



Soweto's Only Hospice Is Emma's Only Hope

Emma, an unemployed mother of three, didn't think she'd live to see the 36th birthday she celebrated at the Soweto Hospice in Mofolo. But the only comprehensive program for terminally ill AIDS patients in this disadvantaged South African community has helped Emma make the rest of her life with her children healthier and happier.

She discovered she was HIV-positive in 2002 when she was six months pregnant. Emma is certain that she contracted AIDS from her husband, but he refused to go for testing and disappeared after Emma tested positive.

She sought help from the USAID-supported Soweto Hospice, which enrolled her in a program to prevent mother-to-child transmission. The program gave Nevirapine to Emma and her son, Smangaliso — the Zulu word for "surprise" — and though he tested HIV-positive at one year, he tested negative at 15 months. Now three years old, Smangaliso remains healthy.



Photo: USAID/Reverie Zurba

The USAID-supported Soweto Hospice provides HIV/AIDS services to one of South Africa's most vulnerable communities.

Susan Moloto is a nurse at the hospice and Emma's home care advisor. Before USAID began supporting the program, she used to assist more than 90 people suffering from incurable diseases every month. USAID helped the hospice hire more staff, reducing Susan's monthly caseload to 72, which allows her to devote more time and attention to each.

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Susan and the other workers at the Soweto Hospice provide more than just healthcare; they also educate, train and support the patients and their communities. Susan has counseled Emma and gotten her involved with a volunteer caregivers group. After Emma's husband abandoned her and she was forced to move out of her house, Susan helped her apply for a government grant that she used to find a new home for her family.

The hospice trains a range of caregivers — from family members to healthcare workers to medical students — in psychological support and nursing. It also helps find facilities for patients with no one to care for them. "If patients need to be admitted for care and families can't look after them, I bring them to our inpatient unit," said Susan.

"We accept USAID's help with both hands," she says. "I don't know where we would be if USAID didn't assist us."

The small Soweto Hospice is making a tremendous impact in one of South Africa's largest-affected AIDS communities.

