

SHORT HISTORY OF OVC PROJECT

The Desmond Tutu Centre for Leadership (C4L) was established in 1999. It is the trading name of Mont de Dieu, which is registered with the Department of Social Welfare as a non-profit organization or NPO.

C4L is located between Nelspruit and White River in the greater municipality of Mbombela, now including Kanyamazane and Kabokweni and other townships. The C4L campus serves as a venue for both local and regional training events. Its target group consists of "leaders and managers in the human services". This includes the Education and Health sectors, among others. C4L offers training in Disaster Management, and also related to HIV and AIDS, which is classified as a "slow onset disaster".

Along with conducting capacity building training events, C4L has been actively involved in community outreach programmes. These began in 2003 when C4L recognized that it was at the "eye of the storm" in terms of the AIDS pandemic.

Pilot Project

The first step was the *Teacher Counseling for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children Programme*, which focused on highlighting the challenges faced by child headed households and other OVC and equipping teachers with capacity to handle them. What began as a response to a need in the communities and schools for assistance with the "deluge of orphans", has evolved into social innovation that has developed through a process of recognizing the needs of these special children within the school system and the local resources available to respond to those needs.

In order to encourage OVCs to stay in school, teachers were equipped to create conditions at school that are supportive and caring for OVC – including classrooms. During 2003-2004, C4L ran the project supported by a discretionary grant from the ETDPA-SETA for teachers in primary and high schools to provide them with the skills required to identify, counsel and support orphans in their classrooms.

Cascading

A number of training materials were developed for the use of teachers to train other colleagues how to work with the OVC in their classrooms. The areas of Kanyamazane, Kabokweni and Pienaar were targeted, to train the teachers. A briefing document,

manual, video and drama were prepared for utilization in the wider community. 40 different schools were targeted for training, but due to the high demand for the course, many more teachers applied to take the training than could be accommodated. The problem in their schools and classrooms was becoming so difficult that they were desperate for any assistance that would help them cope. The pilot project ended in mid 2004.

Step 2

In 2005, with the demand for this training rising and in the light of the evaluation of the pilot project, the Canadian International Development Agency and ABSA Foundation funded the programme to include 50 more schools, bringing the total to 90 schools. A new component was added, that of training Community Child Support workers to care for the OVC in their communities. Fifty workers were trained, in 2 one-week courses, to assist the teachers in counseling and home visits. The volunteer Community Child Support workers provide support at home, after school and weekends when children are not at school, through home visits and counseling, thus protecting the most vulnerable children.

Camps

In addition, C4L built Orchard Camp on its campus in 2005, modeled on Masiye Camp in Zimbabwe – a best practice model. Psychosocial support camps were started to provide intensive interventions for children who were having desperate problems at school related to psychosocial issues. This facility provides intensive one-week psychosocial support camps to 50 boys and girls at a time (junior camps for children aged 6-12 and seniors camps for youth aged 13-18), under a programme driven by trained youth leaders. The camp content includes resilience building, bereavement counseling, sports, drama, skills development and groups sessions on social issues, including HIV/AIDS training, gender issues and life skills. Two to four children from each school attend each (inter-school) camp. Orchard Camp therefore provides a value-added component for the most critical cases identified by the community-based, schools-centred project.

Peer Counselors

In 2006 the camps were further developed and a youth leadership programme was initiated to train young people to run the camps and to begin to change their lifestyles and attitudes towards HIV and AIDS. This team began with 30 youth, all from disadvantaged backgrounds themselves, many of whom were orphans identified from the young people who showed potential as role models at the

camp. These youth volunteers were trained as lay counselors. More training tools were developed to enable youth to run the PSS camps.

A “pre-camp” is run before each of the OVC camp periods, where the youth leaders receive intensive training on counseling and camp skills.

In 2006, December a special 3 day camp was held for the girls in order to encourage and build their self esteem in preparation for the camps.

Connecting the Dots

At the beginning of 2007, 90 teacher-advisors (from as many schools) had been trained at C4L, who had in turn trained about 2000 other teachers in their respective schools. 100 Community Child Support workers had been trained as well, to support these schools. 30 youth volunteers had been trained as peer counselors, mainly to run PSS camps. But only two of these schools had started regular support groups for OVC!

So it was decided to switch emphasis to the formation of support groups at school level, called Kids Clubs, and to encourage collaboration between the different actors. Peer counselors were “attached” to particular schools that they could reach conveniently, and introduced to the teachers and Community Child Support workers.

Youth Corps

This number of youth volunteers expanded to 55 in 2007 and was funded by the Department of Health and Social Services. They provided after-school care and support for OVC through a kind of Drop-in Centre – the Kids Clubs.

By 2008, there were 29 Kids Clubs functioning in 29 schools in an area of Mbombela about 50 kms square. At each school there were 2 youth, who were paid stipends, running the support groups and doing home visits and advocacy work with the OVC. Through regular monitoring and reporting, about 1000 OVC received regular support (attending 3 out of 4 weeks a month) and about 4000 OVC attended at least once a month.

The youth also attend on-going training at C4L on how to run the clubs, counseling skills, etc. There are particular activities that are used in the training and pre-camps which deal with stigma, discrimination, bullying and having positive attitudes. These are overarching issues in many of the discussions and skits that take place in Kids Clubs and at camp. 40 more youth were inducted in 2009 bringing the youth corps to over 100. Not all

of these remain active, as they move on to studies or jobs. Those who do need “care-for-the-caregivers”.

Accredited Training

Starting in January 2008, 40 of the youth began an accredited course in “Development Practice” sponsored by the ETDP-SETA. The Kids Clubs served as the “placements” constituting the practicums for the course. This was offered at both Level 4 and Level 5.

In this case, C4L served as the employer in a trilateral configuration with the ETDP-SETA as Donor and an appointed Training Provider.

In future, hopefully in 2010, C4L aspires to become the accredited Training Provider as well as the employer providing social services at community level. That will make C4L more self-sustaining.

Safety Net

Meanwhile, this integrated programme provides a safety net for children and youth who are orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS. By assisting them in their communities, providing help for their emotional and practical needs, they gain hope for their futures and develop their gifts and skills so that they have confidence that they can overcome the challenges they face.

Monitoring & Evaluation

A baseline study was conducted in 2003 at the beginning of the pilot project. An impact evaluation was conducted three years later in 2006, at the end of the CIDA grant. A second impact evaluation was undertaken six years after the baseline in 2009. It tracked the changes in 5 schools where the various actors have been active over the whole 6-year period. So there is quantifiable evidence of qualitative change.

Lessons Learned

Over this 6-year period, C4L has adapted the programme based on feedback and reflection. What began as a project training teachers has resulted in a Youth Corps driven by a C4L extension team, with a camp facility on the C4L campus.

The needs of OVC evolve as well, and the relative importance of diverse needs that orphans have. In general, though, there are more orphans in 2010 than ever before, and due to the Great Recession, their needs are as acute as ever, as resources are scarce.

C4L did not find this social innovation – *it found us!* One has to listen and adapt, to remain relevant. That is how this unique safety net for OVC emerged.