

A Case Study

Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity



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Cover photo by Rebecca Pursell

Acronyms

AI	appreciative inquiry
AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CSPE	Centre for the Support of Peer Education
DoHA	Department of Home Affairs
DoSD	Department of Social Development
DoSW	Department of Social Welfare
ECD	early childhood development
GOLD	Generation of Leaders Discovered
KZN	Kwa-Zulu Natal
OVC	orphans and vulnerable children
PSS	psychosocial support
RSBS	Rob Smetherham Bereavement Services

Executive Summary

This orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) case study is one of a series of 32 case studies documenting OVC interventions in South Africa. It was researched and written by Khulisa Management Services (Johannesburg, South Africa) with technical support from MEASURE Evaluation and with funding from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (emergency plan) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/South Africa. This study documents Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity (Noah) OVC programme and lessons learned that can be shared with other OVC initiatives. It is based upon programme document review; programme site visits, including discussions with local staff, beneficiaries, and community members; and observations of programme activities. When designing this research, appreciative inquiry (AI) concepts were used to identify strengths (both known and unknown) in Noah's OVC programme, and to identify and make explicit areas of good performance, in the hopes that such performance is continued or replicated.

Noah is a non-profit organisation that emerged in 2000 as a response to the overwhelming need to provide care and support for children who are vulnerable or orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. It began working in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) and has since expanded to Gauteng and the North West. The organisation has evolved organically and began by working with like-minded groups who were already actively addressing the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The OVC model of care is based on community-based care centres, known as Arks.

Arks function as central hubs for service delivery and are the primary contact point for OVC. Identified OVC who are enrolled in the OVC programme attend an Ark and are provided with meals and educational and psychosocial support, as well as life skills training. Some Arks offer both day care and after care, while others provide only one of these, as determined by community need and available resources.

Noah attaches considerable importance to strengthening existing interventions that are working effectively at community level. This is achieved through mobilising community organisations such as churches, schools, local leadership, and government departments to take responsibility for OVC in their community. The organisation has positioned itself as an agent of community empowerment and sees its role as supporting communities rather than directly providing services. It has effectively achieved this through implementing community-led Ark committees and supporting them to assume a greater role in the functioning of the Ark. This has created a model of OVC care that is both sustainable and owned by the community.

Noah has established an exceptional track record in mobilising communities to care and protect OVC by providing a safe and nurturing environment for Arks to grow and expand, with the support and guidance of organisation staff. The work of Noah takes place through capacity-building of community care centres, establishing community-led committees, and through ongoing support to families rendered through home visits. Other areas of excellence include the educational and psychosocial support provided to children at the Ark level. It is clear that children feel safe to express themselves and experience a sense of belonging in the Arks. Where applicable, children are engaged in comprehensive structured activities during the afternoon, making them less vulnerable to peer pressure, abuse, and exploitation.

Noah recognises that it could not do its work without the support and involvement of volunteers. It attaches great significance to making certain that volunteers are well trained, supported and acknowledged for their endeavours. This goes right to the heart of Noah's success – that of individual recognition and appreciation. The organisation understands the challenge of retaining volunteers who do not receive stipends. It has developed constructive solutions through the introduction of the Community Volunteer Support Programme, subsequent to research undertaken internally into the issues and needs of volunteers.

The greatest challenges faced by Noah are due to its rapid expansion in a brief period of time. These challenges include ensuring a basic standard of care is maintained across all Arks and that Arks have access to necessary support and guidance. The organisation has recognised this as a focus area and has proactively implemented processes that will streamline and consolidate services in a way that will ensure that OVC continue to receive the care, support and protection from Noah, its staff and volunteers.

“The project helps those who cannot help themselves. Children are very helpless without parents to guide them. The project is now a parent to these children. The services are very good. They focus on life skills and more, like sports, for example.”

Volunteer

Introduction

“The pandemic is leaving too many children to grow up alone, grow up too fast, or not grow up at all. Simply put, AIDS is wreaking havoc on children.”

Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

Despite the magnitude and negative consequences of growth in orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in South Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa, insufficient documentation exists to describe strategies for improving the well-being of these children. There is urgent need to learn more about how to improve the effectiveness, quality, and reach of efforts designed to address the needs of OVC, as well as to replicate programmatic approaches that work well in the African context. Governments, donors, and nongovernmental organisation (NGO) programme managers need more information on how to reach more OVC with services to improve their well-being.

In an attempt to fill these knowledge gaps, this case study was conducted to impart a thorough understanding of Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity (Noah) OVC programme and to document lessons learned that can be shared with other initiatives. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in South Africa commissioned this activity to gain further insight into OVC interventions, receiving financial support through the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (emergency plan). This OVC case study, one of a series of case studies documenting OVC interventions in South Africa, was researched and written by Khulisa Management Services (Johannesburg, South Africa) with technical support from MEASURE Evaluation and with funding from the emergency plan and USAID/South Africa.

The primary audience for this case study includes Noah OVC programme and other OVC programme implementers across South Africa and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as policy-makers and donors addressing OVC needs. It is intended that information about programmatic approaches and lessons learned from implementation will help donors, policy-makers, and programme managers to make informed decisions for allocating scarce resources for OVC and thus better serving OVC needs.

The development of these case studies was based on programme document review; programme site visits, including discussions with local staff, volunteers, beneficiaries, and community members; and, observations of programme activities. The programmatic approach is described in depth — including approaches to beneficiary selection, key programme activities, services delivered, and unmet needs. Programme innovations and challenges also are detailed.

It is our hope that this case study will stimulate the emergence of improved approaches and more comprehensive coverage in international efforts to support OVC in resource-constrained environments across South Africa and throughout the world.

Orphans and Vulnerable Children in South Africa

With an estimated 5.5 million people living with HIV in South Africa, the AIDS epidemic is creating large numbers of children growing up without adult protection, nurturing, or financial support. Of South Africa's 18 million children, nearly 21% (about 3.8 million children) have lost one or both parents. More than 668,000 children have lost both parents, while 122,000 children are estimated to live in child-headed households (Proudlock P, Dutschke M, Jamieson L et al., 2008).

Whereas most OVC live with and are cared for by a grandparent or a great-grandparent, others are forced to assume caregiver and provider roles. Without adequate protection and care, these OVC are more susceptible to child labour and to sexual and other forms of exploitation, increasing their risk of acquiring HIV infection.

In 2005, the South African Government, through the Department of Social Development (DoSD), issued a blueprint for OVC care in the form of a policy framework for OVC. The following year, it issued a national action plan for OVC. Both the framework and action plan provide a clear path for addressing the social impacts of HIV and AIDS and for providing services to OVC, with a priority on family and community care, and with institutional care viewed as a last resort. The six key strategies of the action plan include:

1. strengthen the capacity of families to care for OVC
2. mobilize community-based responses for care, support, and protection of OVC
3. ensure that legislation, policy, and programmes are in place to protect the most vulnerable children
4. ensure access to essential services for OVC
5. increase awareness and advocacy regarding OVC issues
6. engage the business community to support OVC actively



In recent years, political will and donor support have intensified South Africa's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the growing numbers of OVC. The South African government instituted guidelines and dedicated resources to create and promote a supportive environment in which OVC are holistically cared for, supported, and protected to grow and develop to their full potential. Government policies and services also care for the needs of vulnerable children more broadly through such efforts as the provision of free health care for children under age five, free primary school education and social grants for guardians.

The U.S. government, through the emergency plan, complements the efforts and policies of the South African government. As one of the largest donor efforts supporting OVC in South Africa, the emergency plan provides financial and technical support to 168 OVC programmes in South Africa. Emergency plan partners focus on innovative ways to scale up OVC services to meet the enormous needs of OVC in South Africa. Programme initiatives involve integrating systemic interventions; training of volunteers, caregivers, and community-based organisations; and delivery of essential services, among other things. Emphasis is given to improving the quality of OVC programme interventions, strengthening coordination of care and introducing innovative new initiatives focusing on reaching especially vulnerable children.

Methodology

INFORMATION GATHERING



When designing this research, we used appreciative inquiry (AI) concepts to help focus the research process, and to develop and implement several data collection methods. Appreciative inquiry was chosen as the overarching approach, because it is a process that inquires into and identifies “the best” in an organisation and its work. In other words, applying AI in evaluation and research is to seek out the best of what is done, in contrast to traditional evaluations and research where the subjects are judged on aspects of the organisation that are

not working well. For this case study, AI was used to identify strengths (both known and unknown) in the Noah OVC programme, and to identify and make explicit areas of good performance, in the hopes that such performance is continued or replicated.

“Appreciative inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organisations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential”.

David Cooperrider, Case Western Reserve University, co-founder of appreciative inquiry

Data collection took place on Sept. 25-26, 2007. The information for this case study was obtained through document review, site visits, two key informant interviews, and two AI workshops. The two AI workshops were attended by a total of 28 people. Separate workshops were held for beneficiaries and for staff. Volunteers also attended the beneficiary workshop. Twelve people participated in the beneficiary workshop and 16 people took part in the AI workshop with staff. The operations manager and the research manager were interviewed. They provided information about strengths, successes, systems and processes, and unmet needs within Noah. The two five-hour AI workshops were facilitated separately; in the beneficiary workshop, children over the age of 12 and volunteers participated. The second workshop included head office staff and field staff from two Arks.

FOCAL SITE

Noah provides services to OVC in the provinces of Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), Gauteng, and the North West.

A site visit was conducted in Daveyton, in Gauteng, which is an established township within the Ekurhuleni municipal area on the East Rand. Daveyton was established in 1955 to accommodate African people who had been resettled from nearby areas by the Apartheid government. Ekurhuleni metropolitan district had a population of 2.4 million people in 2004, with an expected population



The Daveyton Ark, which operates within the premises of a local church, provides a place where children can complete homework and use computers.

growth of 4% per year.¹ Statistical data collected during the 2001 census established poverty levels to be between 40% and 46% among the African population. Daveyton is characterised by high levels of unemployment, with estimates as high as 50% among young people. This has contributed to high levels of crime, violence, and poverty. Homes in the area tend to be small brick houses with piped water and electricity. The area has access to major transport routes and health facilities. Though there is infrastructure in place, it is not adequate to serve the needs of the population and is in need of upgrading.

There are an estimated 20 000 households in Daveyton, with an average of six people each.² Many children come from single-parent families or are being raised by extended family members. In the past five years, the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS has steadily increased. The community began to observe an increasing number of young people dying and many children left without parents. In response to the crisis, the local church decided to host the Noah care centre for children to attend daily. The centre manager estimates that approximately 40% of children in Daveyton are affected by HIV/AIDS. Of the children who have lost a parent to HIV/AIDS, the majority have lost their mothers.

¹ Ekurhuleni Municipality (2003) State of the Environment Report.

² SA Web URL <http://saweb.co.za/townships/township/gauteng/daveyton.html> accessed 16 December 2007.

Programme Description

OVERVIEW AND FRAMEWORK



Children enrolled in the day care centre play on the gym equipment at the entrance to the Daveyton Ark.

Noah was established in 2000 in response to the growing number of OVC in KZN. It began by partnering with small community-based organisations and home-based care groups and has since expanded in KZN, North West, and Gauteng. In 2008, it had 77 sites in KZN, one site in North West, and 35 sites in Gauteng. This has necessitated the formalisation of services and relationships within communities. Noah aims to work with and develop communities to support and care for orphaned and vulnerable children through identifying stakeholders and suitable community partners. The primary goal of the organisation is to assist OVC to become

responsible adults who can maintain long-lasting and healthy relationships.

"We exist primarily to give a sense of empowerment to communities we work with. This has always been the reason for our existence."

Operations manager

The programme description rests upon developing the capacity of communities to absorb and care for orphaned and vulnerable children. This is the basis for sustainability at a community level. Community care networks (known as Arks) exist in communities that have recognised the need to respond to the AIDS orphan crisis. Structured engagement with the community and its leaders is initiated prior to any intervention with children. The programme model attaches great importance to the process of community ownership and mobilisation. Noah sees its role as capacity building and supporting the community to help OVC, and not as providing services directly. This ensures that the response is generated locally and that communities recognise that care of OVC is not only the responsibility of NGOs and government. The ultimate aim of the organisation is to enable Arks to become self-governing and operate as independent community-based organisations. This demonstrates a commitment to capacity building and sustainable human development.

As Noah emerged from existing community initiatives, its growth and expansion have been needs-driven, which has guaranteed that services are relevant and respond to the requirements of the community. The organic nature of Noah's growth is part of the reason that the organisation has chosen not to impose standard eligibility criteria across all sites. At the same time, the organisation is currently engaged in a process of standardising operations across sites. Over the years, Arks have joined the organisation at various stages of development. The commitment to providing high-quality care and services has necessitated a process of catch-up for the newer Arks. The organisation is committed to consolidating and maintaining high-quality care before continuing to expand.

PROGRAMME STAFF

“Working with orphans and vulnerable children softens the hearts of people. Even if we are not related to the children, as long as they are part of our community we are responsible for them. We must take ownership of the community and its children.”

Ark staff member



Noah has a dedicated complement of staff and volunteers. Passion, dedication, and perseverance are tangible when interacting with head office and Ark staff. This commitment is evident in their interactions with children and each other.

The work of Noah is supported by head office and Ark staff. Head office staff who are closely involved in monitoring and supporting Arks are known as Ark builders and are allocated into regions. Ark builders are responsible for engaging with communities, monitoring Ark performance, and supervising staff. This takes place through monthly review meetings. The

work of Ark builders is supervised by the operations manager. Noah also has an OVC activities manager.

At the Ark level, Arks are staffed by Ark managers, child supervisors, and child minders. The number of child minders varies within each Ark and is affected by the number of children participating in centre activities. These are all salaried positions. The Ark manager is responsible for general management tasks and liaising with head office. Responsibility for collating and reporting data rests with the Ark manager. The data are collated and inputted into a custom-designed monitoring and evaluation database. The Ark manager is also involved with community liaison and networking with other organizations. The child supervisor has overall responsibility for the child minders and general oversight over centre-based activities. Child minders are directly involved with the children and supervise after school activities. Child minders are also responsible for home visits to families. Their close contact with OVC means that child minders have a greater understanding of each child’s living situation and needs.

Volunteers and beneficiaries noted that staff members are approachable and humble. Staff members in each Ark come from the community in which they work. There are many shared experiences in which volunteers and staff conduct home and family visits at night or on weekends. There is a clear sense when visiting an Ark that volunteers are regarded as equally important as Ark staff. In one instance, an Ark staff member raised the concern that volunteers have basic needs that they are unable to meet due to the lack of a stable income. Programme staff and volunteers attach great importance to the team spirit and collaboration among staff. This is supported by a real commitment to mutual respect and problem-solving.

“I am impressed by the ability of Ark managers to innovate and come up with new and creative solutions. Head office staff do not always have this ability. Ark staff are able to come up with excellent solutions on their own. They have an extraordinary ability to innovate.”

Research manager

This recognition and mutual respect of each person’s skills and knowledge is evident when observing interactions among staff. Ark staff members are recruited by Ark committees, with the oversight of the Ark builder and the Ark manager. This ensures that the perspectives and needs of the Ark are taken into account and that there is a fit between the needs of the Ark and the skills of the applicant.

“The staff are committed and honest. They are transparent. When they came to tell the community about their work they were honest and true. They did not make empty promises. They told us exactly that this is all about volunteering and we should not expect to get paid. They told us if we want to join, we must have passion and a heart for children, patience and perseverance. There were lots of Ps.”

Volunteer

VOLUNTEERS

The Noah model rests heavily on the involvement of volunteers and committee members who are drawn from the surrounding community. This is based on the belief that community members have a better understanding of community dynamics and are likely to demonstrate greater commitment than people who are not from the community itself.



Children dance to drumming by volunteers.

Volunteers are screened by Ark committees. Head office staff provide guidelines and a code of conduct for volunteers to each Ark. These are also used to inform the recruitment process. Volunteers are recruited by Ark staff. The experience of recruiting and maintaining volunteer involvement has demonstrated that there is a process of self-selection. As

volunteers do not receive a stipend directly, their ongoing involvement is often driven by passion and a love for children. Once selected, volunteers receive training on HIV/AIDS, children’s rights, home visits, psychosocial support (PSS), and social grants. Training on HIV/AIDS awareness provides basic information and corrects common myths and stereotypes. In addition, the course provides information about managing HIV exposure, sexual assault, rights, testing, and how to manage basic HIV-related health problems in children.

In 2008, Noah had 955 volunteers involved in 112 Arks across South Africa. There were 614 volunteers in KZN and 341 in Gauteng. Volunteers play a very important role in the activities of Noah. Ark committee members also volunteer their time by becoming involved in the governance and oversight of Arks.

Volunteers conducting home visits have been trained in the use of the Rob Smetherham Bereavement Services (RSBS) approach to providing PSS. Before initiating PSS, time is spent helping staff and volunteers overcome and address any emotional difficulties they may have. Volunteers are provided with emotional support through regular meetings and monthly activities within each Ark.

“I genuinely love children and am willing to help them with all my heart. The project has taught us that all children are the same, I must treat them like my own children and we must all help each other. I am determined to help the children change the situation in their own homes. Most of these children come from uneducated families. I want to see them go through to tertiary level. If their guardians do not have money for tertiary education, I am going to make it my responsibility to organise bursaries. When we have helped other children, they have come back to say thank you.”

Volunteer

High turnover of volunteers is a major challenge faced by Noah. In an attempt to address this, Noah has introduced the Community Volunteer Support Programme. This programme focuses on recognising the work done by volunteers and acknowledging their crucial role in ensuring that Noah is able to respond to the needs of OVC. This culminates in a day of recognition. This day of recognition is held at a venue that is outside of the community and volunteers are acknowledged for the vital role they play in the organisation. At the day of recognition, senior staff and board members have the opportunity to thank volunteers and speeches are made. Volunteers are also

provided with a certificate. This is often accompanied by music and dance. On a monthly basis, each Ark is allocated R500 per month as a token that can be used by volunteers. Each Ark is able to decide how they wish to use the money. In some instances, the R500 is put into a community savings scheme (known as *stokvel*) or used to buy food parcels for the volunteers. This scheme functions by rotating the payout to an individual each month. This provides a greater amount of money for people to use for income generation or supporting their families.

When asked what the most important thing that each person had learned through their involvement with Noah, one volunteer stated:

"I have learnt that I am a strong person. I will not sit down and worship poverty like people are doing in the township. This project is keeping me busy and I am learning new things every day."

Volunteer

The organisation has created the opportunity for volunteers to progress to employment as a child minder or an Ark manager. This keeps employment within the community and affirms the organisation's commitment to self-development and empowerment. The value of utilising staff and volunteers from the community is that they have an understanding of the needs and dynamics of their own community and are able to identify the indicators of vulnerability.

"I never used to believe that a vision could become a reality until it happened to me. My vision has always been that our community will get together to help the poor children and organise sponsors to help with donations. I got very proud of our efforts on the day when we launched our Ark. We decided to launch the Ark without a sponsor. That very same day we got a sponsor, Ernst & Young."

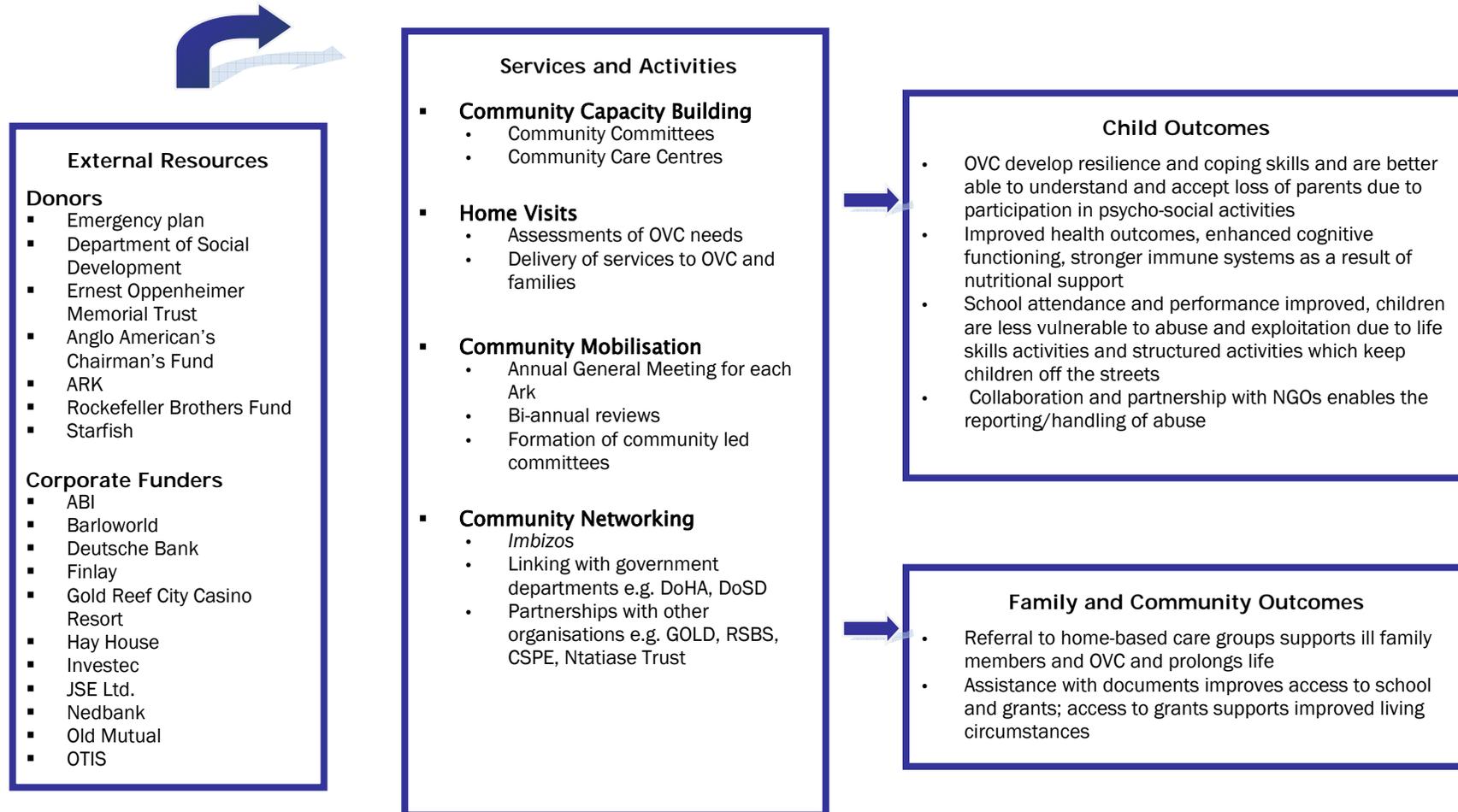
Volunteer

Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity (Noah)

The Mission of Noah is to empower communities with the knowledge, skills, strategies and self-confidence to care for their own orphans and vulnerable children, through the building of Arks.

Programme Goals

To mobilise and capacitate communities to take responsibility for and respond to needs of OVC through developing relationships with relevant stakeholders and partner organisations who in turn build skills and levels of competence.



KEY PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES



Community Capacity Building

Capacity building within communities is a major emphasis for Noah. This is true to the Noah model, which aims to help communities absorb the additional care burden as the number of OVC increases. Capacity building takes place through work with community members, volunteers, and Ark committees, but the primary means of capacity building within communities is through the provision of skills training and support to organisations.

The organisation develops the capacity of committee structures and assists communities to become advocates of their own children. As OVC activities have expanded, more structured systems for data collection, monitoring, and evaluation have been implemented at the Ark level. Capacity building takes place through training and head office support to Arks. Training provided includes skills training focussed on psychosocial support, financial management, HIV/AIDS, and children's rights and responsibilities.

Noah has established a mentorship system among Arks. The Ark-to-Ark mentorship programme provides newer Arks with additional input and support. The mentorship programme has assisted in skills transfer between provinces, with Ark staff from Gauteng visiting KZN and has proved very effective in training Arks on the use of new monitoring and evaluation software. Arks with higher levels of computer literacy were able to support Arks who needed assistance. In Arks that do not have electricity, staff members are able to travel to nearby Arks to use their computers. Similarly, supervisor review meetings are rotated among Arks in each area. This enables Arks to observe programmes and services across Arks, thus creating opportunities for introducing new ideas.

"Communities must be aware that the issue of child protection and development rests with them. It is not only the problem of government or external organisations."

Operations Manager

Community Care Centres

Community care centres (Known as Arks) are the central nodes for Noah's OVC programme. Noah has 77 Arks in KZN, 35 in Gauteng, and one in the North West Province. These centres are located in communities, and children gather at the centres during the week to receive a multiplicity of services. All centres operate during weekdays. Though the centres are open during the week, Ark staff members and volunteers are often involved in centre-related activities over weekends.

The Arks are centrally located in the community and within easy reach of schools and other community facilities. In some communities, Arks are located within schools or church grounds. All Arks provide two meals to beneficiaries each day during the week. Supplementary additional services vary between Arks. The extent of services provided is determined by the needs of the surrounding community, as well as the size and location of an Ark. There are also some variations among provinces. In KZN, the majority of Arks provide after care; while in Gauteng, the majority provide day care. Day care is provided to children above the age of 2 years until school-going age, and after care to children attending primary and secondary school. In some instances, and where the need exists and space is available, Arks will provide both after care and day care. Most Arks have food gardens on their premises, which provide food for beneficiaries. On a day-to-

day basis, Ark staff members and volunteers are able to call on the support of Ark builders, who are located at the head office.

“Noah has brought back a sense of belonging to the orphans. It makes them aware that there are other people in the community who love them and care about them. The services that are provided for the children help keep them away from the streets where they would otherwise be involved in immoral activities. They come to the centres after school for eating, homework, and recreational activities.”

Volunteer

Community Committees

The introduction and ongoing involvement of community-led committees and volunteers from the surrounding community is central to each Ark. Each Ark has a committee that is represented by community members and recognised leadership in the community. The committee members may include principals, teachers, nurses, representatives from local government, and business people. In Kwa-Zulu Natal, committee members may also include representatives from traditional leadership. Community-led committees provide support to staff and volunteers in Arks. The Ark manager reports to the committee and is present during the monthly committee meetings. These committees also assist in the recruitment of staff and volunteers.

Ark committee structures oversee the governance of the organisation and are responsible for financial management, problem solving, and volunteer recruitment. Ark committees are provided with a budget template that is used to prepare the budget for each Ark. Each Ark has its own budget, which is controlled by the Ark manager with oversight provided by the Ark committee. All expenditures are authorised by the Ark committee. Committee members receive training from the head office on how to take up these responsibilities. The model locates responsibility and accountability within Ark committees, and head office staff only step in if committee processes have not been successful.



Home Visits

Home visits are central to the identification and ongoing monitoring of beneficiaries. When a child is identified as a potential participant in the Noah programme, child minders conduct a home visit to verify the child’s living situation. During the first visit, a basic assessment of the child and the child’s living circumstances are conducted, using a checklist. A basic drawing activity is also used to assess the psychosocial needs of the child. This initial home visit is conducted by the Ark manager and a volunteer. This ensures that children enrolled in the programme are indeed vulnerable and in need of support. This is especially important in communities with high levels of poverty and among children who are poor or at-risk in other ways, but are not classified as OVC. Each Ark endeavours to visit each child regularly, but priority is given to children who do not attend the centre regularly. Visits are conducted regularly as a means of monitoring the home situation and following up on the child’s progress. PSS and family interviews take place during follow-up home visits. Home visits also take place as and when the need arises. Where serious needs or issues are identified, the problem is referred to a child minder for further investigation.

Ark staff and volunteers also visit children and guardians at home to provide services when necessary. Due to constraints of distance and location, not every child registered by Noah is able to access an Ark in their community. In instances like this, home visits form the primary means through which the child accesses assistance from Noah. Children who are unable to participate in Ark activities are visited monthly by volunteers.



Community Mobilisation

The mobilisation of communities is central to Noah's intervention at the community level and affirms its commitment to ensuring community ownership and capacity building. Motivated and caring individuals receive guidance from Noah to establish their own network of care, utilising community members with the skills and confidence to support and protect OVC. Awareness initiatives in the form of door-to-door discussions, community meetings, and talks at schools and churches strengthen local community structures and equip them to care and protect OVC. At an annual general meeting for each Ark, community members are invited to the meetings to learn about Noah's work and to elect new committee members. Noah works with identified individuals and community leadership structures, which can include local government representatives, church members, teachers and principals, representatives of local business, and residents within communities. These identified leaders can become involved in the governance of the organisation through the formation of community-led committees.

The extent of involvement of each committee varies per Ark. In those where committees are very involved, the Ark has secured high levels of buy-in and has been able to mobilise in-kind support from the community. Committees are provided with comprehensive training. Bi-annual reviews are conducted with Arks and committees to assess each Ark's operations and identify any needs that may have emerged. Reviews help the committees function optimally and provide support to Arks. Arks receive training, funding, and day-to-day assistance from Noah head office staff. The willingness of community members to serve as committee members demonstrates the positive effects of ongoing community engagement by Noah staff and volunteers.

"Noah involves everyone in the community and consults the community before they do anything. The services they provide are focussed on children and make adults aware of the importance of loving and caring for children, as well as trusting and believing in these children. They are closing the gap between children and communities."

Volunteer



Strengthening Community Networking

The process of community networking also includes hosting community meetings (*Imbizos*) between different Ark committees and Ark staff where appropriate. *Imbizos* provide a valuable opportunity for committees to come together and share information and experiences. These *Imbizos* happen in each district and provide an opportunity for committees to meet with management, discuss operational issues, and provide feedback. They serve as an interface between Noah Programme staff and committee members. The main purpose of the *Imbizo* is to create a dialogue and a platform for Arks and Noah to interact on issues of governance, leadership, and management of these projects in communities. The Ark committees represent the interests of the larger community, the OVC population, volunteers, and staff. After the *Imbizo* is held, committee members report back to the community on the outcomes and decisions made. Feedback is also provided in staff and volunteer meetings. Services remain responsive to the needs of the community due to this communication. The committee *Imbizos* take place quarterly in KZN and Gauteng. In KZN, due to the vastness of the area, Arks meet as clusters.

Ark staff members and volunteers are also active in community forums and committees. Volunteers in one Ark participate in the HIV/AIDS task team at the district level. The task team is convened by the Department of Health (DoH) and participants come from a range of organisations working in the field of HIV/AIDS. This includes organisations working with people who have HIV, conducting prevention programmes, providing palliative and home-based care, as well as those working with OVC. Such networking provides a valuable way of understanding the issues facing the community and formalising referral relationships, which contributes to the delivery of more holistic services for OVC and their families. In addition, volunteers and staff

have been able to develop good relationships with the local Department of Home Affairs (DoHA). DoHA is responsible for issuing birth and death certificates, and identity documents. These documents are necessary for grant applications, foster care, and securing land tenure if a family lives on tribal land. Strong relationships have enabled Arks to circumvent the bureaucracy, which often acts as a barrier to access and service delivery for OVC.

Robust community structures and relationships play an important role in ensuring sustainability and buy-in for the work of supporting and protecting OVC. Workshop and interview participants shared many examples of situations when they were able to overcome problems through enlisting the support and assistance of community structures. One particular instance regarded engagement with local government structures to address a problem where an Ark was expected to pay the same rent as businesses operating on the same premises. A ward councillor was able to step in to address the problem with other tenants and the Ark directly. Extensive community networking and relationship building with government has resulted in four emergency plan-funded Arks being fully funded by the Department of Social Development (DoSD). These sites are now fully accredited early childhood development (ECD) sites. In addition, nine Arks in KZN are on the waiting list to be funded by the KZN Department of Social Welfare (DoSW). This is a significant achievement and represents recognition by government of the important work being done by Noah for OVC at community level.

Partnerships

Noah has been able to identify and partner with organisations offering services that compliment its own work with OVC. These partnerships have enabled Noah to adopt and test new and innovative approaches in KZN and Gauteng. Some of such partnerships include its work with Ntataise Trust, the Centre for the Support of Peer Education (CSPE), Generation of Leaders Discovered (GOLD), Heifer International, and RSBS methodology for providing PSS. Each of these partnerships has enabled Noah to extend the services available to OVC and to test new and innovative approaches to delivery services in resource-constrained settings. These partnerships have also benefited staff and volunteers as they acquire new knowledge and skills to be able to render such services.

This process relies upon strong community networking and relationships and, for this reason, there is a consistent effort to develop relationships with community structures and organisations.

The structure of Noah is such that it does not go into communities to initiate Arks, but goes through a stringent process of identifying eligible community initiatives and organisations that are considered to be suitable partners for the organisation. Each Ark is based upon a foundation of partnership between the community and Noah itself. The extent and nature of the partnership may vary between communities. In some instances, existing community initiatives retain their initial identity and extend their services. In others, community initiatives are absorbed into Noah and specifically provide services to OVC through Arks in line with the identity of Noah and the services it provides. These organisations become community care centres and are known as Arks. Organisations are invited to apply to work with Noah by submitting an application form to gauge their ability to work with Noah. The application form requests information about leadership, volunteers, and community involvement. If the organisation is identified as suitable, a site visit is conducted. Noah is then able to assess whether the partnership could work. In participating communities, community members and community stakeholders benefit significantly through training opportunities. Once a solid foundation has been laid, the project will move on to begin working more directly with children. Considerable value is attached to this initial phase.

BENEFICIARIES



Children at the Daveyton Ark watch traditional dancing and drumming led by volunteers.

Noah activities reach out to three kinds of beneficiaries – community members, OVC, and volunteers. Each group benefits from the work of the organisation in different ways.

Since its inception, Noah has identified 33 888 OVC in three provinces. As of 2008, 24 292 children were receiving services from Noah. The organisation provides services in KZN, North West, and Gauteng. In 2008, it had 77 sites in KZN, one site in North West, and 35 sites in Gauteng. OVC are identified through referrals from other community structures and through home visits. In many instances, OVC are identified by schools, with details provided to Noah volunteers. The schools provide a valuable entry point into the community. Children who are not enrolled in formal

school are identified by community members. The organisation recognises the increased vulnerability faced by girls who are orphaned and vulnerable. For this reason, the monitoring of gender within the programme registration processes and participation is regarded as very important.

All referrals are followed up by volunteers who conduct home visits. This ensures that the services reach the most vulnerable and that services are targeted correctly. Comprehensive registration forms collect information about the circumstances of the child and family. Based on the information collected, a decision is taken as to whether children should be enrolled into the programme. The selection process is also influenced by the degree of vulnerability and the services available in the Ark. Ark staff members are encouraged to apply stringent eligibility criteria so that the programme can continue to provide high quality services to OVC. Once a child is enrolled in the programme, where possible, Noah endeavours to link the caregiver with services to improve the home circumstances.

Children are assessed according to their family and living situation. Programme staff place significant emphasis on the use of unique identifying criteria between sites. This recognises that all communities are different. The application of standard criteria across all sites may result in OVC falling through the cracks. Ark staff members in each site come from the surrounding community and have a deep understanding of community dynamics and needs. This places Ark staff and volunteers in a unique position to identify OVC. Once a comprehensive assessment has been done, Noah responds to the needs of each child. This includes addressing the needs of children which are not reported through the monitoring and evaluation system. This is of considerable importance as it contributes to the delivery of holistic services to OVC.

There are significant differences in community characteristics in KZN and Gauteng. Examples cited of vulnerability criteria for communities in KZN include a granny-headed household, whereas in Gauteng vulnerability criteria include single-parent families and alcohol abuse. These indicators assist in identifying the children who are most vulnerable. Limitations in resources mean that Arks can enrol and support only children who are the most vulnerable. Children who are less vulnerable are placed on a waiting list and are included in the programme where possible. In some instances, children are enrolled but receive a specific basket of services that is not greatly affected by resource limitations.

When asked how she came to be part of the programme, one beneficiary responded by saying:

“The volunteer came to visit us to check how we were coping after our mother died in 2005. The volunteer explained that there is a place which can help us cope better. The volunteer told us to come to the Ark every day after school. When I went for the first day, I found it interesting. There are other kids of my age who have the same problems I have, therefore they understand me much better, even better than the relatives I am living with right now.”

Beneficiary

Children are able to attend the OVC programme until they have finished their schooling. Attending until the end of schooling happens most frequently in Arks where there is a full range of services. Where there is only a day-care facility, children leave to attend primary school, but can return to the Ark for feeding and support. Children who are deemed to be coping well and where family circumstances have improved may continue to participate in Ark activities but receive a limited number of services. Since the beginning of the OVC programme, 776 children have been de-registered. Where possible, beneficiaries can become involved in running of the programme and benefit from training provided to volunteers. In some instances, children whose home circumstances have changed are deregistered from the programme. Possible reasons for this may be that a family member has secured employment or the family has obtained access to grants and is more economically self-sufficient. A representative of Noah explains to the family why the child is no longer eligible and that the family needs to take responsibility for the child. In some instances, children can continue to participate in the programme in a limited way. This means the child may come to a centre to eat and to assist staff and volunteers, but does not receive other services, such as education or PSS.

The third beneficiary group are volunteers, who form a central component of Noah’s intervention at community level. The organisation places considerable value on the training and mentoring opportunities available to volunteers. The opportunity to participate in skills development and other training initiatives is viewed as a long-term investment that is worth much more than money. Volunteers also become part of a larger community within the organisation that provides social and emotional support.

SERVICES PROVIDED



Food and Nutritional Support

The nutritional support provided by Noah takes the form of direct support to children and households, and the establishment of food gardens at each Ark.

Noah provides each child attending an Ark with a meal each day. Set criteria have been put in place to monitor child well-being. Identified children eat breakfast at the Ark before they go to school. In other instances, children who attend the after-care programme are provided with a meal when they return from school. The extent of nutritional assistance provided to each child is determined by available funding and the focus area of the Ark. For instance, larger Arks that provide both day care and after care have a larger demand for food than those that only provide one of the two programmes. Noah endeavours to link families with other organisations that provide food parcels. So that they will receive adequate nutrition, instant porridge is provided to children who can not access Arks. This forms part of the home-visit activity and is not considered to be the primary purpose of the visit.

Training on the establishment of food gardens is also provided to communities and volunteers. One person from each Ark is trained in the development and maintenance of food gardens. This is usually a child minder or a volunteer. The information is then disseminated to the community. As volunteers come from the surrounding community, this training is easily disseminated within the community and has led to the establishment of food gardens within people's property. This encourages the community to take responsibility for the care of OVC and ensures sustainability of interventions. The organisation is currently addressing any quality issues in existing food gardens and initiating food gardens in Arks where they are not already in place. In 2008, approximately 80% of Arks had food gardens. Some of the benefits of these gardens are that Arks are able to supplement their groceries and do not have to buy vegetables. Other Arks with surplus produce make food and vegetable packs or use the produce for income generation to sustain the garden. Children are also given fruit and vegetables to take home if the garden has yielded extra. In Arks where food gardens have not yet been initiated, the primary reason is the lack of available land. The implementation and maintenance of food gardens is monitored and reported on monthly in the same way as beneficiary statistics are captured and recorded. Food gardens are located on the same land as the Ark or at a central place in the community such as a school or clinic. Children can also become involved in tending the garden after school.



Access to Social Services

A major barrier faced by many OVC is the lack of birth and identity documents. These documents are required to enrol in school, to complete matric exams, and to obtain social security grants. Frequently, OVC do not have documents. In some instances, the documents have been taken by others in an attempt to access social security grants. For this reason, assistance in applying for such documents is a major part of the services provided by Noah. This service may take the form of providing information to caregivers, preparing documentation, and assisting people to access the DoHA and DoSD. Noah has been successful in doing this through establishing relationships with individuals who are part of the government administration.

The second major aspect of child protection is assisting children and families in completing the foster care process. Foster care is a legal process that places a child under the care of a nominated guardian on a permanent basis. This provides children with a stable place to live and

ensures they are not moved around among family members. Many children and guardians experience difficulties in accessing social workers and lack information regarding the foster care process.

Noah assists in this regard by developing strong relationships with external organisations and government officials. In many instances, Noah volunteers or staff conduct follow-up visits and find other family members who also require assistance. This is often the case in situations of extreme poverty. Strong relationships with government officials and other organisations ensure that family members are referred to the relevant organisation for assistance. All of these endeavours contribute to a more stable family system that is more resilient and better able to respond to the needs of OVC.

“There is a family that I identified from the community. The granny had died and the [government grant] was stopped for the three children. The lady went to the government offices to ask that the grant be transferred. She never won. I involved a social worker and the Ark manager to help them get the grants. Last week I met the lady at church and she told me she got a letter from social services. The grants are coming. I felt very proud because they really needed the money. They were very poor. Sometimes I would buy them food out of my pocket and give them clothes.”

Volunteer



Psychosocial Support

Many children who are orphaned and vulnerable experience emotional difficulties and may struggle with establishing trusting and stable relationships with others. This is related to the difficulty in understanding the loss of a parent, the stigma accompanying orphanhood, and the absence of a stable family environment which models positive human relationships. Noah has developed multiple ways of offering such support to children enrolled in its OVC programme. The RSBS intervention has been recognised as a best practice by the United Nations Children’s Fund. RSBS provides individual and group-play therapy, counselling for bereaved children, support and counselling to families, and educates and trains community members to meet the emotional needs of bereaved children. This methodology is used as an initial diagnostic tool when children are being assessed at the first home visit.

In addition to this, Arks have made use of the Woz’obona approach, which utilises tools of art and narrative therapy as a means of assisting children to overcome their emotional difficulties. Both of these responses ensure that the emotional needs of identified children are addressed within the limitations of available resources. This support is provided at Arks as part of the after care programme. Volunteers have been trained in the use of these methodologies and, while conducting home visits, are able to offer PSS to other children who do not attend Arks. In certain instances, children are referred to organisations or social workers for additional assistance.

Children who are enrolled in the after-care programme attend the Ark after school and benefit from dance classes, drumming, homework supervision, bicycle riding, and programmes offered by other organisations. This includes work with Dance4Life, Soul Buddyz, GOLD peer education programmes in KZN, and CSPE activities in Gauteng, among other sporting, cultural, and gardening activities.

When asked how the project had helped them, a child shared:

“The best thing the project has done for me is to help me talk to people in a correct manner. I used to be very aggressive and cross with every body after my mother passed away because I was thinking people took my mom away from me. As I received counselling and talked to other children, I understood that nobody was responsible for the death of my mom, she just died because she was ill. What makes it excellent is that we get an opportunity to talk just amongst us [children] without the presence of adults or volunteers. We speak the same language and understand each other.”

Beneficiary



Health Care

Children registered by Noah receive health care through referral to home-based care partners and other organisations. Noah itself does not provide direct health care services to children. In instances where children are taking Anti-Retroviral Therapy, adherence is overseen by child minders at the Ark. Child supervisors and Ark Managers are very involved with each of the children and will report a health problem to the child’s caregiver. If this is not addressed, the Ark staff do pursue this referral with clinics. In certain instances, children attending Day Care who are sick will be taken to the clinic by Ark staff or volunteers during the day.

In selected Arks, child minders and volunteers have also been trained in the Clamber Club. The Clamber Club focuses on developing fine and gross motor skills through the use of physical activity. This has proved very valuable in providing children with much needed stimulation that is often not available within their own home. The programme focuses on children between the ages of 1-8 years.



Educational Support

Children who attend day care benefit from Early Childhood Development (ECD) methodologies. Volunteers and staff within the Ark have been trained in ECD by the Ntataise Trust. The staff report that children who have participated in the ECD Programme adjust better to formal education. The introduction of the ECD Programme has helped children develop spiritually, physically and mentally. The programme has also assisted child minders to better understand the needs of children and made problem-identification easier. Child minders reported feeling more confident in working with children after attending the ECD training provided by Ntataise Trust.

“Going to Ntataise trust was great for me. They are a foundation; you can not develop a house without a foundation. There were things that were highlighted that help us with working with older children – it has also improved our parenting skills in our own families.”

Ark staff member



ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING

Through the partnership with Heifer International, volunteers in KZN have received training on chicken-rearing. This assistance includes training on animal well-being and sustainable income generation.

The process of securing child support grants, foster care grants, and disability grants is a vital part of Noah’s work. These grants form a major component of income for a family and are often the only income available to households living in poverty. The process of making certain that grants are being paid to the person with whom the child is residing is also very important. OVC are often moved between homes as family members attempt to secure access to grants. Noah volunteers and staff help caregivers apply for relevant grants and verify each grant is benefiting the eligible child.

“One day I found a lady with seven children while I was doing home visits. One of the children was disabled. She and her husband are unemployed. There was no food in the house and the children did not have clothes. One day I visited the children in winter and found them with bare feet. I got very hurt. I referred them to the social worker who helped them receive food parcels until they could access the grants. We started putting legal documents together and applying for grants. Right now, four of the children get the child grant and the disabled child receives a disability grant. Now, when I visit them, I can smile because they are happy and well looked after.”

Volunteer



HIV Prevention and Education

HIV prevention and education services are provided to volunteers, Ark committee members, and OVC beneficiaries. Noah regards partnerships and collaboration with other OVC organisations and services as very important. Considerable emphasis has been placed on identifying potential partners and interventions that can make a meaningful contribution to addressing the needs of OVC within Arks.

To date, Noah has piloted enrolment in the Soul Buddyz Club for primary school children and Dance4Life activities, which use dance to communicate messages about sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS. Prevention and education interventions with beneficiaries utilise the peer education approach. Noah makes use of the GOLD programme and collaborates with the CSPE, an initiative of the Harvard School of Public Health. The collaboration with CSPE focusses on the development, design, and testing of a peer education curriculum for OVC. This is currently being piloted.

“The training I received is special for me and the children because they are benefiting from my skills. I used to be very ignorant about HIV/AIDS but I have gained a lot from the training. Dealing with infected people is one thing I learnt from attending the workshops.”

Volunteer

Resources

DONORS



Children attend an ECD centre at Daveyton Ark.

Noah has been very successful in leveraging financial support from local and international donors. It has secured financial support from corporate funders and DoSD in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. In 2008, the emergency plan funded approximately 33% of the total operating budget.

Currently, four Arks in Gauteng are fully-funded by DoSD. In KwaZulu Natal, nine Arks are on the waiting list to be funded by the KZN DoSW. Corporate funders of Noah's work include, but are not limited to, Deutsche Bank, Barloworld, Investec, Hay House, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, and Amalgamated Beverages Incorporated. Each Ark is allocated a donor partner, which is

encouraged to become involved with the Ark directly. This includes assisting with painting the Arks and hosting a holiday party for OVC.

COMMUNITY IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS



A converted shipping container is used by Noah, located on the property of a local church.

Communities play a central role in the work of Noah. This is demonstrated in the commitment of resources to the Arks. These resources range from time given by volunteers and Ark committees to the provision of space and food to the Arks. In some KZN Arks, local farmers support Arks through the donation of fresh produce.

This is validated by observations and interactions with volunteers at the Daveyton Ark. In this particular Ark, the local church has also made space available for the Ark. The Ark is located on its premises in a central location and is easily accessible.

Lessons Learned

PROGRAM INNOVATIONS AND SUCCESSES

Promoting Sustainability

The level of community engagement and ownership is visible when visiting sites. This has been facilitated by a steadfast commitment to skills development and participation and has assisted in the mobilisation of resources. The creation of a job category (known as Ark builder) that focuses specifically on community networking and mobilisation affirms Noah's commitment to community engagement and development. This has been a conscious choice in ensuring that operations and activities can be sustained outside of the organisation. The creation of strong community-level structures through Ark committees has played a powerful role in this.

An essential component to the success of orphan care is valuing and acknowledging the important role of the community, its leadership, and its structures. Noah's orphan care model is heavily rooted in communities and is targeted towards capacitating communities to absorb the needs of OVC in their community. The organisation has done well at assisting communities to take responsibility for their children. This has been done through the introduction and incorporation of community-led Ark committees and the mobilisation of community structures such as churches, clinics, and schools. In the words of the operations manager:

"We must value communities and their input into Noah's work. We must value communities so that they can become heroes for their children."

Operations manager

Holistic and Flexible Service Provision

Noah's holistic approach to OVC care has ensured that Arks remain responsive to the contextual environment without compromising the quality of care. This is demonstrated through the comprehensive assessment of each child's living situation. Noah believes firmly in treating children holistically and is deeply committed to addressing the needs of each child, irrespective of whether such need forms part of the activities and commitments outlined in its country operational plan.

Establishing Criteria for Effective Community Centres

One important aspect of programme monitoring that has been developed is criteria for an effective Ark, which are used to measure performance and to establish the extent of support required by each Ark. These criteria have an important role to play in completing the Ark catch-up process. The catch-up process is a response to the varying levels of capability among Arks and the need to establish consistent requirements and standards in order to ensure the delivery of high quality care to OVC in communities.

Early Childhood Development Programme

The ECD programme provided to children between the ages of 2 and 6 years has had a major impact upon the cognitive development of children in the Arks. Without ECD programmes, many OVC would have remained at home with a caregiver during the day and received very limited structured stimulation. They would be unprepared for entry into formal education and would struggle to cope in a classroom environment with children who had been exposed to ECD programmes or have had school readiness instruction from parents or families. ECD facilitates the cognitive, emotional, and physical development of young children. This ensures children are

better prepared when faced with life challenges. In addition to this, the training of child minders and staff in ECD has improved their own confidence in working with OVC. The training of child minders and staff in ECD methodologies has enabled caregivers and staff to identify children with special needs and developmental delays.

Partnerships

Noah has been able to identify suitable partners and approaches that will enrich the services provided to OVC. It has carefully considered which activities should be piloted and where the greatest benefits will be achieved. Partnerships with local and international organisations demonstrate Noah's commitment to working at multiple levels and ensuring that best practice models can be incorporated into its work.

Diversity of Volunteers

The involvement of volunteers who vary considerably in age is commendable. The organisation has created the scope for any interested person who is deemed suitable to become involved in Noah. Similarly, there are both male and female volunteers within Arks. This challenges stereotypes and misperceptions of men being disconnected and unwilling to recognise the escalating OVC crisis in South Africa. During the visit to the Ark in Daveyton, there were two male volunteers outside who were drumming for the children to dance. It was clear that the children felt relaxed and were enjoying themselves. Successful OVC programmes require stability and community involvement. When the community involves and engages people of varying ages and gender, it is a clear sign that the programme is working and has the likelihood of being supported and sustained by community leadership structures.

Research

Noah has a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy that is applied across provinces and provides a constructive way of measuring programme impact and outcomes. The organisation is committed to ensuring its programmes and interventions remain relevant and responsive to the needs of OVC. This is affirmed in the existence of a research department with dedicated staff that is responsible for completing monitoring and evaluation requirements for donors and has also conducted internal research on identified priority issues. The outcomes and findings of such research have been used to inform decision-making within the organisation and to input into broader policy processes within South Africa. This has been driven by the desire to use field experience and knowledge to inform policy and to advocate for the needs of OVC. This is also a powerful way of disseminating experiences so that other organisations working with OVC can benefit from such experience. Research papers have been presented in international and local venues.

Noah's research team has conducted research into the needs of volunteers and the reasons for high volunteer turnover. This research culminated in the introduction of the Community Volunteer Support Programme. An impact study was conducted with beneficiaries and volunteers, and the study examined services being accessed by OVC, the demographics, and the living situation of households. Research has also looked into potential areas of stigma experienced by OVC. In 2008, this research was expected to be presented at an HIV implementers meeting hosted by the emergency plan.

Noah has also contributed to the formulation of an OVC policy for DoH and DoSD in Limpopo. A child participation workshop was held with 60 OVC from all districts in the province to identify what children would like to see included in the OVC policy.

Computerised Monitoring and Evaluation Data-Capture and Reporting at the Field Level

Noah has been able to develop and introduce software that can be used in the field to capture and record child information and services rendered to beneficiaries. This software is currently being used in half of the Arks in both KZN and Gauteng. In the past, information collected by Arks was submitted on paper and data capture was done at the head office level. This was very time-consuming.

The development of user-friendly software has alleviated a considerable burden on head office staff and has improved computer literacy among Ark staff and volunteers who had previously not used a computer. This has empowered Ark staff and volunteers who are now able to monitor activities in their Arks, track trends, and understand the changing needs of OVC in their community.

Arks have been trained in core monitoring and evaluation concepts and processes, and are now able to report electronically. Reports are completed monthly and submitted to head office where quality control measures are performed. In terms of emergency plan requirements, a child is reported as a beneficiary once he or she has received at least three services from Noah. In some instances, children have received only one or two services each, and are therefore not included in reporting data. Due to this, it is likely that the number of children who are benefiting from the services of Noah is far greater than reported. Indicators that are measured monthly include the number of people who have received training, the number who have accessed services, meetings, special visits, and noteworthy successes or challenges.

Normalising Grief and Developing Resilience

During the AI workshop with beneficiaries and when speaking with the children during site visits, it became very clear that children identify strongly with Ark staff and value the opportunity to interact with other OVC. The safe space where children are able to come together and share with each other has provided an important vehicle for healing and understanding. This has contributed to greater resilience among OVC in the Arks.

“OVC Care at the Ark is like a puzzle. It will never be complete without all the pieces – no matter how small you are or where you come from.”

Ark staff member

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Lack of Funding for Food

Organisations working with OVC struggle to obtain funding for food parcels and feeding at after-care centres. Noah is able to provide beneficiaries with two meals a day during the week. This makes a significant contribution to the nutritional needs of OVC. However, there is still a great need to extend services so that children have access to food over weekends when the Ark is not open. Currently, the food gardens do not provide sufficient produce for feeding at care centres or for supplying food parcels to families. The difficulty of accessing funding for food is attributed to the reluctance of donors to fund interventions that are not easily measured and accounted for. It is alleged that nutritional support is not always well-managed and can be abused, going to people who do not qualify for such assistance. This is a particular risk in communities with high levels of poverty, where it is difficult to distinguish between those who are more or less vulnerable. This reluctance manifests in organizations having to source alternative funding to cover these costs.

While food distribution is difficult to account for, adequate nutritional support is imperative for OVC to be able to perform well at school. Nutritional assistance also protects children from exploitation as a response to impoverished living circumstances. Some Arks have attempted to deal with this by registering children into nutritional support programmes provided by local churches and schools. These programmes are also vulnerable to disruption and funding delays. In one example, children who obtain lunch at school were without a meal for more than three weeks during an educators' strike.

Maintaining Consistent Quality Care Despite Escalating Need for Services

The number of OVC continues to increase in South Africa. Despite the acceleration of an antiretroviral treatment programme, an increasing number of OVC remain dependent on organizations like Noah to survive. It is very difficult to maintain a balance between increasing the enrolments of OVC while focusing on delivering high quality care. Noah has rapidly expanded in the past five years, with an increase in the number of Arks being incorporated into the organization. The organization is attempting to consolidate its services through focusing on Arks that require additional support, in an effort to streamline the quality of care and services in KZN and Gauteng. The organization will need to strike a careful balance as it pursues this goal. The roll-out of new Arks requires considerable investment of time and resources. For this reason, securing community buy-in and support is crucial.

Burnout of Staff and Volunteers

Noah has experienced a period of very fast growth, both in the number of Arks it is supporting and the number of beneficiaries participating in Ark-related activities. This has placed considerable pressure and emotional demands on staff and volunteers. Interviews with senior staff indicated that the organization started with a very small contingent of staff working in KZN and Gauteng simultaneously. It would seem that the organization underestimated the pace at which such growth would occur and the capacity required to support this growth. In certain instances, the loss of staff has required scaling-up and training new staff. The organization has attempted to address this through prioritizing the provision of emotional support to volunteers and through focusing on supporting and capacitating existing staff and Arks before absorbing new Arks.

Avoiding Dependency

OVC have great material needs that can not always be met within the extended family system. Organisations like Noah struggle to provide for such needs without creating dependency. Similarly, there needs to be a balance between providing the necessary material assistance without providing material assistance that can not be sustained should funding decline.

UNMET NEEDS

The need for interventions to care for, protect, and support OVC continues to grow in South Africa. The increasing numbers of children who require the assistance of organizations such as Noah poses challenges due to limited resources. Responding best to the needs of such OVC becomes a process of priority-setting and categorizing degrees of vulnerability. The unmet needs of Noah and its volunteers are not dissimilar to those experienced by many working in this field.

Succession Planning

Noah staff report the difficulty they experience in meeting the shelter needs of OVC. This is a particular obstacle in Gauteng where the extended family structure is not available to many children. The experience is that many OVC are not residing with both parents prior to the loss of their caregivers, resulting in a situation where children are moved to new and unfamiliar environments. Linked to this is the need to formalize initiatives that deal with succession planning. In many instances, the loss of a parent is accompanied by conflict within the family as to what should happen to the house where the parent was residing. Noah wishes to develop services and interventions that focus specifically on succession planning so that living arrangements for OVC are not compromised.

Services and Organizations Addressing Child Sexual Abuse

The absence of a stable family environment and emotional trauma caused by the loss of a parent may place OVC at high risk of being sexually abused. Although South Africa has a good legislative framework to deal with child abuse, implementation and service delivery is constrained by a lack of capacity within organisations. In some instances, children are left without adult supervision or are easily lured by others with the promises of gifts or special attention. OVC also face risks in their own living environment, where children fear disclosure of sexual abuse because they may no longer have shelter or support. These complex social problems require particular attention. This lack of capacity and delays in the criminal justice system make the efficient handling of sexual abuse cases very difficult. There is a particular need for more organizations and social workers to be working in this area of specialization. This will ensure that Arks have referral systems and can ensure the situation is addressed appropriately with minimal risk to the child.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Volunteers and Caregivers

The sustainability of OVC organizations and interventions is considerably impacted upon by the lack of entrepreneurial opportunities available to volunteers. The workshops and site visits demonstrate very clearly that staff and volunteers have a strong emotional commitment to their community and the OVC who participate in the Ark activities. However, volunteers and caregivers need a means to earn an income that meets their daily needs. Sustainable and successful income-generation activities are not sufficiently established in the organization. This has been identified as a priority and a wish by programme staff. Addressing this is likely to have the benefit of improved volunteer retention and self-sufficiency among caregivers. This could be initiated through skill-sharing across Arks in KZN and Gauteng.

“Open your hearts and give, it’s what makes communities survive. It does not cost anything. Many times, we are afraid and think we do not have money. Human connection is what matters most. Helping people is not only about material things. It is about friendship, being there, going beyond the call of the duty. Perseverance is very important.”

Volunteer

Tertiary Education Opportunities

Many donors and government services place the ceiling for funding service provision to OVC at 18 years of age. This limits the assistance available to older youth who lack the support of a family and would like to move into tertiary education. Though this is not the mandate of Noah, it is a priority need that requires close consideration for many OVC organizations in South Africa.

Need for Parenting Skills

As the number of OVC increases, extended families have to absorb the additional care burden for OVC. In many instances, OVC are living with grandparents or with family members who are sometimes not very familiar with the children. This may result in conflicting approaches to parenting and discipline. There is a need for parenting skills to support and assist caregivers and guardians who are caring for OVC who require great emotional and social support in coming to terms with the loss of their parents.

The Way Forward

The programme staff and volunteers at Noah have many hopes for the future. They see a future for Noah that entails increasing the number of communities being reached, the introduction of new activities, and the replication of successful interventions across provinces.

The primary task that Noah is concerned with is consolidating and streamlining its operations across Arks. This involves ensuring that basic standards of care are met and that standard operating processes are being followed. The Ark catch-up process is a response to the considerable divergence in levels of functioning and quality of care among Arks that emerged out of endeavours to expand rapidly and respond to escalating levels of need for OVC. This process requires considerable reflection as to how best one can strengthen and incorporate new organisations and communities while remaining true to Noah's model of OVC care.

In 2008, Noah had one Ark in the North West and was considering expanding further, once it had been able to consolidate and streamline activities across Arks. This expansion was also contingent upon existing Arks achieving greater independence. As part of consolidating and streamlining Arks, the organisation seeks to increase the number of Arks that are self-supporting and are ready to operate independently of Noah. This will continue to be a major focus of Noah's work as the organisation moves forward.

Noah has begun to build its research portfolio and intends to expand the scope of these programmes. The organisation hopes to get more involved in paid research work. Research projects will also be guided by emerging dynamics and needs at community level.

OVC will benefit greatly as the number of staff trained in ECD and additional interventions continues to increase. The organisation has been able to pilot different programmes and activities successfully. It now faces the challenge of identifying the most effective and ensuring that such activities become part of Noah's activities across provinces. These activities will need to be implemented thoroughly if they are to generate meaningful outcomes.

One of the greatest cornerstones of Noah's success is the commitment of staff to reflection and review. Both are crucial to ensuring that services are responsive to the needs of OVC and resources are being used optimally. Noah is an organisation with a clear plan for its future, and its staff and volunteers are able to develop the road map needed to achieve the organization's goals.

"We want to make sure there is a safety net in the community for children who fall through the cracks."

Research manager

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