Turning the Tide on AIDS

Starfish Greathearts Foundation is an international development charity responding to the HIV and AIDS pandemic in South Africa.

We empower communities to deliver professional and sustainable services to children made vulnerable or orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

Due to the AIDS pandemic, there is a generation of children growing up in South Africa without parental support, and relying on increasingly strained communities. These children are exceptionally vulnerable to abuse, malnutrition and dropping out of education, further increasing their risk of contracting HIV.

Starfish believes that to make a difference it is essential to help one child at a time, ensuring measures are sustainable and replicable. We work in the most vulnerable communities to reach the children who need it most. Starfish currently delivers crisis intervention, comprehensive care and development programmes to more than 24,000 children.

These vital intervention and development programmes are delivered through partnerships with 59 local partners at grassroots level throughout South Africa. Starfish has been instrumental in developing and establishing this coalition of local organisations to facilitate a co-ordinated nationwide holistic response to the needs of children orphaned or made vulnerable by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

You helped change the lives of 24,588 orphaned & vulnerable children in 2011

We bring LIFE, HOPE & OPPORTUNITY, one child at a time
Crisis Intervention

Younger children are often forced to nurse their HIV+ dying parents. After the death of a parent, the children left behind are at their most vulnerable. Not only do they have to deal with the trauma of losing their parent, they have lost the financial, practical and emotional support a mother or father provides. While grieving they must adjust to their new circumstances as best as they can; often dropping out of school because they cannot afford the fees/uniform or must look after younger siblings, struggling to find food, and trying to protect themselves and their siblings from sexual or physical abuse. Starfish identifies children in this situation and, through caregivers and support centres, provides:

- Home support visits where carers assess needs and progress.
- Food parcels, blankets, hygiene & basic first aid kits.
- Uniforms & stationery, meaning children can stay in school.
- Crèches for younger children so older siblings can stay in education.
- Locks to increase safety.
- Drop in centres providing holistic care.

“The feeding programme has reached 802 children. This has included 715 children who have received food through the school based scheme at our 7 partner primary schools and 87 individuals who have received food through the provision of food parcels to homes.

Providing food to vulnerable children is a cornerstone of the holistic care that we provide to OVC, to assist them to be healthy and thus remain at schools and succeed in their schooling.”

Zisize Educational Trust

In the last five years, the government provision of food for vulnerable children in South Africa has improved, however, there is still a gap between the amount being provided and those that are in need.

Our partners greatly rely on Starfish for support in meeting this need, enabling them to provide food parcels to families at a time of crisis, meals to children through feeding programmes at centres and schools’ and teaching children and communities to begin and nurture their own food gardens.

Food gardens provide fresh vegetables for children and their families as well educational, training and income generation opportunities. Through our programmes, children receive training in food gardening techniques and are provided with seeds to enable them to start their own gardens at home. This increases their food security and is sustainable.

“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

20,218 children had access to child protection interventions

“I am so happy for what the organisation has done for me, and I would like to thank Starfish for what they are doing for us in this situation where we never thought we can get an opportunity to be computer literate. When I got in this centre I never knew even how to switch a computer on, but now I even know how to use some of the programmes.”

A student enrolled on a computer training course

Food Gardens

Meal Time
Long Term Intervention

Starfish recognises that once a child has been supported through the immediate aftermath of a crisis, their problems do not go away. Rather they need ongoing and consistent support to ensure they are able to grow up as healthy, happy children.

We place an emphasis on long term intervention, ensuring orphaned and vulnerable children receive support for as long as they need.

This can take several forms but often includes:

- Ongoing counseling—this could be in group therapy or as an individual, through play, activities or talking about memories they have of their parents.
- Training on running a household—children of child headed households are taught how to grow vegetable gardens, cook and manage a budget.
- After school care — including academic support, sports activities, nutritional meals.
- Early childhood development crèches for young children.
- Ongoing home visits to ensure children are coping.
- Support applying to the State for grants entitling them to the exemption of school fees.
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Psychosocial support and Counseling at Zisize: case study

The children’s camps, run by our psychosocial team, worked really well. During these camps children are taken to a venue an hour’s drive from Zisize which gives them the opportunity to disconnect from their daily grind and receive support and counseling that can assist them in making positive and responsible choices when they return to their homes. During the first day games are played and introductions are made to foster a sense of rapport amongst the group which includes children and the psychosocial worker.

During the second day the psychologist and social worker facilitate group counselling sessions where children have the opportunity to open up and discuss matters that are bothering them.

Psychological care provided to 10,683 more children in 2011

High levels of psychological distress have been found in children orphaned by AIDS resulting in increased anxiety, depression and anger. This model of OVC care is designed to provide OVC with a safety net of psychosocial support within their own community and minimise their psychological distress and social isolation.

Life Skills and Vocational Training

It is often the case that OVC miss out on learning valuable life skills and practical knowledge. Without such skills, OVC are more likely to face economic, health and social problems as they grow up.

It is important that a variety of platforms are provided to ensure that OVC are given the opportunity to develop and enhance life skills as well as improve their future career prospects. In providing holistic care and support to OVC, our local partners provide life skills workshops, along with vocational training and career guidance for older children.

Upon leaving school, training and employment skills are provided, increasing the opportunity for individuals to break the cycle of poverty and mitigate the impact of HIV.

One of our local partners, Masoyi Home Based Care, located in the Mpumalanga province, has a growing vocational training programme encouraging and facilitating training in computer skills, carpentry, agriculture and baking.

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“I am so happy to be a student at K3, my life has changed since I started doing the sewing course. I also learnt a lot, like how to communicate and make friends with people, increasing my confidence regardless of my background situation. Now I am able to sew a skirt, bag and a dress. I believe God will help me and Starfish to groom others in the future.”

“Rose—A Student enrolled on the sewing programme.
How Starfish is making a difference

“*This is a story about Faith* who is an orphan, her parents passed away, she is now living with her two siblings, and she is currently doing computer skills at our centre. It happened that one day Faith was facing difficulties to attend classes, when we investigated, we discovered that she’s starving at home with her siblings. At the very same time she is finding it hard to concentrate on her studies. So we have seen that a way to help her is to provide food parcels for the family.*

* Names changed to protect child’s identity

Educational Programmes

As part of our educational programme we provide:

- Uniforms and stationary for OVC allowing them to remain in school.
- Crèches and Early Childhood Development enabling older siblings to leave younger children in stimulating and safe care during the school day.
- Homework support to ensure that children are able to keep up with the rest of their class.
- Many of our local partner’s assist local schools in facilitating teacher training and workshops, enabling them to improve the quality of education and care provided.

Educational support provided to 15,194 children in 2011, making a long term commitment to take each child from the point of crisis to one of hope and independence in the future

Early Childhood Development

Early Childhood Development programmes not only provide a safe place for older siblings to leave younger children whilst they are at school but more importantly, they provide stimulation and interaction essential for the early development of a child. Children from birth to five years.

Programmes include a focus on language, vocabulary, reading and numeracy. A child beginning primary school without these skills runs a significant risk of not only starting behind but staying behind.

Through our programmes, children are supported by the daily provision of a nutritious meal and development and social interaction activities. In being exposed to a structured environment which teaches a variety of skills, children are assisted in their preparation for school readiness.
**Assistance with Medical Care and Treatment**

Our local partners play an important role in ensuring children receive medical treatment. The supportive role they play often makes the difference between life and death.

“A 14 year old girl who was born HIV positive suddenly started to become weaker and thinner after being quite healthy. Staying with an aged granny with dementia who has lost most of her own children, there was no one to take her to the clinic. We took the step of taking her ourselves which involved a long time spent waiting in queues in the coldest, wettest weather. We were able to get her treatment for TB as well as the ARV classes.

We were alarmed that her CD4 count was 10! It was amazing that she was alive. We motivated for her to be admitted so that the first stages of the treatment could be monitored. Her CD4 count is now 54 and she is still in the hospital, where we have visited her. She is in Grade 7 this year and we are hoping that she will be able to return to school next year and resume her life.”

A story from Sethani, KwaZulu-Natal

Home visits made by careworkers from the Umvoti AIDS Center helped to identify OVC in need of medical treatment and support. Visits to 50 households over a 3 month period enabled 29 children to begin ARV treatment and TB treatment for 21 children.

Home visits are essential for identifying the needs of vulnerable children who often go unnoticed without the support of parents and caregivers.

**Healthcare support**

- In 2011, an additional 1,815 HIV+ children were supported with access to anti-retroviral therapy. Caregivers assist and support children with their adherence to medication ensuring that they remain healthy.
- Clinical nutritional support provided to 6,027 children.
- 6,000 additional children provided with vitamin supplements.
- 125 caregivers trained, enabling them to provide quality care to children.
- General healthcare referrals made for 6,098 children.

Last year we provided support to over 24,000 orphaned and vulnerable children. Without your generous support, Starfish would have been unable to reach this number of children.

One of our aims over the coming year is to secure multi year funding from donors to enable us to expand the reach of our local partners.

It is our hope that you will continue to support the work of Starfish, enabling us to provide LIFE, HOPE and OPPORTUNITY to many more children across southern Africa.

On behalf of the thousands of children your donations reached in 2011, Thank you!