

Reaching the Hard to Reach Communities

HIV/AIDS is the greatest challenge to sustainable human development in Botswana. As the number of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) increases, the capacity for care and support becomes more over-stretched. Skillshare International aims to improve the quality of care and support services, particularly those targeting marginalised and disadvantaged communities. We use a range of inputs, including development workers (DWs) and our Leadership Development Programme (LDP). We have placed DWs with partner organisations to support their work on HIV/AIDS issues including counselling, palliative care, organisational development, fundraising, community support group facilitation, training, workplace policy development and prevention education. Four leaders of our partner organisations are currently participating in the LDP and we are supporting 2 HIV/AIDS initiatives in schools.

Jackie Deacon (Regional Financial Advisor) and Laura Martindale (Community HIV/AIDS and Gender Advisor) are Skillshare International development workers placed with the Letloa Trust. As part of their work they provide technical assistance to 7 community trusts run by the San community, including the D'kar Trust.

The D'kar Trust has established a Community Health Task Force known as '**Coo ka boo**' (Senaro for 'the way forward'). This Task Force's mission is to create an enabling and supportive environment for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Coo ka boo encourages positive living and acceptance of community members living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, enabling community members to improve their livelihoods.

Task force groups in Ghanzi and Okavango districts mainly comprise field workers, local health workers and members of the community, some of whom are themselves living with HIV. Their dynamic activities aim to reduce stigma and discrimination in rural areas. A recent documentary film *Stand Like Still Living* featured 2 San community members living with HIV/AIDS in D'kar. It is being used to encourage acceptance of PLWHA and initiate discussion about support and access to health services. Laura has facilitated community health training to ensure that task force members are able to answer questions that arise in such community discussions.

The ARV flipchart is another interactive activity that has had positive results. Task group members have been trained to initiate dialogue on health issues using pictures of cows, kraals, termites and lions. This method is particularly useful when working with rural communities, who have strong oral traditions. It stimulates interest and encourages communication on health issues, thus raising awareness and promoting positive behaviour change. Photo: Coo ka boo task force members use ARV flipcharts in the National ARV Programme, D'kar Gantsi District.



Laura has also developed a counselling training manual and trained task group members as trainers in drama, life saving skills and positive living. They enthusiastically present theatrical shows in the marketplace to engage the audience in energetic dialogue about key health issues affecting them. Training local people is critical; a change agent becomes effective only when she/he identifies with the people to be helped. This is vital in HIV/AIDS issues, where culture has a huge impact on a community's behaviour.