



Program Supports Communities Living with AIDS

In South Africa's Zulu dialect, *siyawela* means "we are crossing over" and is symbolic of the way the AIDS epidemic has changed families — grandmothers now care for orphaned grandchildren, mothers care for dying children, teenagers lead households.

Working with local partners, USAID has seized on the concept and helped form Siyawela, a community-based program to support AIDS orphans, vulnerable children and affected families. Toward that end, Siyawela has implemented several strategies, including identifying local needs and strengths, mapping community resources, mobilizing community committees and developing and training a collaborative community network. Through the Perinatal HIV Research Unit, Siyawela provides voluntary counseling, medical testing, advice on preventing mother-to-child transmission, medical care for HIV-positive pregnant women, and references to support groups. The program also tracks treated children from the clinic to the community — vital to ensuring that they get dependable healthcare.



Photo: USAID/Reverie Zurba

Dr. Mark Ottenweller, part of USAID's Siyawela program, holds a Soweto child.

Siyawela's support groups have revealed several critical lessons. For instance, people affected by AIDS share several common concerns — disclosing their status to their families and friends, planning for the future, accessing basic needs like food and medicines, and caring for caregivers to prevent burnout.

The Siyawela program's counseling and support groups served more than 9,000 children over one year's time.

The lessons from support groups help Siyawela identify needs, formulate solutions and develop a strategy unique to each community. USAID is helping train the staff of Siyawela and other community organizations to offer people and families affected by HIV/AIDS disclosure counseling, caregiver support and help planning for the future, financially, emotionally and medically.

Siyawela's counseling and support groups served more than 9,000 children over one year's time, and the program, initially launched in Soweto, has been replicated in 36 communities in Cape Town, Durban, Umtata, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg. Siyawela has mobilized, informed, trained and supported communities in partnership with community groups, government institutions and nongovernmental organizations to cope with the growing number of orphans and vulnerable children among them. The program is working to integrate HIV/AIDS support and prevention and create partnerships between healthcare systems and the communities they serve.

Success Story

