

WOZA MOYA South Africa

Woza Moya - 'come the spirit' - works in a stunning but struggling valley community in KwaZuluNatal, South Africa. The community organisation started life in a very small, but organic way, five years ago, when young people in the valleys were dying and child headed households were evident.

A Zulu speaking white woman, Sue Hedden, started working with a local African woman, Jane Nxasana, by visiting families in nearby villages, and responding to the needs that they found. HIV/Aids was claiming the lives of the young and middle aged, poverty and hunger was widespread and many households were caring for sick and dying people. The situation now is worsening year on year. Funerals take place every Saturday. Recently released figures in KwaZuluNatal report that in 2003, 47% of pregnant women presenting at clinics were infected with the HIV virus.

The valley used to be a successful farming area. Drought, political warfare and the devastation of HIV/Aids has left the people economically severely challenged. This is exacerbated by the mounting death rate, the exorbitant cost of funerals, and increased demands for water, firewood and food for those who are ill. Every family is affected. New graves stand forlorn near rondavel homes. Grandmothers head up large households of grandchildren and great grandchildren. In some families a whole generation is missing. The men mostly leave for the city in search of work. Of those who are left, many abuse the young vulnerable children in their care, misguidedly believing the cruel myth that having sex with a virgin will cure Aids. The role and dignity of the rural African man has been dismally eroded by apartheid, unemployment, and HIV/Aids.

It is a desperate situation and yet the work of Woza Moya, through their responsive and participatory community process, offers hope, support and a chance of greater self reliance to local valley people.

Woza Moya is clearly enhancing the lives of people, through a multi-faceted programme that is responsive, flexible, community based, carefully recorded and entirely delivered by people within their own communities. Woza Moya is managed by a board entirely made up of local representatives. A constant challenge is to source funding. Up to now, funding has largely come through the efforts of individuals, Buddhist communities and their teachers. The Aids Foundation of South Africa and Elton John Foundation have now also provided vital backing.

The Woza Moya programme includes:-

- *Care of those infected and affected by HIV/Aids*

Including the distribution of simple medicines, condoms, and clothing; counselling and emotional support; health/access advice; and general family support and guidance

- *Support of orphans, vulnerable children and child headed households*
Including child minder work, play and educare therapy, school sponsorship, general advice and supervision, identifying foster parents within the extended family network, and counselling
- *Addressing issues of poverty and unemployment*
Including self help projects such as door sized gardens, food parcels, clean water education; facilitating relevant NGO programmes
- *Facilitating access of official documentation*
such as birth certificates, memory boxes, medical certificates that enable child grants, disability grants, and old age pensions to be claimed vitally boosting low or non existent family income
- *Family literacy work*
- *Development of permaculture food growing and nutrition projects*
Working with Heifer programmes, offering goats and chickens to trained farmers, who give the offspring goats and chickens to the next farmers in the community on the list.

These are only the headlines. The most profound support often comes from the one to one work around a rondavel fire. Here Woza Moya carers offer support through listening, befriending, making a plan with the family member and then taking appropriate action to follow through. As one of the carers recently explained 'We do what we promise we are going to do - and that means a lot'.

Important work is also done in small but growing HIV support groups. They meet with a staff member in secret for fear of stigma due to their status. The 'gogos' or grannies group meet to be trained in ways of supporting their orphaned grandchildren through the process of bereavement. Another gogo support group has recently formed to share and publish personal histories, provide support to one another and to develop interpersonal skills.

Increasingly Woza Moya is prioritising the children, seen as the most vulnerable members of the community. A trained staff member works one to one with abused children, finding them safe shelter when necessary and supporting the family to take legal action. A school uniform sponsorship programme enables them to attend school. A play therapy/educare centre is planned in the near future.

More is always needed - but as Woza Moya grows and develops as an organisation, it continues to prioritise the capacity building of its team and the people they work with. Increasingly relying on local management, the focus on

responsive participatory community process stays strong. Working with incredibly complex issues including death, rape, hunger, and poverty, they offer support to every aspect of human experience and in ways that embody empowerment and dignity. May Woza Moya continue to balance sensitivity and urgency in their practice in the community in ways that promote heart and life.

www.wozamoya.org.za
www.thoughtonathread.co.uk

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