

## MALEALEA ORPHANS' DAY



The incidence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho is one of the highest in the world, estimated between 20 and 25 percent. In the Malealea valley, as throughout Lesotho, this is a serious threat on many levels to the livelihoods and on-going development of rural communities. Many parents die of AIDS and/or associated illnesses such as Tuberculosis, and leave young children without a family, many of whom in a context of poverty, are left to fend for themselves as best they can. There is a steadily increasing number of orphans in the villages of the Malealea valley who are particularly vulnerable to the impact and effects of poverty and HIV/AIDS as they are without means of financial, social and family support. They are also at risk for many problems such as dropping out of school, sexual and emotional abuse, teenage pregnancy, crime, and substance (alcohol) abuse. Falling prey to these further entrenches and exacerbates the on-going cycle of poverty and the psychological and social hardship of their lives.

The MDT supports orphans in these villages in the Malealea valley as part of its work to mitigate the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We place orphans as far as possible in extended families which are often headed by grandmothers, or with local foster families where it is our hope that the orphans can live as normal a family-centred life as possible. We also hope that in this way they are more likely to get the love, care and socialisation that they need than if they were placed in orphanages. The orphans currently in our care programme are either 'single' (having one living parent) or 'double' orphans (having no living parents) and many of the surviving parents and/or other family members are also HIV+.

Currently, the MDT provides 'official' support to 26 orphans through its Social Care Programme. We try to support these children and their foster families in a number of ways. The most direct way is through financial support where we offer a monthly food stipend and assistance with medical and primary school related costs. We also offer social care support and monitoring through regular visits to orphan's homes and schools by our social care worker.

However, for an orphan, integrating socially into host families and into the community is not an easy life experience. Bonding with a guardian, adjusting to new routines, taking care of schoolwork, maintaining peer relationships require emotional strength and stamina. Some of

our orphans live in child-headed households and have little emotional, financial and practical support. These children are extremely vulnerable on many fronts and require careful, regular monitoring and extra support.

Although there does not seem to be any social stigma attached to being an orphan in Malealea, there is no doubt that the increasing numbers of orphans takes its toll on the community at large. Peer support, having a 'neutral' adult to talk to about personal matters, and time simply for play, relaxation and enjoyment become extremely important in these children's lives

To try and expand and intensify our involvement with children themselves, the MDT has instituted an Orphans' Day, which takes place on the last Saturday of each month. This has many objectives:

- To give orphans a space to speak privately on a one-to-one basis with our social care worker without the presence of their guardian who may inhibit the child's ability to freely express themselves
- To develop a network of relationships and friendships so that children can begin to socialise with children facing the same difficulties and form bonds that will hopefully become a lasting social support network. To this end, many of the games we play are cooperative rather than competitive games, and team-focused.
- IN future we would like to teach the children skills through games and activities that may be useful in other areas of their lives and later on as young adults. Next year we would like to begin to offer life skills such as sewing, woodworking, gardening, and other skills the children may be interested in learning
- To foster a spirit of independence. Each child is encouraged to make a contribution to the day by participating to the best of his/her ability (for example making his/her own sandwich for lunch, helping to make decisions about activities, helping in the washing up and so on). We try and reinforce the notion that these children need to take their lives into their own hands from the earliest times, rather than having to rely on outside intervention which may not always be forthcoming.



#### Current programme:

At the moment the Orphans' Day is attended by on average 55 children. These children are drawn from the villages in the Malealea valley, some of whom live in more remote areas. It is held in the community hall in the village of Makheteng, and those who can walk to the hall do so. Those who live further away or who are too young to walk long distances are collected by the MDT vehicle. This is an open back truck and has a limited capacity with no shelter from the weather. This often means that we make two or three trips to collect children, a time-consuming (if exhilarating) exercise. Our Clowns Without Borders facilitators



assist with the 'pick-up' and all our activities.

Orphan's Day runs in the following way:

1. The children arrive at the community hall. We try to collect them in groups according to villages so that there is socialisation on the truck during the journey.
2. Warm-up and introductory activities are done as soon as all the children are arrive, the 'Name Game' is a lot of fun and helps children from different villages get to know one another.
3. Children choose an activity to engage in. Most of our older boys and girls choose football, and we are lucky to have a make-shift field right next to the hall! Puzzles, drawing activities and team ball games are also popular and done in groups
4. Break for water/juice, all this is thirsty work!
5. Further activities, usually quieter and larger-group based activities such as Musical Chairs, 'Ke Nako Mang Ntate Tau?' (What's the Time Mr. Lion?)
6. Lunch of sandwiches, fruit and juice and washing up
7. One last game is squeezed in!
8. Farewell; 'Tsamayang Hantle' (Goodbye!)



Throughout the day, our social care worker calls each child individually for an interview, where personal and particularly sensitive matters can be discussed confidentially. This is an extremely important part of the day, and we glean much useful information about our children in this way, which helps us to make sure that we continue to offer appropriate support for the children and their guardians.

September to November 2010 was a 'trial run' for Orphans' Day, and has proved to be very popular with the children. In the beginning they were unsure as to what we were offering them, and we had to go into the villages to encourage them to come along. Now, eager little groups of children can be seen waiting on the side of the road for their 'pick-up'. The children are more active in their engagement with activities, are beginning to suggest activities of their own and express preferences, and there is much more positive social interaction



between them. From feedback we have had, it is clear that they appreciate their personal time alone with our social care worker. Guardians are encouraging attendance and are also coming to meet the truck to chat, and one or two women guardians are regular attenders, offering their help. We feel that the experiences, interactions and activities that the children engage in will have long-term positive benefits for the children. We would therefore like to consolidate and expand this project in 2011.

### BUDGET

The MDT currently has no specific budget for this project, so to this end the following funds are sought:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Food	Bread x 20 loaves = R6 x 20 = <b>R120</b> Peanut Butter x 6 jars x R14 = <b>R84</b> Fruit x 60 pieces = <b>R60</b> Concentrated juice x 6 bottles = <b>R60</b> = <b>R324</b> per session x 12 sessions <b>Total: R3,888.00</b>	We offer a modest lunch of sandwiches, fruit and juice
Transport	By local bus: <b>R20</b> per child in and out x 30 children = <b>R600.00</b> per session x 12 sessions <b>Total: R7,200.00</b>	We would like to hire a local bus for this purpose, run by a known safe driver.
Facilitators	R50 per facilitator x 5 facilitators per Orphan's Day = <b>R250</b> x 12 months <b>Total:</b> <b>R3,000.00</b>	Our Clowns Without Borders facilitators are trained to work with orphans and are an invaluable resource on Orphans' Days.
Materials	R 50 per Orphans' Day = <b>Total: R600</b>	Age-appropriate materials and stationery is required. This also includes items needed for lunch, such as plastic plates and cups, etc.
<b>TOTAL PER YEAR</b>	<b>R20,688.00</b>	

Sponsorship options:

- ✓ Sponsor one (or more) Orphans' Days in a year (R1,724.00 for one Orphans' Day)
- ✓ Sponsor transport costs for a year (R7,200.00) or for one or more Orphans' Days (R600 per Day)
- ✓ Sponsor our Clowns Without Borders facilitators for one or more Orphan's Days (R250 per Day)
- ✓ Sponsor a group of children to attend Orphans' Day (R2,069.00 per 5 children)

**FOR WHATEVER YOU ARE ABLE TO DO TO HELP US THANK YOU!**