

Creating Circles of Care in Communities through Child and Youth Care Work

Situations such as COVID-19, unrest and flooding negatively impacted young people including the beneficiaries of the programmes run by the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW). NACCW developed, strengthened and scaled-up programmes given the compromised safety and wellbeing of many children during these times. Such programmes included the deployment of community Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCWs) in the *Creating Circles of Care Programme* over six months in 2021.

NACCW advocated for the implementation of this programme with DSD and funders as an emergency response to address the unmet needs of young people. The programme was then implemented with support from Aware.org and Innovation Edge.

Key elements of how the programme was run to reach so many children in a short space of time were: a) the deployment of 150 trained and qualified, but unemployed CYCWs, across six provinces. The programme leveraged on the footprint created through the scale-up of training 10,000 CYCWs nationally in past years; b) the programme focused on child protection, substance use, and non-centre based ECD – areas shown to have worsened during these times. A co-funding (‘piggyback approach’) was used where one partner supported one or more elements of the programme; and c) over 20,000 children, and over 10,000 adult family members were served in the programme. Each CYCW supported 30-50 households in a month.

The CYCWs conducted home visits with orphaned and vulnerable children, many of whom were from Isibindi projects, Safe Parks or new children identified by CYCWs in their communities. Key services were:

- Conducting family assessments with developmental plans in place to address the needs of the family members during the six months.
- Supporting families to provide over 6,000 children aged 0-6 years old with home-based ECD stimulation activities, and role-modelling by doing these activities with the children.
- Responding to cases of child abuse and neglect, and GBV. Close to 1,000 beneficiaries were identified and referred for social and other services related to child protection/GBV.
- Assisting families apply for social grants and citizenship documentation and showing families how to create a food garden or support them in accessing food parcels.
- Sharing COVID-19 information with families and referring cases for COVID-19 testing/vaccination.
- Raising awareness on alcohol abuse and referring cases for rehabilitative services.
- Providing educational support to children in school, including addressing cases of school dropout.
- Providing health support for immunizations and for those with chronic illnesses.
- ‘Lifespace’ work and counselling, and family group conferences.

The programme included the following principles for successful implementation which can be used for future scale-up of programmes during times of great need: immediacy; assessment and planning; multi-sectoral/stakeholder partnerships; rights-based/child-centered; inclusivity; holistic services; applying the characteristics of CYC work; mentorship, and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation.

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