

MUREWA IN-SCHOOL ESSAY COMPETITION ON HIV & AIDS



Students following the proceedings of RMT Essay Competitions Prize Giving Day at Zhombwe Primary School, 27 November 2009

ESSAYS COMPETITION REPORT, NOVEMBER 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rozaria Memorial Trust greatly appreciates the efforts of various stakeholders who made this initiative to be a success. Their efforts and resources will continue to impact positively to our community which is deeply ailing from the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

We acknowledge the Ministry of Education under the District office for their invincible support during the implementation of the essay competition. Their insightful guidance and appreciation of our work made things look tremendously easy. We are grateful to Zhombwe Primary School for hosting the Price Giving Day. Its supporting role made the day a big success.

This is an experience, which we will help us build on new, exciting and educative initiatives in schools on HIV and Violence Against Women. We passionately call for the schools to continue with their heart touching support; the teachers made the time to volunteering in the execution of the whole programme. It is our duty together to provide a supportive environment for the children living with HIV/AIDS whilst at the same we provide preventive and awareness messages amongst the students. It is also a pleasure to be associated with a dynamic group of students; they have shown an appreciation of HIV as a community challenge.

It is our sincere hope that this is just a humble beginning of strategic partnership between RMT and schools, all of us we owe it to the community to provide a multi-dimensional approach in fighting HIV and AIDS so that we may effectively contribute towards reduction of the HIV prevalence rate and consequently achieving an AIDS free generation.

We are also indebted to American Jewish World Service who provided the needed funding to enable the undertaking of this important initiative, and AVERT for partnership in our HIV care and support programme.

Kudakwashe Dizha
Coordinator
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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES



Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) is a non-governmental organization, based in Zimbabwe. It supports innovative initiatives that promote education, health and entrepreneurship for women and young people in poor communities. RMT was founded in memory of the late Mbuya Rozaria Marumisa-Dizha (1923-2006) whose life embodied the spirit of caring, sharing and innovation

RMT's focus on education, health and HIV & AIDS is informed by the key issues that the late Mbuya Rozaria had to deal with in her personal life, as well as a response the urgent community needs in Murewa. The key objectives in addressing HIV and AIDS are:

- ⇒ Promoting community based prevention approaches,
- ⇒ Provision of care and support to people living with HIV especially children,
- ⇒ Strengthening community support networks for affected families
- ⇒ Advocating for appropriate policies in education, health and social services related to HIV and their effective implementation in communities.

RMT takes rights based, comprehensive, family and child centered approach to addressing HIV & AIDS. Emphasis is placed on the empowerment and rights of women recognizing their social positions, risks, vulnerabilities and responsibilities. A stronger programmatic approach placed on children. Children are at higher risk in communities and yet they have views and perspectives that can contribute to innovative and creative solutions.

RMT initiated the in-school essay competition in 2007, as complimentary to the on-going community based HIV prevention, care and support programme. The objectives of the essay competition are:

- ⇒ Increasing HIV and AIDS awareness among the children, teachers and families.
- ⇒ Encourage community and action orientated research by children to accelerate response to HIV and AIDS.
- ⇒ Encourage educational excellence, promoting learning and competitiveness among the students.
- ⇒ Provision of merit based scholarships and other provisions to children in resource poor communities.

The essay competition covered ward 8 of Murewa District in Zimbabwe. Five (5) primary schools, namely Zhombwe, Mazianike, Chitate, Magaya, Hurungwe; and two (2) secondary schools namely Magaya and Hurungwe participated in the competition.

An extract of general statistics of RMT in-school activities:-

RMT is providing comprehensive support to 35 school going children living with HIV in ward 8 of Murewa District, through collaboration with the five primary schools and 2 secondary schools in the Ward; also included in this contingent is both Hurungwe Primary and Secondary. RMT is providing counseling services to the children and their parents; education subsidy through payment of school fees; and advocacy for access to treatment for the children. Training for teachers and sensitization of other children in the school environment through education based initiatives is contributing to reduction of stigma and discrimination.

SOME OF THE EFFECTS OF HIV AND AIDS IN SCHOOLS

HIV and AIDS has a great negative effects amongst students both at primary and secondary level if no proper measures are put in place to avert them. School students especially those at secondary level are much more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because their social, emotional and psychological development is incomplete, they tend to experiment with risky behavior, often with little awareness of the danger. In fact, risky sexual behavior often is part of a larger pattern of adolescent behavior in the schools, including alcohol and drug use and challenging authority Nevertheless, most young people in the rural areas have limited knowledge about HIV/AIDS, largely because the society make it difficult for them to obtain information. At the same time, social norms and expectations, along with peer opinion, affects young people thereby exposing them to risk behavior.

HIV and AIDS consumes family budgets, fewer funds remain available for children's education, health care, and other needs. Moreover, children who care for relatives with AIDS but who remain in school are often older than their classmates and thus more likely to drop out of school early.



School children especially girls are greatly affected where both parents are ill from HIV and AIDS as they become the main primary care givers at other times even foregoing their school education. When both parents die they even become the head of the family, which affects their emotional strengths to effectively participate in school activities.

With the Anti-retro-viral drugs prolonging the life of people living with HIV and AIDS, young children are graduating into adolescence but there is lack of knowledge and guidance on these children on how to deal with their developing sexual life, most schools do not have programmes on sexual and reproductive education for young people living with HIV and AIDS.

Some children living with HIV and AIDS suffer from stigma and discrimination in the school environment, which results in them having a negative attitude towards themselves thereby affecting their education. Also school performance is likely to be reduced as HIV and AIDS may affect the level of development in both physically and mentally.

PREPARATORY STAGE



RMT initiated essay competition for schools going children with a total target of 400 students from five primary schools and two secondary schools in Murewa.

The initiative took a participatory approach in the planning stage. A consultative meeting was held with teachers of the schools involved in the competition and a representative of Murewa District Education Office to facilitate the following:-

- Encourage action research and knowledge sharing on HIV related issues in schools.
- Formulation of the questions to be used in the essay writing competition for both primary and secondary schools
- Drafting of the implementation procedure of the essay competition that include writing procedures, marking and the hosting of the price giving.

Primary level

The thematic area for primary students was based on stigma and discrimination. The major objective being for children to provide a supportive environment for their peers living with HIV and AIDS and those affected. It also enables children to reflect on the situations of HIV and AIDS in their own homes. After reflecting on elements that are to be tackled on, the meeting integrated the ideas

to come up with the final question entitled '*what support can be given to people living with HIV and AIDS*'.

Secondary level

The thematic area for secondary schools dwelled on HIV and AIDS prevention recognizing the adolescence stage at which most of the students are on. They require sexual information in the context of HIV and AIDS as they are prime targets to sexual abuse and exploitation especially girls. They need a lot of nurturing by bringing awareness activities so as to facilitate behavior change. To bring about a holistic approach on HIV preventive measures, the meeting came up with a question which integrates the school as part of a broader community where students can play an important part in bringing positive change in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The question attempted by the students reads as following '*what can people in your community do to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS*'.

STUDENTS PARTICIPATION



The general response and understanding of HIV and AIDS by school students was encouraging. 360 pupils from 5 primary and 2 secondary schools took part in the essay writing competition. At primary level grade 5 and 6 participated whilst form three students were directly involved in the essay writing at secondary level.

PRICE GIVING DAY

The pricing giving ceremony was held at Zhombwe Primary School on the 27th of November 2009. Representatives of teachers, School Development Committee members and students from all the participating schools graced the gathering. The ceremony was held in conjunction with Zhombwe's internal price giving day; this proved to be cost effective and helped in mobilization of people. RMT Board members Mr Thomas Dheka, Mrs. Hilda Chitsanzara and Mrs Elizabeth Taonezvi presided over the prize-giving event.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION



The price giving day afforded RMT the prospect to strengthen it's a community based HIV awareness and prevention campaign using music, arts, culture and poetry. Magaya Dzepfunde, an all women traditional group performed at the event. Dzepfunde plays Mbende (Jerusarema) and Jiti with lyrics string with behavior change messages. Apart of their behavior change messages, Dzepfunde's drums are entertaining and educating. Budding poets were also part of the occasion.

RMT is supporting and encouraging youth's innovativeness in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The occasion afforded the Mwana Africa Movement led by Allen Chitsanzara to have exposure for self expression. Their poetry was impregnated with moving words on HIV/AIDS.

Extraction from one of his shona HIV poems as follows:-

"Changu chizodzwa

Sandi chevarwere ndechemufaro

Changu chizodzwa
Sandi chevarere chinerunyararo
Namazwi akakodzwa ndichapanga mazano
Nerurimi rwakapinza ndichatora mazano
Musabata makano
Mune iyi raramo
Chiedza chemumoyo
Ndiwo wose hutano
Hurwere homuviri sandimagumo
Musabata musoro
Mukukwira iri gomo
Mune yangu ongororo
Pfungwa dzenyu ndiye zororo
Kutenda kawakapera ndicho
Chose chikoro
Hwenyu hurwere sandi mitoro
Ndinoremekedza chete yenyu raramo”

The school students from Zhombwe Primary School complimented well, through a number of entertaining activities that included traditional dances, poetry, music and dances. Below is one of their traditional dance performance;-



Zhombwe Primary School Jerusarema group in action at RMT Price Giving Day, 27 November 2009

RECOGNITION OF PARTICIPATION/PRIZES FOR STUDENTS



The best four essays were selected per school with all the winning students receiving a school fees scholarship for term 1. The best students from each school will have a scholarship for the whole year. Apart from this, all the students who participated in the competition were honored with school stationery. The essence of this is to encourage student participation and also help in development of education by provision of the school fees subsidies.

CHALLENGES

The following are some of the notable challenges:-

- Limited resources hindered the direct participation of more students. RMT was forced to select only two grades at primary level and one at secondary level.
- In some schools, the writing dates coincided with the turning away of students for non-payment of school fees. As a result, some students did not take part in the essay writing.
- Non-Availability hindered the participation of a bigger number of teachers and students from other schools on the Price Giving Day at Zhombwe Primary School.

RECOMMENDATIONS



In reviewing the 2009 essay competition experiences, the messages and the interaction with the schools, the following are some of the key recommendations:

- i.** Ensure that clear HIV and AIDS awareness with the support of comprehensive sex education especially for the adolescent HIV positive students is built into the school curriculum to strengthen the already existing in-school HIV/ADS programmes.
- ii.** The emergence of a bigger number of HIV positive students has meant the need for schools to have referral protocols, which incorporate the range of needs of these children.
- iii.** School staff should be capacitated continuously to enable them to effectively deal with the ever-changing HIV and AIDS world. The training needs to capacitate the staff to recognize students who are at risk for and who are experiencing HIV and AIDS.
- iv.** A linkage should exist between the local community and the school that encompasses both the staff and school management committee to enable a one-voice approach for the students both at home and at school.
- v.** Provide the female students with skills to deal with sexual abuses and encourage their participation in the drafting and designing of school policies that aim to keep them safe from sexual harassment and consequently reducing their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.
- vi.** Schools need to be equipped with the updated material on HIV and AIDS recognizing a paradigm shift in the HIV circles. Also the resource inventory should recognize a strong connection between gender imbalances between boys and girls; and the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- vii.** Schools, Non-Governmental Organizations and Community Based Organizations working in the field of HIV/AIDS need to strike a relationship to comprehensively package an awareness and support system on HIV and AIDS in schools.

The best essays are to be published on line and few copies into a children's book. RMT will build on the successes of this essay-based approach to strengthen its HIV and AIDS initiatives in schools. In the coming years RMT will continue with the in-school activities; apart from essays, quiz and impromptu speeches will be added on.

It is important for schools to be a place of safety and advancement for children living with HIV and AIDS. Schools are the place where the children spend the most of their time, therefore it is imperative that they are equipped with updated information on HIV/AIDS awareness and on how to support HIV positive students.

