



Photos: NPPHCN

Community AIDS worker Mandla Hlatshwayo taking AIDS education to schools

# AIDS – Getting the community involved

**750 000 South Africans will be infected with AIDS by 1994 unless something is done to reduce the fast spread of this disease**

**I**t is important and necessary to develop a national, community-based AIDS programme says the National Progressive Primary Health Care Network (NPPHCN). For the past few years NPPHCN has been working on such a programme.

NPPHCN says the AIDS epidemic in South Africa is at an early stage, but HIV - the virus that causes AIDS, is spreading fast. "The problem is that many people still do not believe AIDS exists and therefore it is difficult to get their full cooperation. They think that AIDS is a lie, an American, homosexual or foreign disease. At this early stage of the epidemic, black communities have almost no experience

of AIDS, which is why it is essential that communities are involved in AIDS education programmes," says Themba Miya, an AIDS worker for NPPHCN.

The network's aim is to combine AIDS education with existing education and development programmes in communities. One of the things they are doing is implementing a programme which promotes the acceptance of people who are HIV-positive in the community. Programmes and workshops are run in a way that involve people and help people deal with the issue, rather than to scare them away.

**A**IDS organisers work closely with community organisations in areas all over South Africa.

"My main duty is to educate and inform people about HIV and AIDS, and to teach them to accept and care for those who are HIV-positive," says Miya. "It is very inspiring when the work we do show results. We have formed AIDS awareness committees in organisations and in the community. For example, the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) will be launching a national campaign and is demanding that sex education be taught in all schools," he adds.

"We have also worked with the ANC Youth League, traditional healers and other organisations in finding creative and effective ways of campaigning around AIDS."

NPPHCN believe that AIDS programmes must identify and address the social and political factors connected to the spread of the disease.

"Poverty, migrant labour, unemployment, poor education and poor housing play a big role in the spread of the disease. In addition to this, the health care system in this country is divided along the lines of race, class, sex and sexuality. "Little importance is placed on prevention and health promotion and there is a total lack of encouragement of communities to become involved in health programmes of the government," says Miya.

"The government did not consult with or involve communities when it started its AIDS campaign. Also, too little funds have been set aside by the government for HIV prevention and the care of people who are HIV-positive.

While NPPHCN and other progressive organisations are demanding that the government take responsibility for the AIDS epidemic in South Africa, they continue to run

educational workshops, and to give support to people who are HIV positive or have AIDS.

**N**PPHCN has eleven regional structures and most of the work is done through these structures. In consultation with organisations, each region employs several community AIDS workers who carry out the work of NPPHCN in the region.

While there are a number of people and projects active in AIDS education in South Africa their efforts are not nationally co-ordinated.

The network believe that only through ongoing campaigns in communities will the seriousness and dangers of the AIDS epidemic be recognised. ☛

If you want more information or wish to get in touch with NPPHCN AIDS Programme, here are the telephone numbers of their offices:

**National office:** (011) 337 8539  
**Eastern Transvaal:** (01315) 41 181  
**Northern Transvaal:** (01521) 91 4221  
**Southern Transvaal:** (011) 337 7126  
**Orange Free State:** (057) 396 5509  
**Natal:** (031) 301 2582  
**Natal Midlands:** (0331) 45 0453  
**Northern Natal:** (0354) 74 181  
**Border:** (0431) 43 6733  
**Eastern Cape:** (041) 41 1618  
**Transkel:** (0471) 31 0757  
**Western Cape:** (021) 696 4154



**Community AIDS workers speaking to people in the community**

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