

GAPA – Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS



Township of Khayelitsha

GAPA – [Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS](#) - started in Khayelitsha and spread to many other places in South Africa, then to Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Kenya! GAPA was started in 2001 as part of the implementation phase of a research project by the Institute of Ageing in Africa at the University of Cape Town. An occupational therapist organised workshops and support groups for grandmothers who were affected by the HIV&AIDS pandemic. The interventions were designed to meet the needs described by grandmothers who were part of the study. Grandmothers who participated felt that the information and support that they had received was too valuable to end with the completion of the pilot program so they formed a committee with the occupational therapist, Kathleen Brodrick, and made plans to spread the information and support to others. They have been very successful at spreading this

simple but critical model based on two prongs: education and psychosocial support. Kathleen Brodrick is still a member of the board. The board consists of community members and a diverse group of people committed to the development of grandmothers holding together families affected by HIV & AIDS and poverty.

GAPA has been very responsive as grandmothers continued to identify their needs. Each month GAPA runs an Indaba (meeting), whereby newcomers come to know about the happenings of GAPA and members have a platform to speak about current affairs that are affecting their communities. A weekly slot has been secured on a local radio station, [Radio Zibonele](#), whereby GAPA workshops take to the air, and thus reach a far larger number of community members.

Emotionally vulnerable grandmothers are recruited by grandmothers who are known as area representatives to join the support groups that they run in their homes once a week (pre-Covid). In these groups the grandmothers meet others who have family members who are infected with HIV or who have died from AIDS complications. The group leader counsels them and teaches them about HIV&AIDS. Through the peer support they gradually come to terms with their losses and start to take charge of their lives. These groups consist often of up to 20 grandmothers. Once they are emotionally stable they are invited to form cooperative groups more focused on income generation.

Handicrafts made in the income generation groups are often sold within the township. Grandmothers are encouraged to create their own markets and to make items that are wanted by their communities. GAPA has a store on the grounds of its multipurpose centre. In some places, grandmothers have produced items in large numbers for companies.

There is a vegetable garden shared by the Khayelitsha GAPA Centre and the nearby school. Numerous toddlers at group meetings highlighted the fact that their grandmothers could not afford to send them to preschool. Some applications to sponsors allowed them to send dozens of children to pre-school. This aspect of GAPA's intervention strategy has proved to be very popular and gives grandmothers a real boost to know that they can send their young grandchildren to a safe and stimulating environment while they have some time to themselves. In 2006, 145 children attended preschool through bursaries given by GAPA. The SLF sponsored 89 of these. Shortly after this initiative began, the need for primary school aftercare, especially for certain vulnerable children, was noted by their school heads, and GAPA responded with an aftercare program that now includes hundreds of children.



From a South African grandmother via *Powered by Love*: “Through GAPA I received training on how to care for my grandson and also they provided counselling sessions for the children. My grandson went to help him deal with the loss of his mother. They told him, “Write everything about your mum, how you feel,” and at the end of the session he was asked to place a picture of his mum on that letter. And he chose a picture of me and his mum to place on it. That touched my heart so deep, I can't really explain. I guess on that day I felt like my grief was also coming to an end.”