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CELEBRATING COMMUNITY HEROS ON WORLD AIDS DAY - #WorldAidsDay December 2015

With the global community drawing together on 1 December on World Aids Day to support those living with the disease, &Beyond and Africa Foundation are celebrating those community members who dedicate themselves towards caring for those in need living in Africa's rural areas.

According to the World Health Organisation, HIV-related causes claimed an estimated 1.2 million lives in 2014, with approximately 2 million people newly infected with Aids by the end of the same year. The disease has a profound impact throughout Africa's lesser developed rural regions. While it is estimated that only 51% of people with HIV know their status globally, this number is even lower in many such areas, where a stigma still lies attached to Aids patients.

As medical care is often not available nearby, local communities are turning to each other to provide care and health education for those who are most vulnerable. Such is the case at the Newington Foster Care and Widows Home Community Based Care Centre or the Lilydale Home Based Care Centre, both of them based in South Africa's Mpumalanga Province. Just two of the many initiatives supported by the Africa Foundation, as well as its major donor, &Beyond, these centres were established in a rural community near to the world-famous Kruger National Park, where regular access to hospitals is limited due to the remoteness of the settlements.

Supported by volunteers drawn from the community, the centres provide outpatient health care and education to the elderly and vulnerable, as well those affected by terminal illnesses such as HIV/Aids. Children orphaned by Aids are also cared for, with the recent construction of dining facilities at Newington allowing the centre to provide meals to those in need. This additional extension to the centre's infrastructure was made possible through the Africa Foundation and was handed over to the community on 24 November 2014.

The home based care centres are staffed by volunteers, who move from house to house, providing support in administering medical treatments, promoting personal hygiene, assisting with general home care such as bathing and exercising patients and providing referrals for education, immunisation and proper nutrition.

Identified by means of uniforms, these volunteers are frequently either themselves HIV positive or have family members living with the virus. They make it their mission to be as visible as possible in the community, providing health care education and training others in caring for those living with terminal illnesses.



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Considering the stigma still attached to Aids in many rural African areas, volunteers such as Noldah from Lilydale are frequently the first people in their community to disclose their HIV status. A married mother, Noldah's courageous disclosure has encouraged other members of her community to reveal their status.

Recognising that many of the men in his community are more comfortable discussing their health concerns with other men, Sam, a 53-year-old disabled man who also volunteers at Lilydale, has made it his mission to champion HIV/Aids education for the men in his community. Moving from house to house, he educates his peers about how to manage the virus. Since his involvement, the local medical centre has noticed a marked increase in the number of men from his community seeking treatment.

While getting treatment for the first time is in itself a significant step, there are other volunteers who focus on helping community members to deal with the effects of the medication itself. Infected by HIV by her late husband, who refused to reveal his HIV status to even those nearest to him, preferring to be treated in secret, Florence was diagnosed as part of a routine medical check-up. Immediately beginning treatment herself, she experienced severe difficulties in adjusting to the medication. Today, she uses this experience to run a support programme encouraging recently diagnosed patients who are dealing with the side effects of their medication.

Initially introduced to the care centre when she sought support and medical assistance for depression, Rebacca from Newington received the support she required to leave her physically abusive husband. Drawing on her personal experiences, she has dedicated herself to the centre's door-to-door campaign, educating others about physical and mental abuse and helping other women suffering the same fate she once did.

Working with and for the community, the Africa Foundation is currently engaged in developing the facilities available at its latest Home Based Care Centre in the Newington community. To find out more or donate, visit www.africafoundation.org.

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ABOUT &BEYOND

&Beyond is one of the world's leading luxury experiential travel companies, designing personalised luxury safaris in 15 African countries, as well as arranging bespoke tours in India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Chile and Argentina. The company also owns and operates 33 extraordinary lodges and camps in Africa and India that positively impact more than 9 million acres of wildlife land. Established in 1991, &Beyond takes exceptional care of its guests in order to make a difference; its commitment to sustainable responsible travel, conservation and community empowerment has been globally recognised with multiple awards over the years.



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ABOUT AFRICA FOUNDATION

Founded in 1992, Africa Foundation has built up a highly successful track record in empowering and enriching the lives of communities living adjacent to conservation areas, specifically in the areas of healthcare, education and enterprise development. It is a registered trust, tax exempt and non-profit organisation, supported by the Africa Foundation UK and Africa Foundation USA, as well as &Beyond, lodge guests and other donors. To find out how you can personally contribute to similar projects, please visit www.africafoundation.org.za.

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