

Impact

Pictet Group Charitable Foundation

Tackling the disorder of our age



Mentor Mothers on the front line against AIDS

“I was diagnosed with HIV in November 2004. My first instinct was to deny it. I was terrified that my family and friends would find out, so I used a fake name at the treatment centre. It took me five years to realise that I didn’t want to die like that¹.”

Beatrice M., now a mother of two, was recruited by the non-profit organisation mothers2mothers (m2m) in 2009 to become a Mentor Mother in Kenya. Beatrice is one of almost 1,700 HIV-positive women who work under the auspices of m2m to educate and support other women through a peer mentoring programme that engages local communities to help eradicate mother-to-child transmission.

“New HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths have fallen dramatically since the peak of the epidemic. Now the response is going one step further – ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.” This introduction to the UNAIDS² report published on World AIDS Day on 1 December 2015, sets a formidable goal – but one

that is backed by promising signs of progress. Access to antiretroviral therapy has increased by 84% since 2010, while new HIV infections are down 35% overall and 58% among children since 2000. Nevertheless, the sobering reality remains that over 600 children are still infected each day: during pregnancy, labour and delivery, or through breastfeeding. That means 220,000 new paediatric infections annually, almost 90% in sub-Saharan Africa³.

Although African governments have facilitated access to treatment, m2m says more needs to be done before paediatric AIDS can be eliminated. It is with this focus that the organisation has taken its stance in the fight against AIDS – with astonishing success.



Mentor Mothers Bridget Chamanga and Linnes Gumba, Chikwawa district, Malawi

*"Children should be the first to benefit from our successes
in defeating HIV, and the last to suffer from our failures."*

Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UNICEF



Linnes Gumba, Mother Mentor, Malawi

Active in South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and Uganda, m2m has helped over 1.4 million HIV-positive women since its founding in 2001. In 2014, one in four HIV-positive women delivering their babies in countries with a m2m presence saw a m2m Mentor Mother⁴.

“True success is seeing a healthy child reach sexual maturity, equipped with the knowledge and resources to ensure an AIDS-free generation”

The financial aid received by m2m mirrors the scope of its ambition. Its 2014-15 annual report indicates just over \$17 million in grants and contributions. Donors include the United States government, Comic Relief and the UK Government, as well as the Elton John AIDS Foundation and Victoria Beckham, who held a charity sale in partnership with THE OUTNET. The Pictet Foundation has supported m2m for two years.

Far removed from the glamorous world of its supporters, m2m doesn't shy away from hard work on the ground. Indeed, its founder believes that the basic medical model fails to address the many needs that mothers carrying the virus have beyond simply administering tests and delivering medication. Aid organisations must also cater for broader needs such as HIV/AIDS education, psychosocial support, breastfeeding guidance, personal well-being and social acceptance. “The work done by m2m complements drug-based care by bringing Mentor Mothers into the medical team,” explains Dr Mitch Besser, m2m founder⁵.

“Mentor Mothers are able to forge trusted relationships with HIV-positive women better than anyone else. As women living with HIV, they've experienced the hardships in their local communities first hand,” emphasises Emma France, European Director of m2m. The organisation recruits, trains and empowers mentors. “These young women go from being marginalised to becoming economically independent role models

and leaders within their communities,” Emma adds. And their efforts are coming to fruition. In 2014, m2m virtually eliminated mother-to-child HIV transmission among its beneficiaries, according to UN Global Plan guidelines⁶.

Euphoria aside, ensuring the birth of an HIV-negative child is only half the battle. “True success is seeing a healthy child reach sexual maturity, equipped with the knowledge and resources to ensure an AIDS-free generation.” According to Emma, this is m2m's biggest challenge for the future. “We are developing and implementing programmes specifically targeting adolescents. Our close ties with local communities are a powerful asset in reaching this goal.”

It will be an uphill struggle; that much is clear. But m2m's success lies in the conviction that there is a simple solution to this daunting problem. And so it enlists the greatest resource a community can offer: its mothers.

¹ Extract from the account given by Beatrice M., a Mentor Mother with the NGO mothers2mothers

² UN programme to coordinate the efforts of various specialist UN agencies in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic

³ United Nations Children's Fund, *Towards an AIDS-Free Generation – Children and AIDS: Sixth Stocktaking Report*, 2013, UNICEF, New York, 2013

⁴ mothers2mothers, *Annual Report 2014-2015, Financial Year 2014*, Cape Town, 2015

⁵ mothers2mothers, *Annual Report 2005-2006*, Cape Town, 2006

⁶ mothers2mothers, *Annual Report 2014-2015, Financial Year 2014*, Cape Town, 2015