

HACT celebrates children's rights

AHEAD of National Children's Day on Saturday 2 November, the Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust (HACT) has expanded its children's programme, launching child and youth support groups at four new community sites in the Valley of 1000 Hills region.

National Children's Day aims to highlight progress being made towards the promotion and realisation of the rights of children, as stipulated by South Africa's Constitution and through regional and international human rights commitments.

HACT's children's department manager, Sara Brown, said it was exciting for the team to launch the new support groups in time for Children's Day.

"To us, every day is children's day as we fight for the rights of children, particularly children who are living with HIV and orphaned and vulnerable children, every day.

"It's great that this Saturday the whole country stops to think about these issues," she said.

HACT is a local non-profit organisation that responds to the HIV/AIDS pandemic through care, prevention and poverty alleviation/income generation projects.

Its children's programme started in

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- Sara Brown of HACT

August 2012 initially with 150 children receiving home based care, HIV testing and education and psycho-social support. In April 2013 the project expanded, with a pilot project being set up in one community in which support groups were started – one group for young children and one for teenagers.

"The pilot went extremely well, and so as of October the programme has been expanded again to four additional community sites – now reaching 400 children in the communities of KwaNyuswa, Embo, Inchanga and Molweni," said Sara.

The support groups are facilitated

by HACT staff and focus on educating children about issues facing their communities. This helps them to have a vision for their future and dreams for their lives.

The staff help the children with their homework, educate them about HIV and the realities of the impact of the HIV pandemic on their communities.

They also refer children who require additional assistance to the relevant service provider (such as a psychologist or social worker) and support the children in whichever way possible.

Sara explained that the children in the programme are all orphaned or vulnerable.

"The majority of the children stay in child-headed households where the elder sibling is the head of the household, or in granny-headed households where a granny is the head and the parents have died or are absent," she said.

"The support groups are about bringing children who are in similar situations together to become friends, support each other, become family to one another. Seeing them regularly allows our team to monitor them, observe where there are problems and be a part of their lives – hopefully making a positive impact on them," said Sara.



The Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust Children's Department team members Sanelisiwe Dlamini, Mbali Zondi, Sbusiso Mthethwa, Khonziwe Meyiwa, Babongile Phakathi, Winnie Wakaba, Nontobeko Nkala, Ncamisile Zondo and Sara Brown at the launch of the support groups in the Molweni community this October.