

Spotlight on Grassroots

SUMMER 2021



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN AND GIRLS



GRANDMOTHERS



HOME-BASED CARE



POSITIVE LIVING



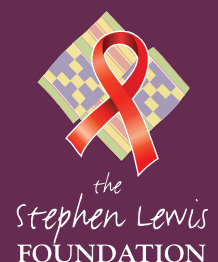
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR
LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

*Thank you
for your
solidarity*

Your generosity has made it possible for us to remain responsive to the needs of our partners and those that they serve. We are grateful for your ongoing commitment and support.



Letter from our Co-Founder and Co-Chair



On the face of it, you might think that this message would be downcast. Given the ravages of COVID-19 and the wholesale devastation of economies and countries, you might be anticipating a mournful wail. You'd be wrong. I'm actually quite upbeat.

Our partners in sub-Saharan Africa continue to forge ahead with determination. In the face of the coronavirus, they show astonishing resilience and innovation. Initially, the pandemic seemed to take a modest toll on the countries of Africa, but as of this issue, there are more than four million cases and 100,000 deaths and hospitals are stretched to the limits. South Africa is the epicenter. The country is reeling from the force of the carnage, but our partners' commitment continues and somehow spirits are alive.

How is that possible? Well, Africa is a continent that has dealt with polio and HIV and TB and malaria and Ebola ... Africa knows what it takes to withstand the ferocity of contagious diseases. Our community-based partners are determinedly following the public health protocols, and extending themselves, fighting to save every life afflicted with COVID-19.

What we have is the triumph of community-based prevention, treatment and care. The World Health Organization, UNAIDS, bilateral aid agencies in donor countries, are all extolling the benefits of community-based interventions. They have undergone a dramatic conversion: they finally understand that top-down never eclipses bottom-up. They have come to realize, however late in the day, that the most effective response to HIV and COVID-19 lies at the grassroots.

Allow me to say without, I hope, a tone of arrogance, that these community-based solutions have been touted by the Foundation for years. We learned, early on, that the strength and resilience of communities and community projects is the road to hope, to empathy, to survival. Thank you for being a part of this journey and for trusting our leadership to invest your gifts conscientiously.

We're rounding the corner in the summer of 2021. For Africa, it will be much later in the year, probably the last quarter. But the stars are aligning. Vaccines are available, sanity is returning, international funding will be restored ... there is reason for optimism.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation will never let its guard down. We know the tasks are herculean. We know that HIV has become collateral damage in the face of the pandemic. In the words of Martin Luther King, "We Shall Overcome".

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Lewis'.

Stephen Lewis

Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Stephen Lewis Foundation

Letter from our Executive Director



Despite all the challenges COVID-19 brought, as the new Executive Director of the Stephen Lewis Foundation I have been inspired by the response of our community-based partners across sub-Saharan Africa, our supporters, including our Grandmother to Grandmother groups, and the staff of the foundation. In the midst of such upheaval, you have all doubled down on your work and support for communities affected by HIV and AIDS.

While effective COVID-19 vaccines are now at hand, what is less clear is when they will be widely available to countries of the global south. Until that happens, the impacts of this new pandemic will continue to challenge our grassroots partners. While they have the skills, relationships and determination to meet these challenges head on, they don't have sufficient funding to do so. As an organization committed to supporting community-led responses and challenging the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, we know that our role as funder is a responsibility we cannot take lightly.

I am so pleased that despite all the uncertainty, SLF has been able to fulfill our commitment to our partners. They have had the reliable and flexible support to provide their much needed services because of the generosity of our supporters. The SLF's loyal donors have stepped up and contributed to our COVID-19 Appeal.

Grandmothers and grandothers across the country found new ways of raising funds for African grandmothers and their families through virtual fundraisers, joining the Stride to Turn the Tide challenge and becoming monthly donors.

Monthly donors have continued to provide the steadfast, reliable funding that is so important. Our Foundation and Union partners provide us with critical funding, and were understanding of our partners' need for flexibility this year. The generous response of our donors gave us the confidence to continue our inspiring work.

It has been an inspiring year. The commitment to feminism and social justice that drives the staff of the Stephen Lewis Foundation and is reflected in the work of our partners and the support of our donors is powerful. Thank you for all that you do. Together we can continue to turn the tide of HIV and AIDS.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meg French". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop for the 'M' and a long, sweeping line for the 'F'.

Meg French

Executive Director, Stephen Lewis Foundation



Photo provided by: NYAKA

The Sobering Realities of Dual Pandemics

Addressing the needs of Communities affected by HIV and AIDS during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As Canadians receive our first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccines, governments continue to ease restrictions on gathering and movement, and our lives begin to return to some sense of normal, more and more of us are breathing a collective sigh of relief.

But while we start to plan for a post-COVID reality where we can reconnect with loved ones, travel, and venture out again, many of our partners in sub-Saharan Africa are finding that hope and optimism out of reach.

Right now in countries like South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, there is a crippling wave of COVID-19 infections that is overwhelming already stretched national health care systems.

In Botswana, where the government has ordered a state of emergency and periodic national lockdowns since 2020, the results have been devastating. There is a significant increase in cases of gender-based violence (GBV), and there is a pressing need to provide counselling and social support to those at high risk, those economically challenged, and those who have survived GBV.

Amid these challenges, our partner Stepping Stones International (SSI) is focusing on three key areas exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic: gender-based violence, mental illness and poverty. Their work will include weekly checks on grandmothers who access SSI's programs, psychosocial supports and group counselling sessions, as well as opportunities where grannies can participate in peer-to-peer support. Some sessions will focus on economic empowerment such as job creation and financial literacy and identifying and responding to gender-based violence and mental health issues.



In sub-Saharan Africa, six in seven new HIV infections among adolescents aged 15–19 years are among girls.

UNAIDS, 2021

Across sub-Saharan Africa, health care providers and community-based organizations are scrambling to respond swiftly and effectively to this new wave of COVID infections. Having already pivoted significantly since the beginning of the pandemic, these organizations also continue to be a critical lifeline to people affected by HIV and AIDS, providing targeted and otherwise unavailable support to their communities during these chaotic times. This new wave threatens to set their work back even more, as dwindling funding to the HIV and AIDS response further compounds the impacts of two pandemics.

"Being a parent can be very challenging in everyday situations and taking care of your mental health is more important now than ever before due to COVID-19."

-Stepping Stones International

Our partners are sharing stories with us about the unprecedented demand for their services and the challenges of delivering supports hampered by COVID-19 protocols, including significant restrictions to movement and school closures. Their already limited funds are redirected to ensure that staff, volunteers and the community remain safe while maintaining life-saving HIV and AIDS supports.

"During this exceptionally hard period of restricted movement and extreme social distancing our team have not been deterred to continue their work."

-Stepping Stones International

They worry that newly-needed resources such as hand sanitizers, masks, safety equipment, and additional training and materials won't be replenished quickly enough. And they are concerned that with so much still unknown about a post-COVID reality, the urgency and gravity of the HIV and AIDS pandemic will be lost in the shuffle.

One of the biggest challenges community-based organizations face is the slow national progress in COVID vaccine access, distribution, and uptake. Africa currently has the world's lowest vaccination rates. A number of complex, interconnected issues threaten to compromise the efforts of hospitals and national health care systems including stigma, misinformation about the vaccine and overall availability in some cases. Tied to this is the broader context of wider economic and social damage and disruptions wrought by the pandemic.

In many places where progress has been made it is thanks to the expertise and established ties of community-based organizations. They are implementing lessons learned from the frontlines of the HIV and AIDS response to educate, build trust and mobilize individuals towards greater vaccination rates.

"Let's help end the pandemic by ensuring everyone is protected from COVID-19. Let's level the playing field and recover better."

– Stepping Stones International

For many organizations, their origins in the early days of the HIV and AIDS response make them well positioned to respond, adapt, and pivot yet again to focus COVID-19's emerging challenges with speed, care, and ingenuity. They are working not only to safeguard the progress that has been made in addressing AIDS, but also to prevent COVID-19 from having irreparable impact on their countries and communities.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation is an essential ally in ensuring that community partners are not sidetracked from their focus on addressing inequities and ending AIDS. We are grateful for the generosity of donors who have made this possible for organizations like Stepping Stones International.

Thank you for helping to keep the Stepping Stones International footprint strong in communities in Botswana. ■

Health and Human Rights for LGBTIQ Communities

In Kenya, strict COVID-19 restrictions including lockdowns and curfews have significantly impacted the daily lives of its citizens since the start of the pandemic. In the Lake Victoria Region, Men Against AIDS Youth Group (MAAYGO) has had to temporarily close its doors in compliance with the COVID-19 guidelines. For young gay men like Isah Makambo Otis*, MAAYGO is a safe place where they can access HIV testing, counseling, referral services, and treatment, and where their fundamental rights to exist as gay men and men engaged in sex work without fear, discrimination or threats of violence is prioritized. This is why it was so important to MAAYGO to retain a connection with its members despite the closure. They implemented an online peer-to-peer support program that allows the young men who depend on them to have an outlet to share their stories, and receive education and information throughout the pandemic.

In Isah's case, he has had to make the tough decision to engage in sex work despite the pandemic. He shares that with rising unemployment, precarious housing and reduced access to food, sex work has become a necessary option for people who are trying to navigate these social and economic challenges. The support that Isah received through MAAYGO has been important in helping him cope and remain hopeful despite his high risk for contracting HIV.

According to Isah, his story is not a sad one. It is a story of triumph and inspiration at a time when hopefulness is much needed. He feels empowered and emboldened to share his experiences as a young gay man with others who are grappling with their own sexuality, or who are fearful about accessing treatment and other supports due to discrimination. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, he became a peer educator and is committed to being a part of this strong network that allows men who have sex with men to be their authentic selves while learning to reduce their risk to HIV. He sees himself as a champion and advocate whose role it is to preserve the general welfare of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.

**Pseudonym to protect his identity*

Photo provided by MAAYGO



"MAAYGO conducts focus group discussions with community members every six months. Through the discussions, MAAYGO documents community needs and ensures they are well taken care of. The community (LGBT/MSM) are also involved in project design, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. All these processes ensure the community is well represented in every strategic planning and implementation process."

– Men Against AIDS Youth Group (MAAYGO) – Kenya

PARTNERS IN

Pride

Thanks to the generosity of the Ruby Fund, we launched the first SLF Pride Month Campaign, challenging our friends and supporters to donate during the month of June to have their gifts matched – doubling their impact to LGBTIQ partners.

We are so excited to share that we reached our goal. We could not have done it without you.

If you missed the Campaign, it's not too late to become a Partner in Pride by visiting <https://stephenlewisfoundation.org/partners-in-pride>

Thanks to you...

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we have been able to sustain funding to 125+ partners in ways that have been responsive to their feedback – allowing them the autonomy to shift their programming to meet communities' changing needs.

Grandmothers



Photo provided by Mamelani

35,000+

grandmothers participated in support groups and income generation activities to improve their livelihoods

Positive Living



Photo provided by Kitovu Mobile

105,000+

people received HIV testing and counselling critical to understanding and accepting one's status and treatment

77,000+

clients received medical care through home-based care visits by front-line workers, trusted and respected in the community

Home-Based Care



Photo provided by Swaziland Nurses Association

Children and Youth



Photo provided by Cotlands

25,000+

children and youth received psychosocial support critical for their development to thrive

Partners in Pride



Photo provided by Icebreakers Uganda

40,000

people reached through LGBTIQ partners' legal and psychosocial support groups, outreach, and advocacy work

”

“Your support made it possible for us to continue making a difference in our communities even during this difficult time.”
-Juliane on behalf of MU-JHU

93%

client adherence to HIV medication reported by SLF partners, higher than regional averages

Health



Photo provided by ROCOM

Building a Legacy One Step at a Time

Sue Griggs is a loyal donor to the SLF through her family foundation and has supported the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign over the last 15 years. She also dedicates her time and talent to furthering the mission and vision of the SLF. We are proud to call Sue a partner in solidarity.

When the Grandmothers Campaign was first started, I heard about it on the radio while I was driving on Bloor St. in Toronto. I pulled my car over because I was overwhelmed with the thought that this work had the potential to be truly amazing. My first thought was that my husband and I have to get out of Canada and do things in the rest of the world. I phoned immediately from the side of the road and asked, "how do I get involved with this program? What do I do?" That was how my journey with the Stephen Lewis Foundation started. There were such good vibes all around with the staff and other grandmothers that I got involved in many ways. I was in a Grandmothers Group, went to many gatherings and ran workshops to raise awareness about the issues in sub-Saharan Africa. More recently, a group of us wrote and designed a cookbook to raise funds. I care a lot and donate time and energy in my own way.

*"There were such good
vibes and
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in so many ways"*

We believe in what the Foundation is doing and the fact that the SLF does not tell the community-based organizations what to do. We like the fact that these organizations make their own decisions about how to put funds to work in their communities. I really believe in that philosophy. People need to plan for themselves in terms of what they need.

Our former Governor General of Canada David Johnston said philanthropy is all about time, talent and treasure. I like that definition and I've been endorsing this way of thinking because I think that many people feel that philanthropy is only for those who have a lot of money. Yes, of course money is important, however taking the time to share one's skills is also critical. The idea of connecting Grandmothers from two different continents is quite amazing. Encouraging both African and Canadian women to get involved, to use their voices and to help change the status quo has made such a difference. The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign has shown us all that time, talent and treasure are all important. Certainly, it's the way this Foundation has been set up and the Grandmothers Campaign has led the way in reinforcing that.

Although we're still researching what legacy giving means to us, I believe that it all goes back to the work and the values of the organization. That's what's most important. I realize too that all the work I've ever done, whether it's paid or unpaid, has had that aspect of well-being, of caring, of partnering, of joining - all those things.

Leaving a legacy gift to the Stephen Lewis Foundation allows us to plan for the long-term investment in our partners' work. Your generosity will ensure that children, grandmothers, families and communities will be cared for well into the future. Leaving a legacy is an important conversation for you and your loved ones and we would be honoured to provide more information about the SLF, our partners, and how Legacy Giving plays a crucial part in sustaining the momentum and outcomes of HIV and AIDS work.

For more information on leaving a legacy to the SLF, please contact Niambi Martin-John at legacy@stephenlewisfoundation.org or call 1-888-203-9990 ext. 0



Photo: Alexis MacDonald

Our commitment to anti-Black racism and anti-colonialism

On May 25th we marked the one-year anniversary of the death of George Floyd, an African American man who was murdered at the hands of a police officer. It took 9 minutes and 29 seconds for his breath to leave his body. That brief but deadly time lit a flame that fuelled protests denouncing anti-Black racism around the world.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation added its voice to recognize the role of systemic oppression and discrimination in upholding inequality and inequity for Black people. We support the movement to condemn and eliminate pervasive anti-Black racism by adopting bold, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial approaches to how we work, how we provide funding and through the information that we share. We recognize the expertise, power and ownership that our partners and those they serve have in determining and directing their own destinies, without the insertion of judgement or authority from outside sources. We recommit to the ongoing learning and effort this requires, because Black Lives Matter.



Photo: Alexis MacDonald

Grace Waruguru, left, (Program Director at Kiambu People Living with HIV/AIDS, Kenya), Lorenz Hembapu (Executive Director at Catholic AIDS Action, Namibia) and Nomvuyo Mhlongo (Co-Founder of Siyanqoba Community Care Centre, South Africa) share their insights and expertise with their peers and the SLF team at a 2016 home-based care roundtable at the SLF office.

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