

WORLD AIDS DAY CALL ON THE NATION TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY



MEC Lydia Johnson lights the main World Aids Day commemoration candle at Ixobho Hall

The 2009 World Aids Day commemorated under the theme "*I am responsible, We are responsible, South Africa is taking responsibility*" was hosted at Ixobho in the Sisonke District area as an intersectoral collaboration venture led by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs MEC Mrs Lydia Johnson.

MEC Johnson kicked-off the day's activities by visiting child-headed households in the uBuhlebezwe Municipality area where she donated food parcels and seedlings in order to assist and encourage them to start food gardens to sustain their own food production. She later visited National Integrated Project (Drop-in-Centre) in eMadungeni area where she also planted a tree.

In her keynote address at Ixobho Town Hall, MEC Johnson, pointed out that the best weapon to fight the scourge of HIV and AIDS is to lead a responsible lifestyle. She advised youth in particular to abstain from sex until they get married or avoid having multiple partners and at least to use a condom if they cannot control their sex appetite. She urged the community to abandon outdated practices such as forcing young girls into marriages and advised young girls to avoid having relationships with elderly men. She further pleaded with everyone to go for a Voluntary Counseling and Testing in order to know their status.

MEC Johnson later led in the candle lighting ritual in honour of HIV and AIDS victims.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CLUBS PAVE THE WAY TO HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Its scenes and acts like these (above) that make the work of Environmental Health Practitioners and Community Health Clubs so valuable as these community members are using the same river for doing their washing and also fetch water for human consumption

Sisonke Health District Environmental Health Services in collaboration with uMzimkhulu Local Municipality and Danish Aid Organisation (DANIDA) have initiated a pilot Community Health Club project in the eMzimkhulu Municipal area.

Community Health Clubs project, managed and supervised by Environmental Health Practitioners Mrs Bulelwa Lukhozi and Mr Eric Mlomo, is aimed at improving the standard of health and hygiene in the community by inviting selected community members to water health and hygiene trainings and they in turn train communities in their respective wards.

Umzimkhulu is one of the most disadvantaged of all areas of South Africa. Levels of water provision by government are very low, with 80% of the community within this project still using unprotected open water sources. In addition, the recent base line survey shows that hygiene and sanitation practices are equally appalling, and health knowledge is negligible, with only 18% of the community having a good knowledge of 6 health topics.

The combination of poor facilities, poor hygiene and poor knowledge is causing high levels of infectious diseases: diarrhoea from unsafe food and water, skin diseases from lack of washing and worm infestations which inhibit child growth and damage levels of achievement at school.

The Community Health Clubs project is already bearing some fruits. The community's response to the project has been very enthusiastic as indicated by the ever growing number of health clubs membership. Other clubs have begun to improve conditions in their communities by engaging in activities such as building water diversion and storage systems, cleaning along the stream they use to fetch water, developing an innovative hand washing station using locally available material.

The local leadership has also taken a keen interest in the project as indicated by recent visits to the Zibambele and Buhlebezwe sites by the eMzimkhulu Mayor, Honourable Cllr Bheki Dzanibe, and his Deputy, Honourable Cllr Nompumelelo Domoyi . There were also other stakeholders from various departments who took part in site visits.

“I AM NOT MY MENTAL ILLNESS I AM A PERSON”

The month of July is, as per the health awareness calendar, dedicated to mental health awareness. *Sisonke Ngempilo* spoke to Mrs Thobile Nzimande, Senior Technical Advisor: Mental Health, to learn more about mental health issues.

Sisonke Ngempilo: What is the mandate of the mental health programme?

Thobile Nzimande: Our mandate is entrenched in our vision which is to achieve mental health status for all persons in the province of KwaZulu-Natal

SN: What are the activities you engage in order to attain your goals?

TN: We render daily mental health services in all facilities in the district. We also engage with other stakeholders in the field of mental health to encourage a participative framework for the development of mental health services. We also have outreach programmes led by a team from eMzimkhulu Psychiatric Hospital that comprises of the psychologist, social worker, medical officer and a registered nurse. We have also integrated mental health into Primary Health Care.

SN: What are the critical issues that people have to know about mental health?

TN: We should all be aware that one in five South Africans is affected by mental disability and disease. Drug abuse and alcohol abuse is the most widespread cause of mental health. On top of that high levels of stress driven by crime, economic uncertainty or inequality, poor living conditions and HIV and AIDS induce and exacerbate mental health problems. Special needs exist among groups such as children, elderly people, women, minorities, and others. Mental health can have a significant impact on the outcome of a number of medical problems. Fortunately effective treatments exist for many mental disorders, and these treatments come in many forms, including medication, psychotherapy, psycho-social services and rehabilitation. Lastly, people should be aware of that people experiencing even the most serious mental disorders can participate in the full range of human endeavor.

SN: What are the programme's major achievements so far?

TN: We have made some great strides in the recent past like the integration of mental health into PHC.



Mrs Thobile Nzimande Senior Technical Advisor: Mental Health and Substance Abuse

We also have a specialized psychiatric hospital, uMzimkhulu, that offers a full spectrum of psychiatric services in Sisonke District and they also have a team that offers outreach services. All our district hospitals are providing full 72 hour assessment service in accordance with the Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002. We have developed a Mental Health Information System. We have also recently held a very successful stress management training for the uBuhlebezwe sub-district nursing and forensic staff.

SN: What are your plans going forward?

TN: We have set ourselves targets for 2009/2010 starting with training on mental health integration into PHC during the course of the month of October. We aim to identify community members who have passion to provide placement for homeless mental health care users so as to be assessed and be given licenses by the Department of Health. This would sustain the Chola Chola campaign we held recently to reduce the number of mentally challenged clients roaming around. We will also continue with our home visits to identify relatives or families of our clients.

SN: Thanks Mrs Nzimande



MEC Lydia Johnson donates food to a child-headed household and admires the produce of local agricultural cooperatives



Khanya Africa volunteers hand out blankets to needy children (above left) and registering clients during the recent outreaches at uBuhlebezwe Sub-District



Sisonke Health District and Ingwe Local Municipality Environmental Health teams organized community members and schoolchildren to participate in the clean-up campaign in Bulwer town.

SISONKE CROWNED AS 2009 NETBALL CHAMPIONS



The triumphant Sisonke District Office Team (above) posing for the picture after the demolishing job they meted out during the Old Mutual Interdepartmental games recently held at Ixobho Sportsgrounds.

Our girls surprised all and sundry as they swept away everyone on their way to lifting the coveted trophy albeit was their inaugural participation in this tournament.

HALALA MANTOMBAZANE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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