

Happy New Year Newsletter, January 2007

Dear Friends,

The New Year fills us all at [Thusananga](#) with hope and enthusiasm. 2006 was a difficult year financially for Thusananga as one of our leading supporters, the Rural Health Initiative, had to pull out through lack of funds and we have had to make some difficult decisions in the last few months. We have to thank our friends and family, private & church funders, for their continued and dedicated support which has allowed us to keep our heads just above water. We are planning to employ a professional fundraiser for both Thusananga & Khaya Lokukhanya for 2007 which will hopefully boost the coffers! As ever, donations are always welcome!

The New Year brings lots of good news though:

- Thusananga has joined forces with The [Desmond Tutu HIV Centre](#) (Cape Town) & will be coordinating it's very successful "HEP", "HIV Education Programme" in Barkly East. Seven individuals have been selected to undergo a six-month training programme about all aspects of HIV & Antiretroviral (ARV) drug therapy. These include 3 nurses, 2 HIV+ clients, a lay HIV/ARV counsellor & a church member. The programme involves an exam at the beginning of the training, six monthly modules, with an exam after each module, and a final exam at the end of all the modules.
- Thusananga continues to manage clients taking ARV drugs, the majority of whom receive them through the Department of Health ARV rollout programme, which is based in Sterkspruit (2 hours away). For many of our clients, those who are too sick to travel, or those whose immune systems (CD4 white blood cell count), are still too high to allow them access to the state programme, we provide drugs through the Treatment Action Campaign Treatment Project. These cheap generic drugs are made in India and we are allowed to use them through hard fought for legislation, known as Section 21. The TAC has championed the human rights of HIV+ people all over the world, and we are very proud to be associated with them.
- The local hospital in Barkly East, has recently been accredited as a government ARV site, but has been beset by numerous management and staffing problems, including the loss of our pharmacist. We hope to become much more involved with the site over the next few months and Thusananga has already undertaken training of nursing and lay staff there. The feeling on the ground amongst doctors, nurses and patients all over rural South Africa, is that there is still an overwhelming lack of political will to get to grips with the HIV and TB epidemic that is decimating our country. Much still depends on the energy and enthusiasm of health workers at grassroots level, and this is often ignored by politicians.

- We continue to care for over 60 clients and their families, with 20 on ARV drugs. Ten of these are children. The use of ARV drugs is providing us with real hope but we cannot ignore the failure of current campaigns to prevent the spread of HIV. Around 530 000 new HIV infections occurred in South Africa in 2006, 1400 a day. South Africa's population has grown to approximately 48 million people, and 11% of the population is infected, 19% of the working age population (ages 20-64) is HIV+. One and a half million children under the age of 18 have been orphaned, 66% of these as a direct result of HIV/AIDS. Life expectancy has fallen from 63 in 1990 to 51 in 2006, (49 here in the Eastern Cape). There is much work to be done but with special attention to educating children & teenagers on how to stay HIV negative and healthy.

- Thusananga's Income Generation project (beadwork) and HIV+ support group, Sibanye, has had quite a successful year. Only a handful of clients have taken part in the beadwork, less than expected, but their work has been sold at home and overseas in the UK and USA. The client vegetable garden is a green oasis amid the dust and wind of the township. Most of the vegetables will be consumed by clients, but some will be sold by them for profit. The garden is also a great place to visit for some green peace and quiet after a hot day in the clinic!

Thusananga must thank the nursing staff at Sonwaba Zandile Primary Health Clinic, in Barkly East, for their continued cooperation in allowing us to work and dispense from there. We would be lost without this support. If you would like any further information about Thusananga, visit our website, www.thusananga.org or drop me a line at jsepton@eci.co.za.

News on our project for vulnerable children and orphans - Khaya Lokukhanya, to follow.

Cheers & best wishes for a healthy, happy & peaceful 2007!

Clare