

#1 - History and Background

African AIDS Foundation

History

African AIDS Foundation (AAF) seeks to serve marginalised people on the African continent affected by HIV/AIDS. AAF is motivated by its understanding of the life and works of Jesus, and the call on Christians to act in the world for justice.

Beginnings

AAF had its beginnings in the late 1990's as the vision of Dr John Schwarz, an Australian General Practitioner.

Together with his wife Rosalie and their 5 children, John lived in South Africa between 1975 and 1984. John was the Medical Superintendent of Emmaus Mission Hospital (then a Lutheran and now a Government run hospital) amongst the Zulu people of KwaZulu Natal Province. His medical work and their experiences with the Zulus gave John and Rosalie invaluable insights into cross cultural cooperation and the challenges of community development.

John and Rosalie returned to Australia in 1984. However, they maintained contact with friends in South Africa and through them heard of the emergence of AIDS. Information about the problem was scant in Australia. In late 1999 John and Rosalie revisited South Africa expressly to investigate the effects of AIDS and to determine what they could do in response.

The AIDS Crisis

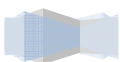
John and Rosalie witnessed the pain and enormous disruption AIDS was inflicting on communities. Interviewing and videoing friends, health and community workers, and victims of the disease and their carers, clarified and reinforced the Schwarz's desire to assist.

What they observed, and what has become even more apparent over the last few years, is a catastrophe the like of which has rarely been seen. Millions of Africans are dying from AIDS each year. Many more are being infected. Of the millions of people suffering HIV/AIDS infections around the world, Sub-Saharan Africa is the most heavily affected, accounting for in the vicinity of 70% of all people living with HIV and the related deaths from AIDS. Entire communities are feeling the impact of the loss of their strongest and most productive members.

More than 13 million African children under the age of 16 have been abandoned or orphaned because of the AIDS crisis. They are often left to survive as best they can in child-headed households. In some cases children find their way to orphanages and cluster homes. With limited access to schooling, good role models, and basic needs such as shelter, food, water and medicine, the life options for these children are restricted.

As well as seeing these problems, the trip in 1999 by John and Rosalie also gave them the privilege of visiting a number of places seeking to make a difference. They were introduced to Heather Reynolds and the work at God's Golden Acre (GGA), situated at Cato Ridge, between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Together with a group of volunteers, Heather was supporting 35 children who had been orphaned because of AIDS. GGA was helping a further 280 children living within extended families in the nearby communities. (Over the years these numbers have grown quite significantly at the orphanage and also those that they support in their community).

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The Response

John and Rosalie Schwarz returned to Australia determined to provide support to those they had met. That support would involve letting people in their own community of Camden, and beyond, know of the plight of so many in Southern Africa.

As John and Rosalie began speaking at meetings many people responded with gifts. They quickly realised an organisation would be needed to properly manage these donations. With a group of committed friends and colleagues they got together to plan a response. The result was the formation of the African AIDS Foundation on 7 February 2001, a registered not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee.

From these beginnings African AIDS Foundation now supports a number of organisations in South Africa and Kenya. Current projects include Philakahle, Zamimpilo, Tabitha Ministries and God's Golden Acre.

These organisations are involved in comprehensive responses to the needs of communities devastated by HIV/AIDS. Strategies include education and support for families with responsibilities for orphaned and abandoned children through the ARV Program (Anti-Retroviral drug roll-out and support program), vocational training, development of micro enterprises, training and support of home based carers, market garden projects, equipping of leaders in community development, and life skills training and development for youth.

AAF is privileged to be partnering this group of organisations with diverse programs and strategies, which are assisting children, communities and villages infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

