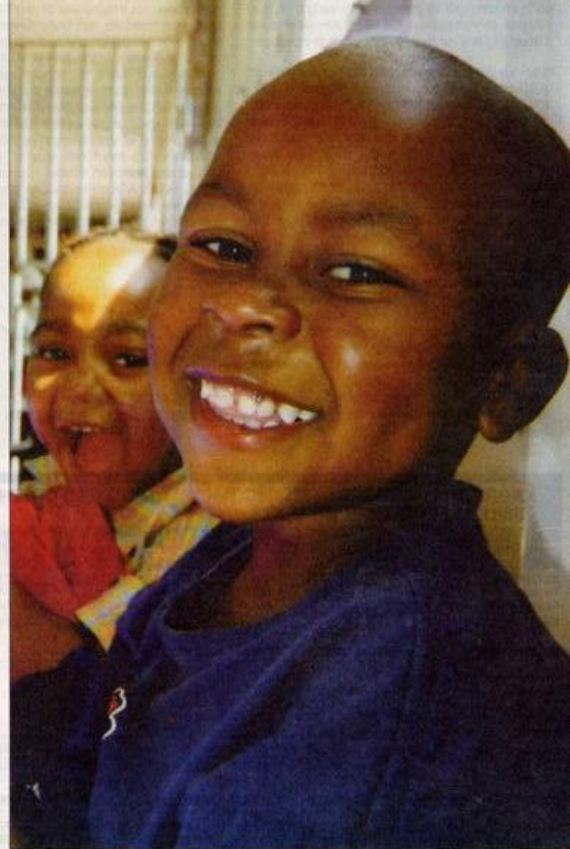


Catalysts of transformation



Community volunteers for the MaAfrika Tikkun project grow vegetables for orphans and vulnerable children in the Donsloot area.

Winner – Most Innovative Award

MaAfrika Tikkun

Lynley Donnelly

AS HIV/Aids takes its toll on South Africa, it leaves a trail of destruction in its wake. Children are growing up without parents, people are too sick to provide for their families and everyone is left traumatised by the mark it leaves on their loved ones.

Enter MaAfrika Tikkun, an organisation that aims to alleviate poverty and assists people struggling with HIV/Aids, particularly orphans and vulnerable children. The organisation believes in tackling the impact of HIV/Aids and poverty in a comprehensive, bottom-up approach. The work sees care-giving volunteers, selected from within the community, assigned to five vulnerable children in their vicinity.

"We are catalysts for transformation," says Saira Khan, director of development and marketing for MaAfrika Tikkun.

After winning the Investing in Life Award for the best not-for-profit organisation last year, MaAfrika Tikkun has come out tops in this year's most innovative category. Khan says challenges surrounding HIV/Aids and poverty are dealt with in a multi-dimensional approach, which impressed the awards judges.

"Our belief is that we can't go in there with just one solution. We need to look at a collective solution that's going to benefit the community and lead to their overall upliftment," says Khan.

The judges noted that "MaAfrika Tikkun delivered a comprehensive service", as well as covering "nearly every area in Aids that needed to be touched". They were impressed with the "holistic approach to child vulnerabilities, its inclusion of women abuse and, above all, the comprehensive and wide-ranging nature of its programme".

Khan believes that the key to the organisation's success is the inclusion of community members in bringing about transformation in their own environment.

MaAfrika Tikkun empowers the communities it works in, by acting as a guide in bringing about change. It makes sure that the communities themselves take ownership of the work they do. Volunteers are then trained by MaAfrika Tikkun to offer guidance, care and are assisted in providing nourishment to the five children placed within their care.

Investing in the Future

Training not only encompasses health issues surrounding HIV/Aids but also a number of practical interventions that can assist child-headed households. Children are taught how to access government funding, how to budget their income and why it is important to budget.

Part of MaAfrika Tikkun's philosophy includes approaching community-based organisations already working within the targeted area, and networking with other NGOs, ensuring that progress already being made is enhanced and extended by what MaAfrika Tikkun can offer.

"We see ourselves as partnering with other NGOs, other CBOs, and we've done that successfully in Orange Farm and here in Diepsloot, where we're replicating [the project model]," explains Khan.

MaAfrika Tikkun has partnered with seven other organisations to form the Tjhebelo Pele forum in

Orange Farm. Each organisation performs a special "core" function according to its individual mandate, whether it is palliative care or counselling for abused women.

A similar system, forming the "Wings of Life" Community Partnership, has been set up in Diepsloot with other NGOs. Khan says because MaAfrika Tikkun has a community-driven model, the organisation has introduced experiential learning, where the community of Diepsloot community are taken to Orange Farm.

"They learn from another community who has the same problems, who go about managing them," she says.

Caregivers entering the project don't just offer life-skills training, counselling and care to the needy. They also act as a crucial source for data capturing. After basics, such as nutrition, are seen to, caregivers go about looking at the other needs of a community.

"This is done very personally, on a house-to-house basis, where we train caregivers to go out and get the information that we need," says Khan.

"When that information comes through, we've got a global picture of exactly what's going on in Diepsloot, and then we've also got very specific pictures of each household and what the interventions need to be."

Khan points out that caregivers do have to be literate. But if caregivers are identified as showing promise, MaAfrika Tikkun will provide them with the literacy and numeracy training to continue their work.

The programme currently employs 268 community volunteers, providing them with a monthly stipend and monthly food parcel to take home to their own families. There are 1 400 children under care.

Sustainability is a key driving force behind MaAfrika Tikkun's projects. Khan would like to see the commu-

nities getting to a level where they can manage themselves and so allow the organisation to move on to serve more communities.

She admits that a programme caring for children isn't necessarily sustainable in the immediate future – any child entering the project early on will have to be cared for until he or she is old enough to be self-sufficient.

"If a child is two years old when [he or she] comes into the programme, we've got to sustain that child all the way through to matric. But there is no reason why we can't develop that child's skills," argues Khan.

She would like to see increased input for MaAfrika Tikkun from government, as it is the perfect candidate for a public-private partnership. She argues that with MaAfrika Tikkun's 12-year record of success, it is perfectly positioned to see that aid reaches people at grassroots levels.