



# A BUDDY FOR LIFE- HOW PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT CAN IMPROVE ARV ADHERENCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

# ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

- ▶ MMPZ is a private voluntary organisation set up to respond to the various challenges faced by children and young people living with HIV who most often are stigmatised, abused and discriminated against, at home, at schools and in the community in general. Using a four pronged approach that touches on the **individual, the family** as the first line of support, the **schools, clinics and churches** as service providers and **leadership** as enablers of enforcement of policies.
- ▶ The project uses, Experiential learning, Solution focussed approaches and Memory work (the Hero book in particular) to help children and youths living with HIV to find spaces (both physical and psychological) where they can express themselves and deal with the challenges that they face.
- ▶ The program is situated in Bulawayo , the second largest city in Zimbabwe.

# Peer led interventions

- ▶ Million Memory Project Zimbabwe is a youth driven organisation that believes in the power of leading from behind and allowing the young people to take the lead.
- ▶ The organisation uses peer-to-peer approaches to help improve ARV adherence amongst young people.
- ▶ The organisation has a group of 16 young volunteers between the ages of 18 and 24 who are known as Development facilitators.
- ▶ The Development facilitators are in charge (with the support of the officer) of designing, implementing and reporting on their activities.

# The Buddy System

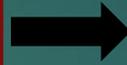
- ▶ The Buddy system is an everyday assistance offered by the Youth facilitators to other young people newly diagnosed with HIV, those who might be facing difficulties in adhering to their medication, and those who might be finding it difficult to fully accept their HIV status.
- ▶ A Buddy is a strongly empowered and highly equipped (with both skills and knowledge) young volunteer who is paired with someone newly initiated on ART to offer support in terms of their treatment, possible side effects, what to expect and just offer a helping hand through out the whole process.
- ▶ Usually the newly initiated individual is paired with a Buddy for the first 6 months as this is a critical and delicate stage.
- ▶ A buddy is also paired with a young person who would have defaulted on medication due to adversities faced at home or within the community. (The pairing happens after a youth-led defaulter tracing exercise is conducted)
- ▶ The buddy systems allows young people living with HIV not to feel like they are all alone in the world.

# FLOW CHART

Young person is tested positive



Young person is initiated on ART



Counselling and support (by a treatment partner)



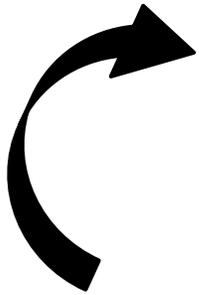
Young person is monitored during reviews and linked to a support group



Young person is retained through constant monitoring- home visits, counselling, calls, chats etc



Young person is returned to the system, and paired with a Buddy



Young person found and counselled



Defaulter Tracing (youth-led)



In the event of the young person being lost to follow-up or defaulting



Young person is paired with support Buddy within the support group for the first 6 months



Not found



# HOW THE BUDDY SYSTEM IMPROVES ADHERENCE AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

- ▶ The peer to peer approach allows young people to share lived experiences, challenges and also assist each other to come up with solutions together.
- ▶ The system creates a platform for two young people to assist each other in discovering and building on their strengths as friends and also as individuals so that when the young person faces adversities they can in the future be able to address and face them without defaulting on their treatment. The system teaches them that they have resources within them that they can use to solve issues.
- ▶ The youth facilitators dedicate their time to ensure that they remind the young person to take their medication by calling, texting or sending an emoji on a daily bases 30 minutes and 10 minutes before the actual time and also on the actual time the person is meant to take their medication

# Cont...

- ▶ Regular home visits are conducted where the Buddys get to interact not only with the young person but also with the caregivers and the rest of the family. This allows the buddy to also find out if family can confirm that the treatment was taken consistently and correctly.
- ▶ The home visits also allow buddies to have a clearer picture of the community and home environment (which usually strongly affect the adherence of young people) assessing the availability or lack of support systems, the possibility of stigma and discrimination, and level of knowledge that the rest of the family might have on HIV, ART and possible side effects.
- ▶ The Buddies also make it a point that they accompany the clients to their review appointments at the clinic, ensure that scheduled blood tests are done on time, and also track viral loads to check on improvements.
- ▶ The Buddys also conduct SRHR sessions emphasizing on protected sex to prevent cases of re-infection and discussing emerging and topical issues in youth sexual reproductive health circles .
- ▶ During the Buddy sessions, the young person is gradually inducted into a support group (Active Citizen Clubs) where they will eventually get to support other peers as well.

# CARING FOR THE CARER

- ▶ The Buddy system has proved to be a very effective system in improving adherence however an effective framework and measures to support the youth facilitators themselves to avoid burn out and compassion fatigue are crucial.
- ▶ MMPZ has mechanisms in place to detect and respond to burn out and fatigue among the buddies . Activities include :
  - I. Debriefing sessions outside the work environments.
  - II. Counselling sessions
  - III. Holidays and Occasional Breaks
  - IV. Trips and travels

# Conclusion

- ▶ The approach underlines the importance of seeing young people not merely as passive consumers of interventions but as active actors of change.
- ▶ Conclusively, the buddy system highlights how young people are experts of their situation, and how they have it within themselves to find solutions to the challenges that they face- all they need is a peer to help them identify the strengths they might not know they have. All that is needed is a conducive environment for them to explore.
- ▶ Since the introduction of the Buddy system, viral loads and treatment failures amongst young people living with HIV have improved.