

GROOTS Mathare



Mathare is the second largest slum in Nairobi. The area is overpopulated and the people living there are generally impoverished and have poor housing, sanitation and limited access to clean water. The majority of people support themselves by running small roadside businesses, selling second-hand clothes, food or sundries. Other laborers do casual day work either inside Mathare or elsewhere in Nairobi.

GROOTS Mathare is a network of

26 women's self-help groups within the Mathare slums. It was formed in 1996 after the formation of GROOTS Kenya. GROOTS Mathare has a main office in Mathare, which also serves as their Mother/Day Care Center. The group collaborates with a number of community-based organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, health institutions, youth groups, schools and churches in empowering and improving the lives of those living in Mathare.

Over 100 members of GROOTS Mathare have been trained in home-based care through the GROOTS Kenya trainers of trainers program, some of whom provide home based care for twenty people. Because those living in Mathare have relatively greater access to government and NGO-run resources such as hospitals and clinics, home-based care workers in GROOTS Mathare are more involved in activities such as transporting patients to hospitals and delivering medicines from clinics and food from feeding programs than are



their rural counterparts. GROOTS Mathare has built a variety of strong networks with local hospitals, NGOs, government and educational institutions.

Home-based care workers here see emotional and spiritual support for the HIV positive as one of their most important jobs. One woman they care for is Liz. She has lost both her husband and her three young children to AIDS. She also has found herself unable to work due to the illness. When she becomes very sick, Liz is almost entirely dependent upon her home-based caregiver, with whom she has developed a very close relationship. Since this caregiver has begun visiting regularly, Liz reports that she is feeling better. She is now able to travel to the local well to get water and her mental health has also improved. She attributes her high spirits to her caregiver. Economic empowerment for women is another focus for GROOTS Mathare. To this end, the group has begun a number of in-

come-generating activities for its members, including making and selling charred briquettes and a tie and dye project. In order to assist orphans in supporting themselves, several members of GROOTS Mathare have also begun an orphan knitting program, in which primarily adolescent girls are taught to make, market and sell



sweaters. GROOTS Mathare also conducts a merry-go-round for sharing resources, and has recently begun a micro-loaning project to assist members in getting small businesses off the ground.

GROOTS Mathare has a large influence in their community and its members have involved themselves in many aspects of life there. One of their greatest accomplishments has been in partnering with youth groups, who often take the lead in AIDS education, stigma-reduction and awareness-raising. Y-SAFE (Youths in Slums Aiming for Excellence) is one group that has been particularly successful. It was founded by a young member of GROOTS Mathare, Gordon, whose aim was to fill the gap in knowledge

and awareness about HIV/AIDS in local youth. The fifteen members of YSAFE use poems, skits and songs to create awareness about AIDS. They travel to schools, churches and other youth groups within and outside of Mathare. The group is encouraged by the positive responses they receive, and see the importance of creating a space that allows for free and open peer exchange; such exchanges may not always occur with adults such as parents or teachers. The members of YSAFE have seen positive changes in themselves as well as the youths they target, and feel encouraged by this to continue spreading their message.



A Y-SAFE Performance in Mathare