

Bringing hope to communities

ABB South Africa is responding to the HIV/AIDS crisis by supporting Noah, a not-for-profit organisation that runs a programme to care for 28 000 orphans of HIV/AIDS. Chesney Bradshaw reports on the impact this partnership is making in communities.

Thirteen-year-old Thokozani from a township in Gauteng writes: "The past two years were difficult for me. I lost my mother, she got sick for a few months in 2004 and then she passed away. I was left alone with my sister. When my mother died I was so desperate. I was angry with everything and everyone. My sister had nothing to make for supper. When Noah came into my life I can say that that is where life began. They have exciting programmes, soccer and computers. Now there is no reason for me to bunk school ... not ever!"

There are many other personal testimonials that can be found on the Noah (Nurturing Orphans of HIV/AIDS) website above the difference that Noah can make at a deep emotional level.

Noah, a registered not-for-profit organisation, was established in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country and is actively supported by ABB South Africa.

The focus is on building the capacity of communities to care for their orphaned and

vulnerable children. The first Noah Ark was started by Dr Gregory Ait in 2000 in KwaZulu-Natal, and the numbers have grown rapidly to the current 107 Arks (73 in KwaZulu-Natal and 34 in Gauteng). The organisation cares for more than 28 000 children with a target budget of R5-million in 2006.

For ABB, sustainability means seeking a balance between economic development, environmental stewardship and social programs. Sustainability is built into different aspects of the business, including the manufacturing of energy-saving products, systems and solutions, and the sharing of technology throughout the group, particularly with developing countries.

ABB South Africa's sustainability programme supports a range of social development projects that reach out and touch the lives of the needy and most vulnerable in communities. ABB's corporate social investment programme supports technical skills development, care for orphans of HIV/AIDS, and environmental awareness and energy efficiency.

To support efforts to care for orphans of HIV/AIDS, ABB has partnered with not-for-profit and community-based organisations such as Noah and Sunfish Goodhearts Foundation.

ABB supports about 1 000 children orphaned by HIV/AIDS through these two organisations. Employees also volunteer their time to assist with ABB-supported HIV/AIDS projects.

Noah reports that by 2006 the AIDS pandemic will be the most significant factor to have shaped humanity in this century.

South Africa is one of the most severely affected countries in the world, with more than five million people infected with HIV/AIDS in 2005. Parents are dying before their children reach adulthood, dramatically increasing the number of orphans in society. The Actonville Society of South Africa estimates that there are currently 1.9 million orphans in the country. The number is predicted to rise to more than 2.5 million by 2015 (in a population of 50 million), creating a humanitarian challenge on a scale no nation has ever faced.

When Noah was formed in 2000, the sheer number of orphans ruled out traditional charitable or institutional models of care. Noah's model is designed to reinforce the communities that are already caring for the orphaned children in their midst.

Noah's model starts with an approach by a community to Noah for assistance in caring for orphaned and vulnerable children. Noah goes to work mobilising the entire community by forming a committee of community leaders. These leaders are trained in the needs of children and in the recruiting of a volunteer group. This group then finds and registers orphans in the community, and helps them obtain birth certificates and apply for child support grants. Volunteers continually check up on the circumstances of the children.



The Noah Ark in Katsheing cares for 85 orphans at its base in Mosaleki Section.



Children at a Noah Ark near Richards Bay that is supported by ABB South Africa.

and refer them to appropriate agencies. Home visits, food gardens, feeding schemes, therapy care and after care are all part of the programme.

This web of community support is known as an Ark. Arks are supported by an Ark manager from the community and an Ark builder, who is a Noah head office employee. The Ark manager makes operational decisions on a daily basis and the Ark builder helps with problem solving and the organising of events.

By providing the volunteers with skills, the community is empowered to take care of its children.

ABB South Africa supports four Arks – two in Gerteng, at Katsibong and Ivory Park 1, and two in EwaZobe-Natal, at Nombuyiselo and Umhombini.

Katsibong Noah Ark, which cares for 45 orphans, is based at Mswakeli Section, near a clinic in the middle of the township – which is infamous for the many lives lost in political rioting towards the end of the apartheid era.

The Ivory Park 1 Ark, catering for 150 orphans, is in the township's section 3, ward 77 – and area made up of both formal and informal housing. The nearest town is Midrand.

Nombuyiselo Ark, which supports 130 children, is situated 45 minutes from Richards Bay and two hours from Durban at Katsibong section in Fort Dundas. The local population numbers around 6 000 and there is an unemployment rate of 60%. Many of the people survive on child support and pension grants.

The Umhombini kaNoah Ark, supporting 240 orphans, is in the rural area of Kibaphela, near EwaZobe township, about 40km from Durban. The headquarters is at EwaZobe Primary School. The population of the area is about 200 000, with a high proportion of orphans. It is estimated that 50% of the orphans live with grandparents, 40% without any relatives and the remaining 10% with other relatives.

ABB's contribution to Noah was recently recognised in a report by the organisation, in which the company was thanked for its support over the past three years. "Your support is invaluable and we appreciate the great work that has come out of this partnership," said Joelyn Walker, fund raiser, EwaZobe-Natal, Noah. "The Arks are able to operate more effectively and deliver numerous services to the children."

For ABB South Africa, Noah provides it with an opportunity to make a difference in communities

where the company has operations. Members of ABB's Sustainability team, who are responsible for corporate social investment, have become personally involved in the programme, visiting Arks on field trips throughout the year to speak to Noah staff, volunteers, educators and community members. They have been heartened to experience first hand the work that Noah is doing to alleviate the plight of the children.

A Noah volunteer in a Gerteng township reinforces the difference Noah is making in communities. "Their life faces and soulful eyes haunt me, but today I woke up to a brand, bright new day. A blessing has fallen in our grounds and camped round us. A big thanks to the Noah family. You have brought change in our communities."

Caring for communities is important as ABB develops a better appreciation for people and a deeper understanding of its stakeholders. The company recognises that for corporate social investment to be effective, and to make an ongoing difference to the lives of underprivileged people and the economic well-being of the country, it needs to be well-managed and underpinned by the driving principle of sustainability. ABB's collaborative partnership with Noah is important in integrating social investment throughout ABB's business.