

Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative Newsletter



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Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative is delighted to share with you our quarterly newsletter that gives you a glimpse of the positive change achieved thus far through our engagements and programs. Have a look at some of the highlights of our second quarter.

Self-testing: an alternative fast way to know your HIV status during COVID-19

By Esther Opade, Locum Communications & Public Relations

Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative (ROM) serves the community by providing self-test kits known as Oraquick HIV self-test.

Self-testing aims at increasing HIV testing rates especially for the Key Population and Priority Population, clients whose partners have not tested, men with poor health seeking behaviours, those busy due to the nature of their work and the hard to reach population groups.

Florence Awor the Counselling Supervisor, narrates that with the problems of non-disclosure of HIV status to partners and stigma, some clients fear taking the kits. This has changed since the COVID-19 lockdown, the number of people picking the kits has greatly increased," she adds.

Even though the number of patients receiving the kits is increasing, there is slow and sometimes no feedback from the clients which is the biggest challenge. "The feedback I received came a month after yet ideally it should take only two days, other patients don't communicate. When we reach out to some of them their phones are usually off," she added. With persistent follow ups, we have received feedback some with positive status.

ROM puts a smile on clients faces.

By: Sarah Nassolo, Social Worker

With support from Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF), ROM put smiles on the faces of families under our support. These included families of 107 vulnerable children and 15 grandmothers. "It has been quite difficult to feed the families ever since the COVID -19 lockdown was announced," mentioned some parents to the vulnerable children as they received the food on Friday, 12 June 2020.

"Am so happy to receive this food because yesterday I collapsed, I have a three-year-old living with HIV. I served her the food that was left in the house since she needed it and I only took a cup of warm water because I had to swallow my medication," says Nafuna Aisha after receiving the food.



Florence demonstrating to clients how to use the Oraquick HIV self-test.



Sarah Nassolo (Right) addressing some of the clients as they receive food.

Namukwaya Rose, an elder woman has no option but to do all kinds of work to support the grandchildren in her care including Charity a 12-year-old born with HIV. "Digging other people's compounds and washing clothes is what I do on a daily basis," she says.

Ejonu Evelyn 16 years old, born with HIV stays with her sick mother and two younger brothers says, "it has not been an easy situation especially during COVID-19. For them to have food on the table for a day, her mother has to move long distances looking for banana peels so that she sells them to people with cows to get money to feed her three children. If my mother manages to get one sack of the peels, she is paid One Thousand Five Hundred shillings only.

ROSES of Mbuya contributes in the fight against COVID- 19.

By: Michael Buwembo

With guidance from Ministry of Health and the presidential directives on COVID-19, Roses of Mbuya continues to participate in the struggle against the global pandemic through production of masks.

Roses of Mbuya has collaborated with the community to minimize the effects of the lockdown as a result of COVID -19 with opportunity given to young women to work and earn some money.

Currently the workshop has secured four contracts for reusable masks production, from Reach Out Mbuya HIV/AIDS Initiative, Population Services International (PSI), Sustainable Outcomes for Children and Youth (SOCY) and Program for Accessible Health, Communication and Education (PACE).



Mubikira making re-useable face masks from ROSES of Mbuya workshop in Banda

A ROSES STAFF SHARES HER EXPERIENCE:

"I am proud to be among the young women involved in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 through making masks. The experience has made me realize the importance of accuracy in whatever I do. I see myself as an important person contributing to save lives of others.

In a day, I am able to make one hundred pieces. When COVID-19 ends I will continue making them because people will continue to wear them. **Brivian Mubikira, ROM OVC beneficiary**



ROSES beneficiaries at work.

Accelerating HIV Control in Mubende Region

By: Alex Mugenyi, Project Coordinator

In conjunction with Mildmay Uganda with support from Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ROM is implementing the HIV impact health interventions for improving service delivery to Key Populations (KP) targeted to HIV prevention, care and treatment services in Mubende and Kassanda Districts.

Reach Out Mbuya Parish HIV/AIDS Initiative uses approaches such as ; Home Testing Services (HTS), Behavioral Change Communication messaging and video behavioral risk reduction counselling, networking and partnership with key stake holders, KP referrals, phone calls, internet and cyber services such as social media platforms for example WhatsApp, zoom, Google meet and Microsoft teams to deliver services to the Key populations (KP) in Mubende and Kassanda Districts.

About 893 KPs received combination prevention services with 78% female sex workers (FSWs). The KPs served expressed gratitude to the ROM's holistic community model of service offered to them during COVID- 19.

In Uganda, HIV prevalence among Key population is estimated to be 35% among FSWs. According to Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC) records of 2016, FSWs clients' accounts for 18% higher than the mainstream population national estimated at 6% according to Uganda Population-based HIV Impact Assessment 2017 (UPHIA). Many KPs especially sex workers do not access HIV/TB services because their occupation is stigmatized by society and the practice is criminalized by our legal system.



Going an extra mile to serving our clients during COVID-19

By Hilda Achayo community and social support manager

COVID-19 came unexpectedly sending shocks to our systems and testing our preparedness in responding to emergencies. As an organization we immediately came up with a response plan which we are still implementing to date.

Community activities that needed meetings were all affected by the lockdown and presidential directives that followed. The lockdown however triggered the staff to think more innovatively and work smart thus introducing new ways of working in the “New Normal” working environment.

Teams are able to hold virtual staff meetings, work remotely which turned out to be more productive. This worked for a few staff members and others had challenges like how to balance work and family attention in the home working space. Amidst these challenges, we became more accountable to each other and bonding among staff was enhanced through the joint travels to office.

Given that ROM is an indispensable service provider, our biggest desire was to serve our clients fully with HIV medication and other services. ROM has reached over 90% of our clients with medication and basic services and this was attributed to the following which are good lessons to learn for other actors in the same service delivery sector.

ROM’s well-grounded community structures with community health workers based in their catchment area eased mobilization and follow up of the clients for refills. The proximity of clients to the health centers equally enabled them to walk to the facility to get their refills.

A committed team of staff ensured that they went an extra mile to get medication reach clients especially those who were unable to visit the facility. They rode their bicycles, hired motorcycles and utilized the project motorcycles to voluntarily reach the clients. These teams remain heroes in our communities and will forever be remembered. Owing to the reduced number of staff at the facility at the early stages of the pandemic, there was a lot of multi-tasking and this came in handy without coercion. Everybody played a role from the cleaner, office messenger to the top.

Prior to the lockdown we were cognizant of the early warning signs and we started giving longer refills to our clients. Three months as opposed to two months and this practice is still ongoing. However, we keep in touch with our clients to follow up their adherence to medication and maintain the relationship in care.

Up scaling our depreciated drug distribution models, Community drug distribution became handy and a number of eligible clients were transferred under these models. Expert clients were equally handy in distribution of the drugs to the clients. These models will continue to be upheld to reduce the number of clients in our facilities.

ROM liaised with the government and other health facilities to serve our clients who were out of the catchment area and other districts. We equally offered services to non-ROM clients and space for other service providers to serve their clients.

Intensive adherence counselling continued on the phones and our clients received the psychosocial support they needed. ROM continued engaging our young people through virtual meeting and imparting short term skills in group of fives as they attended clinics.

Through these various channels we have drawn lessons from the pandemic and have renewed energy to serve our communities. ROM is determined to offer holistic services to the community.

Hard work paid off for Tamale.

“I worked as a sweeper, cleaner, driver and washed people’s clothes for a living before I got a management job,” says Tamale Joseph an Account Manager at Development Companion International and an entrepreneur.

Tamale is one of the many young people who have gone through the care of ROM under Music Dance and Drama.

“ROM supported me from the time I was in Primary Four to the time I graduated from university where I studied Catering and Hotel Management. Even with a good job, I still find time to offer catering services at parties and barbeques when contracted. I love cooking it is my passion. I discovered this when the CATTs would talk to us about building your career. Some of my friends connect this kind of work to a lady’s thing but it is something I can do every day.”

Blessed with such entrepreneurial skills, the 27-year-old is set to soon open up a restaurant in the busiest town of Najeera. He said that his restaurant will only specialize in preparing fast foods since there is more demand for such foods than local foods in the area.

With all these achievements, Tamale remains a young strong man working hard to make sure that he improves his life as well as that of the other youths around him. He praises those that have helped him to achieve his goals as he is living a happier life.

“I encourage the youth never to give up on their dreams because it’s from striving to achieve your dreams that success comes,” he adds.

With the mindset that Tamale has, he believes that in five years he will be owning his own five-star hotel. He believes in himself and knows that hard work pays greatly. “I encourage young people/ youths to be hardworking and also stick to what is right”.

“I would love to thank everyone at ROM, they placed me here. If I meet people out there and talk about ROM, they say they know the organization and it makes me proud.

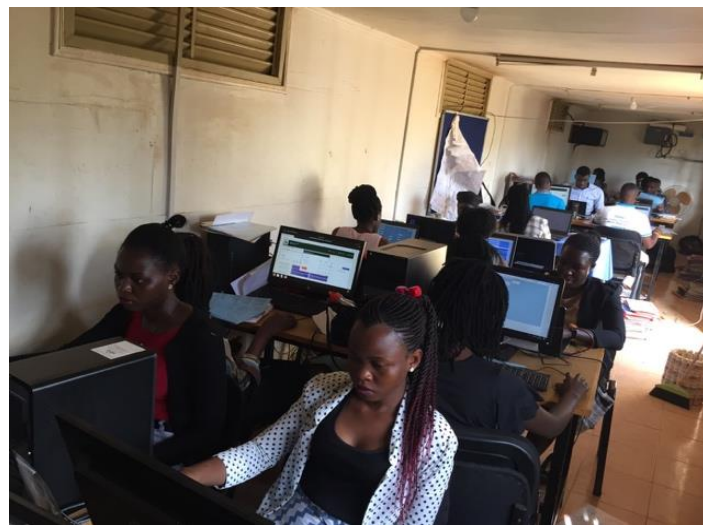


By Ayella Patrickson, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer ROM

With the emerging of COVID-19, data has become a basic need like food or medicine. Data is needed to benchmark and measure progress. Data also enables organizations to evaluate alternatives and make informed choices. Organizations must have reliable and timely data upon which to make required decisions.

Quality data management systems will always result in increased productivity for the users because the end users are empowered to make quick and informed decisions this has contributed to our success especially in-patient care and service delivery. In ROM we are able to capture real time data and monitor clients in care. ROM has registered an increase from 7096 patients from January-March 2020 to 7208 patients from April-June 2020 quarter of which 65% are female and 35% are male in both quarters. All this is attributed to the user-friendly data system in place.

The same data is used to conduct research studies such as demographic and health surveys on grandmothers, Orphans and Vulnerable Children, HIV care services, Maternity and Child Health, immunization and child growth that has really improved our service delivery.



Data entrants entering data in the OpenMRS at ROM.

