BEYOND TREATMENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN ACHIEVING VIRAL SUPPRESSION

Providing psychosocial support to adolescents living with HIV is essential.  

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

WHAT IS VIRAL SUPPRESSION?
Strong adherence to antiretroviral therapy suppresses the virus to undetectable levels within people living with HIV, helping to reduce likelihood of death, and greatly reducing the risk of transmitting the virus to others. When large proportions of people living with HIV within a community are on treatment, it has been shown to have a preventive effect within that community.  

UNAIDS, 2016

WHAT IS PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT?
Psychosocial support addresses the ongoing psychological and social problems of HIV infected individuals, their partners, families and caregivers. HIV infection can often result in stigma and fear for those living with the infection, as well as for those caring for them, and may affect the entire family. Psychosocial support can assist with informed decisions, coping better with illness and dealing more effectively with discrimination. It improves the quality of their lives, and prevents further transmission of HIV infection.  

World Health Organisation

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS LIVING WITH HIV

Sentebale runs week-long residential camps and monthly Saturday clubs at local healthcare clinics across Lesotho, to give children living with HIV the knowledge and the tools that they need to live physically and emotionally healthy lives.

This financial year, 12 weeks of camp were held at the ‘Mamohato Children’s Centre, serving over 1,000 children aged between 10-19 years old. In total, 55 clubs were held across all 10 districts of Lesotho; there were over 2,400 children registered. Quarterly caregiver days were held for each club. The programme is rapidly expanding, with a 72% increase in hours of psychosocial support delivered compared to the previous year.

Sentebale has participated in five technical working groups and steering committees at a national level, strengthening connections and sharing our expertise. Our model of psychosocial support for children living with HIV was presented at the 2016 International AIDS Conference in Durban.

Sentebale’s Founding Patrons spoke at a special session on youth empowerment, titled ‘Ending AIDS with the Voices of Youth’. Following on from this success, a Youth AIDS Conference for over 100 people was held in partnership with UNICEF and the National AIDS Commission at the ‘Mamohato Children’s Centre in Lesotho, allowing young people to report back on the conference to their peers and national leadership from government, civil society and business, and to discuss how they can be included in the AIDS response.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO ARE GRADUATING FROM THE PROGRAMME?
Following graduation of 56 young people from club support this year, 88% have now been trained to be leaders at their clubs.

Children from camp in July 2016 told us the most important thing they learnt:

To take my medication properly and accordingly.”
“ We don’t discriminate against others.”
“I can communicate with my peers.”
“Even though I’m HIV-positive, I can still live a life that is same as others.”
“I can help others to have this information.”