



DFID MSP PROJECTS: EVALUATION OF OVC SERVICES

Project title: Evaluation of services rendered at drop-in centres and children's homes in Limpopo

Service Provider: Akena Research, Evaluation and Consulting

Partner: Limpopo Department of Health and Social Development

Background

Drop-in centres (DICs) typically provide meals, homework supervision and skills development opportunities for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). Since 2006 the Limpopo Department of Health and Social Development (DHSD) has funded DICs and plans to increase the number of government-funded DICs in the province from 167 to 327 in 2008-2009. There are also a growing number of DICs that are not funded or regulated by government and the DHSD identified the need to evaluate the services provided by these centres and by children's homes.

Aim

The aim was to evaluate current service. In particular to:

- ascertain the nature and scope of services provided by DICs and children's homes;
- assess whether these services confirm to draft national and provincial norms and standards;
- identify the strengths and weaknesses of these institutions in addressing the needs of OVC; and
- make recommendations for strengthening services offered by DICs and children's homes.

Project description

The evaluation included a comprehensive assessment of a sample of 25% of DICs and three children's homes. The evaluation design had two components – an external evaluation of DICs and children's homes by evaluators and by the children themselves, and an internal evaluation by DIC and children's home staff. The latter included seeking staff views about the quality of material support (e.g. food and clothing) and professional services (e.g. social services and access to grants) and difficulties experienced by staff in providing quality services.

Prior to the comprehensive assessment, the evaluation questionnaires were piloted in 21 DICs in Capricorn District. The following summarises the key findings from the 21 DICs covered by the pilot study:

- All DICs receive government funding; 48% receive top-up funding from other donors; 43% receive food and training from the DHSD.
- The number of staff employed at DICs ranges from 4-31 (average 12); 86% of staff are female and 67% are aged under 50 with most aged 30-44.
- The number of children catered for by DICs ranges from 49-679 (average 171); most children attending are aged 5-14 years old.
- Door-to-door campaigning and school referrals are the most common methods used to identify children.
- All DICs provide food and assist children and their families to apply for grants; most children said that the main reason for attending is that there is no food at home; children also liked the togetherness and hospitality offered by the centres.
- Children are generally not involved in decision making at DICs.
- Major challenges facing DICs are financial constraints, inadequate educational equipment and infrastructure.
- Most DICs attempt to keep asset registers, caregiver profiles, income and expenditure records, minutes of staff meetings, lists of beneficiaries and NPO license; most do not have activity plans and budgets.

The main evaluation findings were made available in October 2008. One provincial and five district reports were produced as well as a database of DICs.

Conclusions

Drop-in centres are an effective mechanism for meeting the basic needs of OVC at community level and the DHSD has made a strong commitment to fund an increased number of these centres. It is anticipated the evaluation findings will support the development of minimum service standards that ensure children are cared for and protected and that their rights are respected. In addition, the database will assist the DHSD to regulate services provided by centres that are not funded by government.