

child rights

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Champions for Children Handbook to mobilise caring school communities

By Norma Rudolph, *HIV/AIDS Programme*

"Collectively, we have the power to influence policy", reflected a member of one of the five teams from four provinces who gathered in the Free State in January 2008 to strengthen their work and plan implementation of the Stop AIDS Now! Networks of Care learning track. This partnership is a nested component of the second phase of the CI's *Caring Schools Project*.

The action-research project comprises the development of a capacity-building programme aimed at expanding the role of schools as 'nodes of care and support' to vulnerable children in the context of HIV/AIDS. Developed in partnership with the South African Democratic Teachers' Union in phase one of the project, the capacity-building approach has now been distilled in a *Champions for Children Handbook*, which will be tested, strengthened and revised in phase two.

The handbook guides school communities to build a shared vision of a better future and work together for change through partnership and protecting child rights in the context of the AIDS pandemic. Community leaders, teacher unions, school governing bodies, Department of Education officials and other government role-players, as well as faith-based and other non-government service providers can use the handbook to develop and sustain multi-sectoral teams to protect child rights, with schools as gateways for care and support.

Since communities are different, facilitators will find what works best through practice, listening with openness to feedback, and trying different strategies. Rather than giving steps to be followed in a strict order, the handbook guides users through cycles of activity and reflection. Each time the overlapping steps are repeated, understanding and action improve. New plans and actions for change build on previous experience and users are invited to adapt the steps to bring in new ideas from their own or others' experiences.

As workshop participants prepared to return to their provinces, they expressed their enthusiasm about using the handbook to mobilise their communities to protect child rights. Other individuals and organisations are invited to participate in investigating the effectiveness of the handbook in helping school communities to act in concert to supporting child well-being.

If you are interested in participating in the research or would like a copy of the handbook (available in hard copy or CD-ROM) please contact [Norma Rudolph](mailto:Norma.Rudolph@ci.org.za) or info@ci.org.za

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The Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, aims to contribute to policies, laws and interventions, that promote equality and realise the rights and improve the conditions of all children in South Africa, through research, advocacy, education and technical support.



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