

MEMORY BOX WORK (written by Sibongile Spengane and Zoleka Sauli)

The HEART of our psycho-social childcare work is home-based counseling for families who are looking after orphaned children.

We learnt about the memory work at a special workshop for affected children.



The children received a wooden shoe-size box. We explained that this box is called memory box. We decorated the box and talked about the memories of our parents. We asked the children to think about nice and warm memories of things they have done with their parents. They should start writing the beginning of a memory story and put this memory in the box.

Some children managed to write the stories on their own, others received assistance from an adult.

One child wrote: "I remember when my father came back from Johannesburg, he brought me a new cap. My father always smiled when he saw me." Another wrote: "When my mother was sick, she always asked me to put a wet cloth on her forehead and then she held my hand for a long time."

The children were very keen to talk about their parents. With some it was like opening sluice gates – they needed the release for their feelings. They made plans about what items belonging to their parents they will search for at home and put in the memory box. They also wanted photos of their parents to put in the box.

"MY HERO BOOK"

Each child received a hard-cover book which they also had to cover in different coloured paper and decorate. They were asked to write stories about their parents (only the beginning of the stories which they would then finish at home). Remember something about your parents that made you happy. Facilitators helped some children to write the stories in their hero-book.

One girl wrote the story about the day when she went to the shopping mall with her mother and she bought sandals for her. She no longer wears the sandals but keeps the sandals at a special place. When she is sad and misses her mother, she goes to her special corner in the house and puts on the sandals for a while.

Another boy wrote about Christmas when the father came home from Johannesburg. He brought the most wonderful presents and he told them a good-night story every time when they went to bed. They also wanted to sleep during the day because they wanted to hear Father's stories.

When Themba (not his real name) feels the “cloud of sadness”, he takes the memory box and looks at the only photo of his father – (Identity document). He was 8 years when his father died and he promised him to work hard, not to drink alcohol, and always be open and friendly to other people. He promised his mother to be a responsible older brother. She died 2 years later.



Phumeza wrote about the joy at Easter when her mother came to visit. She brought a new dress for Phumeza and picture books from her madam’s children. Her mother worked as a domestic worker in Durban. Whenever Phumeza is sad, she asks Gogo (granny) to sit with her and together they read the hero-book.

Some neighbours told Phumeza nice memories of the time when the mother was a child. “Your mother had a beautiful voice, she often came to sing in our house and people walking past stopped and listened to the “angel’s voice”. With the help of a volunteer Gogo and Phumeza write the stories down in the HERO-BOOK.

TEARS OF HEALING

Our aim is to make more home visits and help more children and their caregivers to create a memory box and write a hero book. We can see the healing that happens.....but there is no healing without lots and lots of tears.



The villages and homes are often very far apart. Thankfully, we can arrange visits days beforehand through the cell-phone network. We have to ask a rural pick-up taxi to take us to the place.



We, Sibongile (left) and Zoleka (right) , are at times very tired and exhausted. Yet, we are also very happy as we can see the change in the children and in the relationship between caregiver and child.

We also hold workshops for caregivers. Psychologist Judy Rankin has taught us helpful ways to understand children who have experienced grief and loss.



Caregivers are encouraged to think of their own childhood and remember the people who helped them most when they were sad. We remember “The Child Within” - as adults.