



**CONGREGATION OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERS  
STAR SUPPORT GROUP  
YAMBIO COUNTY - GBUDUE STATE - SOUTH SUDAN**



**STAR SUPPORT GROUP QUARTERLY  
NEWSLETTER: APRIL - JUNE 2017**

Welcome to the second newsletter for the Star Support Group (SSG) project for 2017. This is an opportunity to share with you, our donors and friends, some of what has been happening in the previous three months.

For those of you who don't know much about the project, the mission and vision statements will give you a better understanding:

**VISION**

*Star Support Group is committed to help people living with HIV/AIDS live with dignity.*

**MISSION**

*Star Support Group respects the human dignity of all and builds capacity of the community to be aware of, care for, support and encourage PLWHA through home based care programs and workshops.*

**NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION**

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB) has proved to be a very helpful and cooperative partner in the battle of keeping HIV infection rates as low as possible. Every Thursday two members from their team come to SSG and do counseling and testing of people who have not been tested before. As well as this, their main focus is to ensure that all of our members are registered to receive their free antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, as this is crucial for them to live longer lives and with relatively good health. Sadly, over the years, some people have the erroneous view that ARVs are the cause of someone's death. This is because, some years ago, people living with HIV only went on ARVs when they had become very ill. However, since December last year the WHO guidelines are that all people with HIV immediately go on ARVs as soon as they are diagnosed positive. It has been a challenge to educate and encourage the minority of members who still are wary of these drugs.

Thankfully, a doctor from the WHO came and gave a talk to the monthly gathering of members on Saturday June 10<sup>th</sup>, to

help educate them and emphasise the importance of them taking these drugs. CMMB and WHO have shown their willingness to continue supporting us with technical and educational support.



***Dr. Galla from WHO addressing the members of SSG***



***Joyce and Charles from CMMB, with their testing kits and ARVs to give to our members***

***ON-GOING MEDICAL SUPPORT***

Most of the hands-on work of SSG happens from Monday to Friday when the consulting rooms are open for the members to come to receive their antibiotics (septrin) and other medication to combat any opportunistic infections. The rainy season these months means there are many more cases of malaria than usual. However, with the strong emphasis we are putting on ensuring that all members go on ARVs, the



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expectation is that people will be less likely to contract some of these opportunistic infections. Cases of gastro-type sicknesses among children continue which is largely a matter of poor hygiene. Education through workshops and personal counseling continue to attempt to reduce this incidence.

The funding needed for the purchase of these drugs comes from the Sudan Relief Fund and we are very grateful for their ongoing support.

***SOME STATISTICS***

	APR	MAY	JUN
# of visits by members for consultations and antibiotics	153	340	275
# of members receiving other medication	525	904	656
# orphans at gatherings for nutrition support	389	573	343
# caregivers and members at workshops/gatherings	146	125	178

***HOME-BASED CARE***

Despite all the efforts being made to support our members in so many ways, sadly, some become ill and need to be referred to hospital or are bed-ridden for some time. They are visited by our small team of outreach workers or caregivers come to receive modest support in the form of beans, rice, sugar, salt and soap. This nutritional support becomes very important to ensure that the ARVs are as effective as possible. We are grateful to the Edmund Rice Foundation Australia (ERFA) for their ongoing funding of this aspect of our work. The Zimele Foundation members are significant contributors to this funding through their own fundraising activities.

***TAILORING PROGRAMME***

The tailoring programme continues five days a week, where the members learn the basics of tailoring with the help of their instructor, Johnstone Siro. During May, the graduates of the 2016 class were given one sewing machine between two, to enable them to start up their own small businesses to

help them on their journey of being more self-sustainable.



***The graduates of the 2016 class receiving their sewing machines at a gathering of members in May***

In addition to this, through funding from SRF, we were able to purchase sixteen new sewing machines, which will form the basis of the machines needed to begin classes with the new group in 2018, when the present machines in the class will be given to this year's graduates.



***Instructor, Johnstone, with the sixteen new sewing machines purchased in Kampala.***





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**ENGLISH CLASSES**

The English classes continued during the past three months with the numbers remaining stable at 20 members who come four times a week from 3 pm to 5 pm. The instructor, Justin Peter, is a trained primary school teacher, having done his training some years back when the Brothers were running Phase One and Two programmes under the leadership of Eamon O'Brien and John Dundon. Justin, being a member of SSG, is an example of how SSG has provided some employment to help in his own self-sustainability.

**MICROFINANCE.**

In the latter part of 2016, some training was given to a group of 61 members who wanted to take out loans to enable them to start up small businesses and so work towards being more self-sustainable. Of those who took out loans of 6,000 South Sudanese Pounds each, 38 have completed their payments, 22 have paid back some of the loan, and one has sadly died. This represents 82% of the loan repayments having been made, which is very good for a first venture into microfinance. Those who had completed their loan repayment, were encouraged to take out a further loan of 10,000 SSP, and this number has risen to 25. In addition to this, 29 new members joined the scheme to take out their first loan of 6,000 SSP. Members who have taken out loans report how much this is helping them to become more self-reliant.

**NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT**

The fight against HIV and its effects is dependent on the proper use of ARVs, and the nutritional support that goes with it. As mentioned above, those who are unwell are given these nutritional supplements to support them, as well as people who first go on ARVs, to ensure the optimum chances of their success.

In addition to this nutritional support for those who are unwell, SSG also supports the nutritional needs of many orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), some of whom are also being supported with school fees. Each month, a group of somewhere between 350 and 450 children come along for a day of fun, activities and nutritional support in the form of a powdered milk drink and a meal including rice, beans, eggs, meat and green vegetables. Soap is also given to each child to help their caregiver to provide for hygiene needs.



*Games time at the monthly gathering for children, with the help of a group of trainee teachers at Solidarity Teacher Training College*

**OVERCOMING INSECURITY AND THE RETURN TO THE SSG GARDEN**

In the last newsletter I mentioned the insecurity present in South Sudan. The Catholic Bishops put out a statement in March about the insecurity, quoting that there are 2.1 million people internally displaced and 1.5 million refugees in neighbouring countries. Famine, in parts of the country has also made life extremely vulnerable for many. Yambio had also been hit with fighting between the government forces and rebels. One consequence of this was that people did not move far from town. The Star garden was left abandoned for over a year. However, since April, the elected committee of the SSG, decided, with the other members, that it was safe enough to resume work in the garden. Thankfully, the rains seem to be good this year and the members are now working in groups in the garden and planting maize and groundnuts for their own consumption, as well as offering some of the fruits of their labour to those who are too ill to farm.

The SSG garden is a great way for the members to work cooperatively in groups, as well as help provide food for their families and those in need. We hope that the area stays peaceful so that this venture may continue. However, as this is being typed up today (30/6), reports came in that in the areas just beyond the garden, there had been some insecurity, with peoples' homes being looted and burnt. We pray that the situation does not worsen and that the areas become more secure for people.



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*Members working in the garden*



*Members and facilitators at the recent workshop*



*Threshing the beans*

***AWARENESS WORKSHOPS***

These are monthly gatherings for groups of 50 of the members to grow in awareness about positive living, along with many other topics, which enable the members to live more healthily. From February to April, the topics were caring for children, including nutrition awareness, hygiene and child rights. June began the cycle of workshops on positive living, fighting stigmatization, eating well and the need for strict drug adherence. We hope to continue this cycle with other members in the coming months.

***STAFF TRAINING DAY***

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, the staff at SSG had a one-day training facilitated by a member of the Ministry for Education, Gender and Child Welfare. The focus was on child rights, combating gender based violence and learning of the processes for reporting such incidences. It was a very useful day as the staff became more aware of the need to be alert to any signs of neglect and abuse amongst children and adults, particularly those who are our members



*Staff and facilitators at the training day*

***WE WANT TO THANK ALL OUR DONORS WHO SUPPORT OUR WORK AT STAR: EDMUND RICE FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA, ZIMELE FOUNDATION, SUDAN RELIEF FUND AND CARITAS AUSTRIA***



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