

25 Years Later: AIDS And The Forgotten Victims

(NAPSA)—Science has taken important steps toward treating the condition in the 25 years since the first cases of a nameless, deadly disease now known as the human immunodeficiency virus were recorded in the U.S. The problems of one group affected by the disease, however, need addressing in a different way.

Over the last quarter century, the tragic story of HIV/AIDS has often been told—but the story of children orphaned by this disease is often forgotten. Without mothers, fathers, doctors and community leaders, millions of children are left unprotected and deprived of a normal childhood. Children are suffering because the world has not recognized that the disease is wreaking havoc on childhood.

The AIDS pandemic is unraveling decades of progress for children. School enrollment, immunization rates and child survival around the world are suffering significant reversals because of the impact of AIDS.

To date, an estimated 15 million children worldwide have been orphaned by HIV and AIDS. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the world's hardest-hit region, eight out of 10 orphans lost their parents to AIDS. Meanwhile, in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is estimated that 752,000 children have lost one or both parents to the disease.

Through its Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS campaign, UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) hopes to record significant global progress in addressing HIV/AIDS by 2010. UNICEF's goal is to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the disease by offering services to 80 percent of women in need; increase pediatric treatments to 80 percent of children in need; reduce the percentage of young people living with HIV by 25 per-



Young, vulnerable children in Lesotho, Africa receive food, learning opportunities and support.

cent; and reach 80 percent of the world's children most in need with support services.

In 2001, UNICEF and the Kimberly-Clark Corporation partnered to support children orphaned and made vulnerable by AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The \$5.2 million pledged by Kimberly-Clark has helped UNICEF to ensure orphans are fed, protected and educated. The evidence of the effects of these programs can be measured one child at a time, such as Werner, a bubbly 3-year-old who was brought to San Jose Hospice in Guatemala by his mother, who later died from HIV/AIDS. Through UNICEF-supported programs at the facility, Werner is receiving food, medicine and other supplies, which are helping him to grow up strong and healthy. Soon he will be going to school.

"The fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic is not an easy one. Through successful partnerships like our relationship with Kimberly-Clark, we can bring hope to children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS and offer them a brighter future," said Charles J. Lyons, president of the U.S. Fund for UNICEF.

Although Sub-Saharan Africa receives the most attention regarding HIV/AIDS, there are many other areas of the world that are at a crucial juncture in their response to the disease. For

example, now is a pivotal time to address HIV/AIDS in China. The country has seen unprecedented economic growth, but the social stigma of HIV and AIDS is still very negative. Given that 20 percent of the world's 10-to-24-year-olds live in China, ensuring the health and well-being of the world's children cannot be accomplished without considering this country.

The estimated 530,000 children in China who have lost one or both parents to AIDS, or who are living with parents who are currently ill, are often outcast from their schools and ostracized by their communities—and they fall victim to inadequate social services.

Recognizing this, UNICEF and Kimberly-Clark have expanded their partnership to China to ensure that children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS have the opportunity to lead normal lives. The goal is to keep orphans in loving, caring families and communities, and to provide them with access to education, health services, medicines and psychological support in the face of negative social stigma.

Together with the Chinese government, UNICEF has launched a campaign to help to reduce the shame and discrimination of the disease through awareness efforts and to protect those children who have been orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. Kimberly-Clark support of this campaign will help to provide subsidies for school fees, summer camps and a youth ambassador program. The company will also help to fund UNICEF-established Red Ribbon Centers in local communities, where vulnerable children and families receive care and support through education, training and income-generation activities.

For more information, visit www.unicefusa.org.