

UNIT FOUR

Networks of Care and Support

Introduction

The scale of social challenges in South Africa is so huge and widespread that it requires a multi-pronged response strategy that harnesses resources and expertise from across public and private sectors: health, social development, education and training, business, non government organisation (NGOs), community based organisations (CBOs), national and international agencies. Schools are critical role players but management has to collaborate with other role players to support the large numbers of traumatised and vulnerable learners in the most appropriate ways.

Many of the problems that affect the health and well-being of people in communities – such as alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, environmental hazards and inadequate access to health care – cannot be solved by any person, organization, or sector working alone. These problems are complex and interrelated, defying easy answers.... Only by combining the knowledge, skills, and resources of a broad range of people and organizations can communities understand the underlying nature of these problems and develop effective and locally feasible solutions.

(Lasker, R. and Weiss, E. 2003 in IDASA publication, 2005)¹

It has become apparent from our research that many schools feel overwhelmed by the extent of the problem. Although the situation on the ground is dire, schools do not have the capacity to take adequate care of the needs of their vulnerable children. Yet without adequate support many learners are unable to attend school regularly and participate adequately in learning and teaching. Schools that have provided support for vulnerable learners to mitigate the effects of socio-economic issues are those that have been able to draw in support from external organisations and partners through networking.

Networking and the formation of partnerships is not an optional extra; it must become an integral part of the strategy to manage sustainable support for vulnerable learners. This is the focus of our reflections in Unit 4. We start by looking at a few practical examples of how schools have managed networking with external partners and what kind of support they provided for vulnerable learners.

Key questions

This unit explores the following questions:

1. What are the benefits of establishing networks of support?
2. What types of external support are available to your school?
3. How can you best manage support networks to optimally benefit your school?

Outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of a multisectoral, integrated approach to mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS and other interrelated socio-economic problems.
- Demonstrate an increased awareness of the types of support that external organisations can offer schools.
- Understand clearly the role of management in working with external organisations that offer support to schools.
- Describe what is involved in setting up a collaborative network with external organisations and agencies.
- Identify potential sources of support and compile a start-up list of contacts.
- Understand the importance of the need to access services and support from relevant government departments and initiatives.
- Assess your ability to manage a support network.

Networks of support in practice

Schools are responding to the challenge of providing support to large numbers of vulnerable learners in a variety of ways. The examples we came across during our research show that there are essentially two main categories of approach to networking that schools are using.

1. Responsive networking

Outside individuals and agencies approached the school to offer specified support services. For example, at one Gauteng, East Rand township school, local women took the initiative to provide aftercare support for learners. In other instances, notably in KwaZulu Natal and in the North West province, schools were approached by the provincial Department of Education to participate in an NGO-led initiative to support orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). Other examples included donors who approached schools and offered funds, resources or services. In all these cases, apart from being involved in the initial negotiations, principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) played a more passive and limited role during the implementation phase allowing the external organisations to manage the interventions.

2. Proactive networking

The principals took the initiative to find suitable support outside of the school. Contact was made with external organisations, government departments and individuals. These were then drawn in to provide various forms of support, usually in response to clearly established needs. The principal provided strong leadership and was actively involved in establishing and maintaining contact with external providers and managed the support initiatives and projects inside the school.

Here are some more case study examples from our research that illustrate both these approaches to networking.



ACTIVITY

Activity 1

What is the role of the principal in responding to offers of support from external agencies?

Case study 3 describes how a group of grandmothers approached Ngesi Primary School and offered to care for learners after school.

1. What are the benefits of this support initiative?
2. How sustainable is this initiative?
3. What opportunities did the principal miss?
4. What is the role of the principal/SMT in this kind of initiative?

CASE STUDY 4 – THE CARING GOGOS

Like many schools in the country, **Ngesi Primary School** has a large number of vulnerable children who need support. These learners are provided for by various external agencies, the main one being the community-based group called Itsoseng. Itsoseng is an organisation in the township of Vosloorus, East Rand, where Ngesi primary school is located. It was started by elderly women in that community. These women were touched by the plight of learners at risk, especially those who did not have adult care at home. In 2002 the women approached the school, and offered to help them by looking after their learners once school closed.

The main aim of this initiative started by the women was to keep such children off the streets after school and to assist them with their school homework and study. This is how the aftercare facility at Ngesi Primary was established. With time, the women's initiative was greatly appreciated by other organisations, which then offered to support Itsoseng financially. One of the organisations that offered such support was Emperor's Palace, a casino operating in the area. Itsoseng was also assisted by the Gauteng Department of Social Development to establish offices in the township and broaden their work to include the whole community.

The funding of the interventions at Ngesi School by Emperor's Palace through its East Rand Trust has helped to pay for two people who are employed full time to look after learners, and a fully qualified cook to prepare meals for the learners. The Aftercare service, which was started, also established a food garden and now provides extra food for the learners.

The principal and the teachers seem to have no direct involvement in the implementation of this aftercare initiative at their school.



Comment

When we visited Ngesi Primary we were moved by the compassion the women at Itsoseng had for the children of the school. All kinds of benefits flowed from the aftercare initiative started by the grandmothers. The children received food, were safe, did their homework in the afternoons under supervision, and participated in life skills training. The aftercare experience contributed significantly to enhancing the children's self esteem and confidence and had a positive influence on their schoolwork.

Although the initiative started as an informal support service offered by concerned and caring women, it grew into a community-supported project that received financial contributions from a well-established local business. An interesting feature of the Itsoseng project is its links with the Department of Social Development, which encouraged the project to expand its work in the community. From humble beginnings this care initiative became rooted in the community and therein lies its success and its sustainability.

It is surprising that the school was not an active member of the network of organisations that formed around this project. The principal at Ngesi stayed on the sidelines and missed a valuable opportunity to participate in the network and create strong links with individuals and the organisations for the benefit of the school. Robust interactions with organisations in the community offer principals opportunities to forge relationships and partnerships that can support and assist the school in a variety of ways. It also enables the school to remain abreast of the needs of the community.

The school principal and SMT should play a vital role in monitoring all support services offered to the school whether they are initiated from within or from outside the school. By keeping a watchful eye on initiatives the principal is able to ensure that the support meets the school's requirements. It is important to know what is actually happening on the ground so that principals can intervene if actions are not in the best interests of the children or of the school. On-going monitoring also enables principals to be proactive especially when there are indications that the support is running into difficulty. Steps can then be taken in good time to find alternative strategies to avoid collapse of the support.

A responsive approach to networking does not mean a passive approach. Principals should welcome offers of support but should not abdicate their responsibility by leaving individuals and organisations free reign to do what they want. It should always be a collaborative arrangement between the provider of the support services and the school management.

In the following example you can get a good idea of what happens when the principal initiates contact with external individuals and organisations to provide support to the school.



ACTIVITY

Activity 2

What is the role of the principal in a proactive approach to networking?

In Case Study 5 you will notice that the principal has a proactive approach to networking.

1. What are the benefits of being proactive in finding support from external agencies?
2. What role did the principal/SMT play?
3. What does the principal have to do to ensure that the support provided by external providers is sustainable?

CASE STUDY 5 – WEB OF SUPPORT NETWORKS

At **Hlophe Secondary School**, on the East Rand of Gauteng, Mr. Mokoena, the principal, did not wait for organisations to link up with him. Through his activism in the local community he went out and networked with several local businesses like Royal Paraffin to get support for the school. This included funds for supporting orphans and vulnerable children.

Through his innovativeness, Mr. Mokoena also managed to bring in the local police to help with the maintenance of security in the school. The police in turn linked the principal to the local Community Policing Forum (CPF), an initiative that combats crime in the community. The Forum then roped in other influential people like the chief of the local Correctional Services institution, the local magistrate and prosecutor and formed a stronger coalition called the Justice Forum.

The school has also established strong ties with the local clinic and it stands as surety for poor learners who cannot afford the clinic fees. Mr. Mokoena also belongs to the local branch of the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (SANCA), an organisation that educates young people on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. The organisation representatives come into the school occasionally to talk to learners about drug abuse. It is through this organisation that the school was linked to a School in England, a development that led to the principal of this twin school visiting Hlophe Secondary in 2007 to strengthen the partnership. Further benefits of this twinning arrangement have resulted from the learners in the UK raising money for Hlophe Secondary School.

It is evident that the assertive leadership of the principal in this school has led to the establishment of a strong network of organisations that support the school in many of its needs. Many of the organisations and stakeholders the principal has worked with have led him from one organisation to another, thus creating a web of support networks that all contribute towards the welfare of needy learners in the school.

Comment

Hlophe's experience is a good example of how a principal can proactively manage a support network for the school. All the organisations involved were brought into the school through the initiative of Mr. Mokoena. He approached each organisation with a clear vision of what he needed and had a good idea of how each organisation could help. He also understood how their activity could contribute to creating a caring environment in the school as a whole. The police forum helped to address the issue of safety. The local clinic responded to the needs of ill children, while SANCA looked at learners made vulnerable due to substance abuse. The links with one organisation led to the involvement of many other organisations, but at the centre of the network was the visionary leadership of the principal, who saw the potential of each initiative to develop his school.

The assertive leadership of the principal at Hlophe Secondary led to the establishment of a strong network of organisations that support the school in many of its needs. We could easily see the knock-on effect of networking. Many of the organisations and stakeholders Mr. Mokoena was actively involved in led him from one organisation to another. Soon there was a wide web of support round the school. This clearly is the strength of Mr. Mokoena's proactive approach. It gave him a wide resource base to draw on and he could choose how each organisation would contribute towards the welfare of vulnerable learners in the school. With so many organisations involved, it is unlikely that the school's support system will collapse if one organisation pulled out. This is the real benefit of a network, as opposed to getting support from one or two partners only.

A proactive approach to establishing networks of support can be time consuming and energy sapping. There might be the danger that the efforts to maintain the support network could lead to neglect of other key management duties if not well managed. This is where good coordination and delegation skills play such a vital role. As principals have a strategic role to play, they do not have to do everything. Instead their task is to promote the vision of the support network, to involve suitable people to carry out agreed networking tasks, to monitor the networking initiative at the school, and to take corrective action where necessary.

Principals and SMTs are expected to use both proactive and responsive networking approaches in their efforts to establish a robust network of support that can help them meet the diverse needs of vulnerable learners at their school.

Types of support

The two case studies examined in this unit give an idea of the kind of support that schools could receive from external sources. Our research has revealed many more examples. Listed in the table below are other examples that we came across in our visits to schools dotted across the country. They are grouped according to the key support needs of vulnerable children and also indicate the types of service available.

Needs of vulnerable learners	Types of service	Examples of support
Nutrition	Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial Nutrition Programme provides state funding for the provision of food during the school week in quintile 1,2, and 3 Primary Schools Contributions from local businesses
	Nutrition Programmes as part of aftercare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NOAH (Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity) is an NGO that provides after care programmes for clusters of schools in Gauteng, KwaZuluNatal and Mpumalanga. The nutrition programme they offer forms part of their aftercare programme and provides food to vulnerable children throughout the year.
	School food gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Agriculture helps with the school garden by providing seeds and gardening implements. A number of NGOs exist nationally that focus specifically on assisting schools to develop their own food gardens Unemployed parents help with doing the gardening as part of the school 's volunteer prograame HIV and AIDS Committee in the school coordinates support to learners including a vegetable garden

Needs of vulnerable learners	Types of service	Examples of support
Nutrition	Provisions and a cook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds from a local trust pay for the purchase of provisions and for the salary of a qualified cook who provides meals as part of the school aftercare programme.
	Food donations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses like a supermarket or a bakery donate food to the school. A school in an affluent community forges links with a school in a disadvantaged community and makes food donations. Local schools twin with schools in other countries and receive donations used to purchase food. The school has established a system which encourages the children in the school who can to bring food to share with those who most need it. One school had a system whereby each week it was the responsibility of one class in the school to bring an extra sandwich to school and to make it available (through a coordinated process) to any learner who needed school lunch.
Safety	Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Adopt a Cop”: local police and the police forum are approached by the school to assist with security at the school. The school sets up a parent volunteer system for maintaining security at the school.
Health	School-based support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school establishes a special fund to pay clinic fees for learners who need this support. Members of the School Based Support Team (SBST) assist in taking learners to medical facilities for treatment.
	Community and NGO-based support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a number of instances NGOs including MIETA, Save the Children and the Catholic Institute of Education (CIE) have established district-wide initiatives in Free State, North West and KZN which entail providing a stipend to community or youth workers whose job it is to take learners to the local health facilities.
	Treatment at clinics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local clinics give treatment to vulnerable children. They also check for abuse.
Counselling to deal with emotional and psychological problems	Counseling and referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skilled Life Orientation teachers or those who have a qualification in psychology are able to provide initial guidance and counseling and to make appropriate referrals for specialised support where necessary. A contractual agreement was established between the school and a local child and parent counseling centre. The school identifies vulnerable learners and the centre offers appropriate support. Links with the Department of Social Development for information about possible counseling through their regional SASSA offices (SA Social Security Agency).
	Dealing with bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of schools had a box into which learners could place a note anonymously reporting incidents of bullying or other problems. In this way SMTs would be alerted to such problems as they arose.
Child support grants and other social security grants	Financial support for OVC from the Department of Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principals assist OVC to secure documentation (Birth Certificates, IDs, Death certificates etc) to secure Child Support Grants. NGOs working in the school district provide the services of community/youth workers to assist learners in schools in accessing grants through the regional SASSA office (SA Social Security Agency).

Needs of vulnerable learners	Types of service	Examples of support
Payment of school fees and for uniforms and books	Community project raises funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The principal negotiated funding and support from the NDA (National Development Agency) and the Japanese Embassy to set up a self employment project for unemployed parents of the school. A sewing and a brick making project were established. Through money earned, parents were able to pay school fees and for school uniforms.
	School uniform and book bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a number of schools, the school management team had set up and coordinated a school uniform and book bank. All learners leaving at the end of Matric, as well as those who had grown out of their uniform, were asked to donate their uniforms and books to the school 'bank' for redistribution to anyone who may need them.
Learner hygiene and clean uniforms	Washing facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In two schools, one in rural Eastern Cape and one in a Gauteng township, the School Management Team had seen to it that a shower with hot water was made available at the school for OVC. Teachers took turns to supervise the personal hygiene of learners. On Friday afternoons, OVC were able, with supervision, to wash and dry their school uniforms at school.
Transport	Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A bus company provides learners with free transport services.
Academic support	Aftercare Programme that includes homework support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internally organised by the principal who involves teachers and parents who serve on a volunteer basis in the school. External support from concerned adults in the community. The aftercare programme is organised by this group. External organisations (NGOs) run the aftercare programme. In one school visited, the principal had organized for all teachers to stay on one extra hour immediately after formal classes ended to be able to offer homework support to any learners who needed it or who needed to catch up work. In another primary school, the principal had a box into which each class teacher put some extra copies of worksheets covered in class each day. If a learner was absent, they knew that they could collect the hand outs that they had missed.
Information about HIV and AIDS	Information in the form of posters, pamphlets and lectures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGOs involved in HIV and AIDS related projects, and relevant government departments in the district, e.g. Department of Education, Social Development and Health.
Adequate classrooms	Funds from donors to build classrooms	Principals whose schools had inadequate classrooms, and were forced to teach outside under trees, approached diverse donors for funds, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japanese Embassy Canada Fund National Development Agency De Beers Education Trust Phinda Game Lodge SA Lottery Overseas 'twin' schools.

Needs of vulnerable learners	Types of service	Examples of support
Staff training and development	Management training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An external organisation was approached to run workshops for SGB and SMT members to improve their management skills. The principal believed that this training would develop the capacity of the school to give support vulnerable learners. Largely as a result of these workshops the school has been able to establish various working committees to run initiatives like the school nutrition and garden programme, health and hygiene programme, orphans and vulnerable learners programme, and the counselling programme. ● In another instance, the principal attended training offered by an NGO in fundraising and on how to prepare a funding proposal.
	Teacher training in care for vulnerable learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IEP (Integrated Educators' Programme) is an NGO which conducts workshops for teachers on pedagogical issues including caring for learners and teachers affected and infected by HIV and AIDS. ● Some schools took up training offered by NGOs like REPSI in first level counselling for teachers.

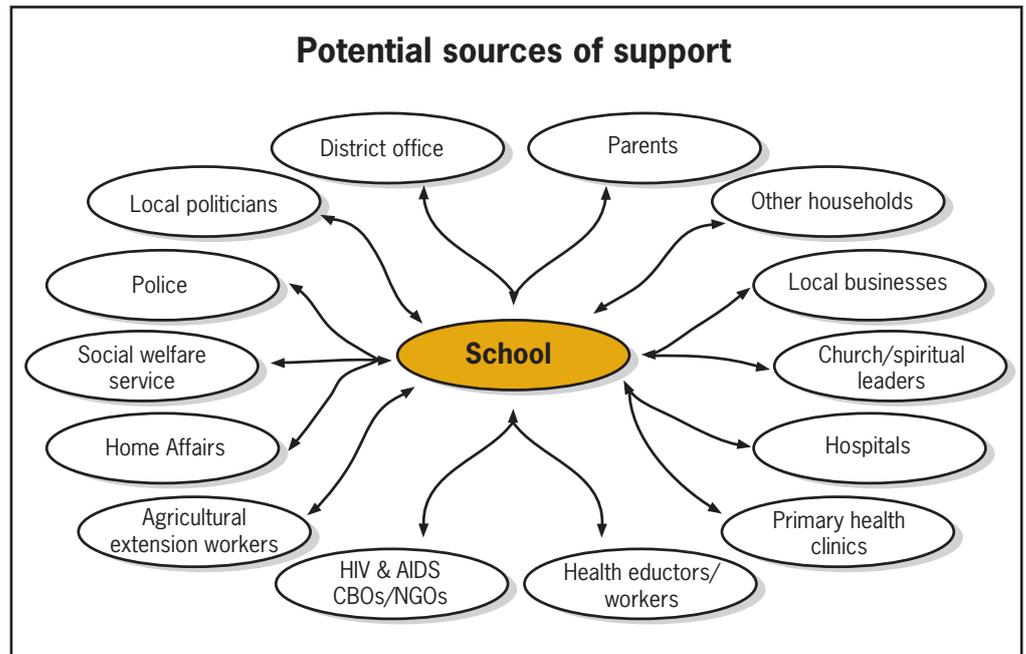
While this list of interventions aimed at supporting vulnerable children is by no means intended to be exhaustive, it does give you a good idea of the different kinds of support you could access from individuals and organisations in your support network. A number of the interventions are also easy to implement and don't need specialised resourcing, for example, a school system for homework support. We observed that the principals in our study who were proactive in responding to the challenge of caring for vulnerable children exhibited a range of good management skills including:

- Sound knowledge and understanding of the socio-economic context of the school
- Accurate identification of challenges that vulnerable learners and teachers face
- Prioritisation of problems and challenges
- Identification of potential sources of support
- Good communication and initiation of contact with external individuals and organisations
- Development of critical strategies to respond proactively to challenges
- Insightful and practical actions to respond to challenges
- Active participation in all external projects and initiatives

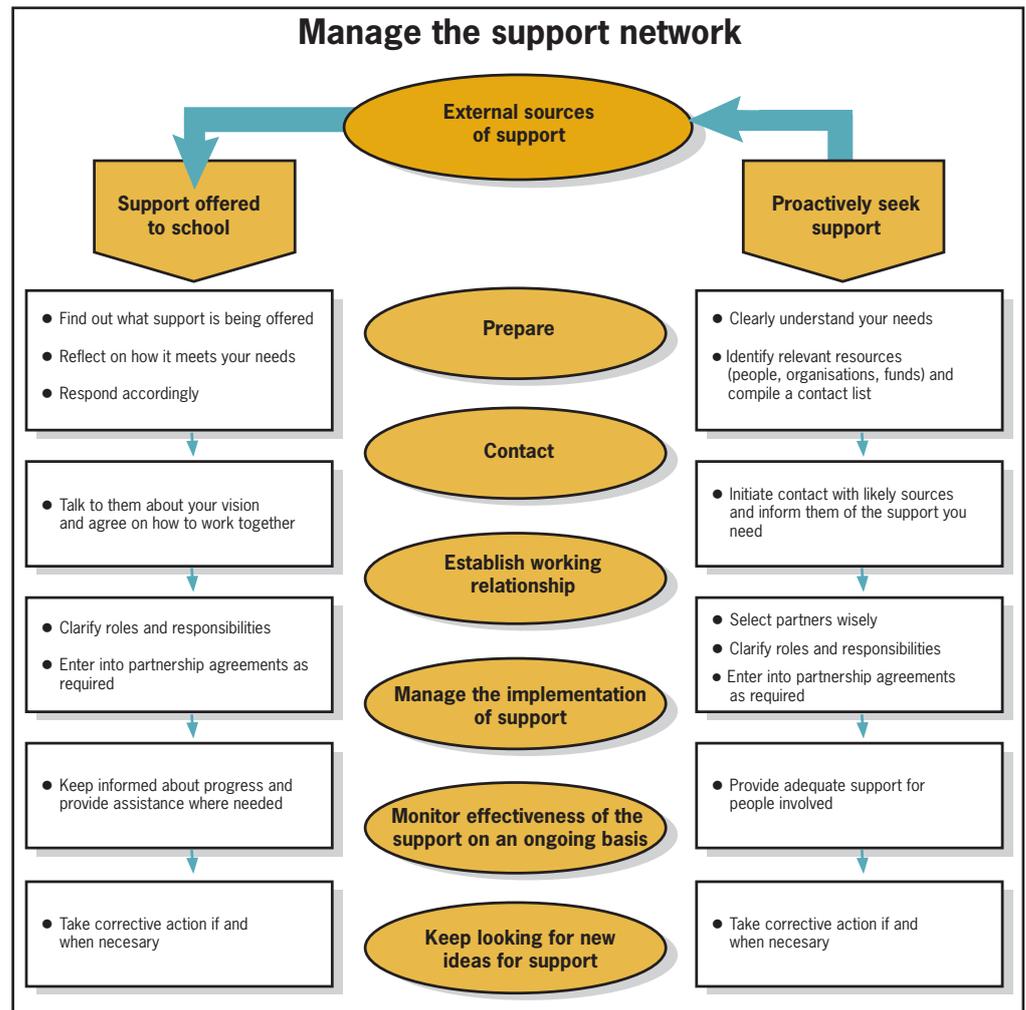
The process of managing the network of support is illustrated in the next section.

Managing networks of support

The school is not an island but has links with the community and organisations beyond the immediate context as is reflected in this diagram.



This is a picture of the potential sources of support for the school. Sometimes individuals and organisations knock on the door of the school and offer support as we saw in Case Study 4 (page 74). But principals and SMTs cannot afford to sit and wait for such offers. Instead you have to go the proactive route and find the right kind of support that meets your needs. So how do you manage networks of support? Here is an overview of what is involved.



On one level networking is as easy as making new friends. If you can make new friends, then you can network. But setting up suitable support networks takes effort and is time consuming. Many of the principals we met were people with vision and energy. Often, it was their energy and their commitment to making a difference that helped them set up successful networks of support. Although particular knowledge and skills in identifying and mobilising resources were learnt and honed in the process as well. They came up with creative ideas and connected with a range of individuals and organisations. They saw networking not as an end in itself but a **strategy** to help them get the support they needed.

Let's examine each of the main tasks required to establish and maintain a network of support for your school.

1. Have a clear vision of your school's support needs

The teachers and principals we interviewed reported that the support actions and programmes that made a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable learners are particularly those that concentrated on areas like nutrition, after-care and psycho-social counselling.

- A school nutrition programme which ensures that vulnerable learners received at least one meal a day was established.
- An aftercare programme where learners were fed and which provided a safe place in the afternoons was set up. Some aftercare facilities also provided place for learners to do their homework under adult supervision. Vulnerable children were provided with opportunities to interact with peers, and 'friendly' adults. Social warmth, which was often lacking in the learners' homes, was a positive experience.
- Psycho-social counselling provided traumatised learners with the emotional support they required to cope with issues such as bereavement and abuse.

These were among the main types of intervention that we identified in Unit 3 when we examined the needs of vulnerable learners. Given your school context, you will have to decide what your priority support needs are. When you have a clear vision of what your school's needs are, you will be in a strong position to pinpoint the most appropriate support.



It is always wise to proceed with caution. You may decide to introduce one intervention only, making sure it is working well before turning your energies to introducing another intervention.

2. Map your circle of support

An important second step in the process is to **identify resources** that can help. The table on the previous page shows the kind of resources that schools can access. This could mean tapping into the skills and services of an organisation, or the wisdom and energy of a particular individual or expert. Resources obviously include money, building materials and other material assets, but they also refer to things the school already has (like classrooms or a field) and perhaps does not use efficiently (like a hall that is empty a lot of the time). Some schools get involved in recycling projects and turn the waste of the community into a resource. Unemployed parents can be a resource for a school because they have time to help with small, practical tasks. Do you remember the principal in Case Study 1 (Unit 2) who set up a system that involved parents in volunteering their help to the school in cleaning, gardening and helping in the school aftercare? Thinking creatively about resources and how to make use of them is a critical networking skill.

Resource mapping is an activity that helps you to identify individual people, groups, organisations, businesses and institutions that can help to support the needs of your school. The map usually begins locally, with your school and then moves outwards. It will thus include resources:

- in your school
- in your immediate community
- in your district or ward
- in your province
- at national level
- in the international community.

Not all resources are visible. Government services like the child care grant, for example, cannot be seen. Yet they are resources available at national level and the school can support vulnerable learners by helping families in their community to access them. It is important for you to make it your business to know what is available. Other less obvious resources include the information provided by policy statements and guidelines; parents and teachers with special skills; drawing on the skills and support of other school principals in the District; the services of non-profit organisations (NGOs); links to overseas funders; and information networks, like the Internet. When you do the following activity, it will be useful to keep these kinds of resources in mind.



Activity 3 Map your circle of support

There are numerous sources of support in your immediate environment, which you can tap into. But usually, you will have to make the first move. It starts with an informed list of contacts.



Tool 10 Check your circle of influence

Use Tool 10 to check your present circle of influence. You can also ask your management team to do the activity. This will enable you to identify people and organisations that you already have strong links with.



Tool 11 Map your circle of support

Now use Tool 11 to compile a start-up list of contacts – individuals and organisations that have the potential to support your school.



The old saying, “two heads are better than one”, is always a good strategy for dealing with challenging situations.

Comment

The above activity is very useful if you are not sure where to begin looking for support. It helps you to identify possible partners in your support network. Draw in the whole SMT and staff, brainstorm the process and try and think beyond the obvious individuals and organisations. Try to come up with some new ideas. Once you have identified potential partners find out more about them. What kind of organisation is it? What work do they do? What support can they offer the school? Why would they want to help the school? This kind of information will be gathered over time. Draw in as many people as you can to help with this task. For example, you could ask specific parents or teachers to do the research for you, and there may be other principals who could help you with information they have gathered over the years in their school communities.

Think about purposively setting up a support group of principals from your District or Ward – a peer support group in which information and ideas about support and managing schools in an environment of HIV and AIDS and tackling other socio-economic challenges can be shared.

Many principals have found it helpful to start a digital resource file of information, which is organised in an accessible way, e.g. in categories of support and in alphabetical order. In this way the school can slowly build up a database of information regarding support networks and it can easily be updated. If your records are kept digitally, they will also be easy to update every few months to ensure that the information remains relevant. You can keep the printout in a file in the school office where the information is accessible to others staff members.

3. Make your support needs known

An important step in networking is to become known to the community and to the networking partners who might be willing to help.



ACTIVITY

Activity 4

How can you make your support needs known?

You know your community and have experienced what communication methods work best with different sections of the community.

Brainstorm ideas with the SMT and the rest of the staff on how to ‘advertise’ your schools needs. Make a list of the ideas that you know work well, but also try to think of new ways of ‘advertising’ your school support needs. Keep a record of your ideas and add to them on an ongoing basis.

Comment

When you thought about ways of making your support needs known you may have considered what would be suitable for the different target groups. For example it would be a waste of time to use the Internet to raise awareness of your needs to parents who don’t have access to the Internet, let alone have no computer or ability to use the computer. This approach, though, would work quite well with businesses.

Did your list of ideas include the following?

- Talk to the learners and parents at your school and help them to see how they can help to build a caring and supportive school environment.
- Put up a poster or notice in public places like clinics, crèches, local government offices, shops, churches, mosques or other religious places.
- Place a short notice in local newspapers. Here is an example of a notice to draw attention to the need for school uniforms:

Some of our children don't have uniforms. Can you help? We need 20 white shirts (size 7-10), 10 pairs of grey trousers (size 9-10), 12 grey skirts (size 7-8). All contributions will be appreciated.
Contact: Principal (tel)]

- Speak about your school's support needs at community meetings, circuit meetings and when visitors come to the school – never miss an opportunity to raise this topic with others, you never know who might be willing to help!
- Organise a meeting with influential people in your community and make a presentation that provides the people attending with a good idea of what the situation is of vulnerable children in your school, what you are trying to achieve, and how they might be able to help.
- Draw attention to the plight of the vulnerable children in your school by sharing your story at teacher conferences, workshops and training events.
- Compile a regular newsletter (e.g. once a term or twice a year) in which you capture, among others, stories of how you are managing to support the vulnerable learners in your school. Send your school newsletter to the district and provincial departments of education, NGOs, embassies, international funders and friends of the school.
- Enlist the aid of parents who have the skill or experience of compiling information and using communication media such as information sheets, posters, notices, newsletters, web site.

Sharing your story and your needs builds awareness and contributes to creating an informed and caring community.

4. Choose your partners wisely

Here is a short, adapted extract from a paper by Michael Fullan², called *The Three Stories of Education Reform*. In this paper Fullan looks at the relationship between individual schools and the systems in which they work. He makes some helpful points about the discerning way in which schools should choose to relate to the outside world.



As you read through the extract think about these questions:

1. Under what circumstances would you refuse to get involved with an individual or outside organisation?
2. What attributes would you look for in a person or organisation that could provide your school with support?

ADAPTED FROM: THE THREE STORIES OF EDUCATION REFORM

Schools need the outside to get the job done. These external forces, however, do not always come in helpful packages. They are a mixture of complex and uncoordinated offers and ideas. The work of the school is to figure out when to say yes and when to say no and how to make its relationship with the outside a productive one.

One key to understanding this process is the realization that schools that are good at collaboration do not take on everyone. Rather, they are selective. They select and integrate innovations. They constantly work on connectedness. They carefully choose staff development programmes, and they always work on applying what they learn.

In other words, the secret to a successful relationship with the 'outside' lies in the way a school attacks the incoherence and confusion outside partnerships can create. They have to deal with the outside, partly to ward off negative forces, partly to ferret out resources, and partly to learn from the outside. But the success in their partnerships comes from the way they choose the connections and make them work for their school.

(Fullan, M.: 2000. p581)³

Fullan's reminder that schools have a right to say no to external partners is helpful. It brings us back to an earlier point in this unit, where we argued that setting up support networks should be a management strategy that serves the interests of the school. Not every networking opportunity will be helpful for a school. Sometimes outside partners introduce themselves with smooth presentations that create high expectations, and when these are not met, teachers and learners feel disappointed or betrayed. This can happen, for example, when an organisation promises to provide support material, and then takes a very long time to deliver the pamphlets or books. Another example is of an organisation introducing an art competition and once the school has sent off entries, they never hear from the organisation again. Principals can ask for references and check on the reputation of organisations, before they agree to let them work in their school.

Even worse than experiencing some disappointment are the potentially negative consequences of allowing individuals or organisations into a school without having properly assessed the nature and quality of the input or service that they propose to provide. Especially if individuals or organisations are going to be addressing learners on sensitive issues such as HIV and AIDS, they should not be 'let loose' on learners before they have provided the school management with detailed information on what they plan to do and how they plan to do it. Importantly, there should be congruence between the values that your school stands for and those promoted by the external agency.

Another problem relates to the way networking activities might make demands on the attention and time of staff members and this could contribute to the disruption of teaching and learning at the school. Too much activity is not helpful, especially if the staff feel they are being pulled in many different directions at once. It is the responsibility of the principal to manage the level of outside activity in the school. Networking is a means to an end, and should not become an end in itself.

5. Establish good working relationships with partners

There are different types of partnerships that you could be involved in. For example, you may have an *informal* partnership arrangement with selected parents who are able to volunteer a variety of services to the school, e.g. gardening, cooking in the aftercare facility, supervising work in classes when teachers are sick. A more formal arrangement with selected parents might be that they offer specified services on a regular basis in lieu of paying school fees. You will then draw up an agreement that specifies clearly what you are expecting from the individual and that their services are considered payment for school fees.

Formal partnerships are usually entered into with businesses, community organizations such as Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and national and international agencies that offer specific forms of support. Formal agreements will specify clearly what the purpose is of the partnership, what kind of support is provided, what the roles and responsibilities are of the partners, and the timeframes during which the support will be provided.



You can find an example of a partnership agreement in **Tool 12**.

Partnerships can help schools access expertise, information and resources that would not otherwise be available to schools. They can also lead to more efficient use of resources and provide support in a range of different ways. Some partnerships are simple and do not require much coordination on the part of school management. Partnerships with large, complex organisations, e.g. government, Unicef, and those that involve multiple partners require strong coordination skills. Whether simple or complex, all partnerships have to be managed well if you are to derive optimum benefit for your school.

Here is a checklist of what to watch out for in any partnership.



1. Are all partners clear about what the purpose is of the partnership and what each one is expected to contribute?	
2. Are the partners committed to the outputs of the partnership?	
3. Is there a willingness to give the partnership activities priority so that the promised support can be delivered?	
4. Have all partners signed the agreement?	
5. Is the school leadership able to manage the impetus for partnership support?	
6. Is there a good flow of communication that keeps everyone in the 'loop'?	
7. Are monitoring mechanisms in place to track progress?	
8. Is regular feedback given to the partners about the progress made?	
9. Are there strategies to address problems such as conflict, delivery of support, which is below expected standard, or lack of delivery of support?	
10. Is appreciation of support communicated to partners at regular intervals?	

6. Monitor the support services

Monitoring the progress of the support services provided by external agencies is an integral part of managing the process. Whether the support is initiated by external agencies or whether the principal initiates contact with outside individuals and organisations to provide the support, monitoring what happens and judging whether the support meets the expressed needs is critical.

Monitoring is the continuous assessment of any intervention and its context with regard to the planned objectives, results, and activities. Both informal feedback and communication and formal reporting can be used. In informal partnerships for example with parents who offer support services, the principal or any designated member of the SMT can regularly have a chat with the individuals concerned and discuss with them what is working, what is not and what improvements might be necessary. However, when dealing with outside businesses and organisations, more formal reporting is required. Good monitoring identifies actual or potential successes of failures as early as possible and facilitates timely adjustments and remedial actions to ensure that the objectives set out in the partnership agreement are met.

Effective monitoring requires that principals frequently and routinely keep an eye on what is happening, collect suitable information about progress, and give regular feedback to the partner or partners.



Working with government

Working with other government departments also requires networking skills. Identifying the correct section in a department (having a clear vision and mapping the support needed) following through on necessary procedures and managing the necessary service delivery is all part of the process (establishing good working relationships with partners) and monitoring implementation. As part of the state service provisions system, schools are well placed to link up with and maximise the benefits of other government services that provide resources and support for vulnerable learners in a variety of ways. Like schools which are constitutionally bound to provide education for all children of school going age, so our health department, social development department, police and other state departments are equally bound to deliver services to all South African citizens. Accessing state support for OVC should be your first step in any plan of action.

1. Obtain suitable information

Government departments and national agencies offer particular services (including information) through their provincial and local office., Examples include clinics and hospitals (Departments of Health) district and provincial Education Departments, SASSA (South African Social Services Agency), SANAC (the South African National AIDS Council) and the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences/Child Protection Unit. These are some of the agencies and organisations that you can approach.



Tool 13

Extending your network of support: Linking up with your Local AIDS Council

This tool gives you some information about National, Provincial and Local AIDS Councils. The key functions of these councils include among others, to "create and strengthen partnerships for an expanded response (to HIV and AIDS) amongst all sectors; to mobilise resources and to collaborate with 'citizen groups', NGOs, CBOs etc".

These government offices can be contacted and requested to provide materials, e.g. pamphlets, guides and books, that you can use in your school or as guidelines for teachers or persons who have been selected to offer counseling to learners.

2. Link up with available support services

Here are some examples

- The Department of Health has established centres for voluntary counseling and testing for HIV and AIDS (VCT) and also offers anti-retroviral treatment and therapy. You can get a list of contact details for these centres at the District Office of the Department of Health in your area.

- The Department of Home Affairs regional offices provide the necessary documentation needed to access various child and support grants.
- The Department of Social Development offers support for families and helps them gain childcare, disability and other grants. You can approach the regional offices of SASSA (the South African Social Services Agency) and get information about what support they offer and what the procedures are for obtaining grants.
- The South African Police Service's Child Protection Units (CPUs) can be contacted if you suspect that learners in your school are victims of abuse of any kind. This unit has trained personnel who give advice about what actions to take.

3. Utilise government sponsored initiatives and programmes

The Department of Education can be contacted through the local district office for information about support initiatives for learners and teachers infected and affected by HIV and AIDS and learners rendered vulnerable through any number of socio-economic reasons.

An example is the school nutrition programme. It is a nationwide programme sponsored by the Department of Education. Reports in recent newspapers have not been complimentary about the way that funds are allocated and used, and how it is being implemented. Use a proactive approach in managing the nutrition programme at your school. Unit 5 is dedicated to exploring what the school nutrition programme should be comprised of and how it can be implemented for maximum benefit to vulnerable learners.

4. Schools can provide referrals to services

You can obtain a list from your local AIDS council or the education district office of names and contact numbers for local resources that are available to support vulnerable children. Organisations and people who could be on the referral list are:

- Community organisations
- Primary health care nurses
- Social workers
- Police officers
- Religious ministers
- Agricultural extension officers
- Community development workers.

5. Schools can be places of government service provision

You can help your school by assisting the government to bring services closer to the community. Here is an idea from a Soul City Publication: *Supporting Vulnerable Children, A Guide for School Governing Bodies*.



As you read the excerpt ask yourself:

- What are the benefits for your school?
- What are the practical implications of organising a government services registration day?

SCHOOLS AS PLACES OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE PROVISION

One of the best ways for schools and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to support vulnerable children is to use the school as a place from which to provide people with government services. This will also help to bring government services closer to the community. Schools and SGBs can do this by hosting a Government Services Registration day at their school.

When a school hosts a Government Services Registration day, it means that for one day (usually a Saturday), government departments will bring their officials and their equipment to the school. The community will come to the school to access the different government services that they need; and the officials from the different government departments will provide them to the community. The services they offer can include applications for:

- identity documents and birth certificates
- police affidavits
- child support grants and other social grants.

There are many government departments that can be part of a government services registration day. The most important departments for vulnerable children are:

- The Department of Social Development which brings officials who can take applications for child support grants and social grants.
- The Department of Home Affairs which brings officials who can take applications for identity documents, birth-certificates and death-certificates.
- The South African Police Services which brings officials who can take affidavits for the documents needed for Social Development and Home Affairs applications.
- The Department of Health; which brings officials to provide Road-to-Health Cards, the hospital birth register and information about primary health care for vulnerable children. This includes information about how to get anti-retroviral treatment (ART) for HIV positive children.
- The Department of Education which provides information about no-fee schools and school fee exemptions.

(Soul City: 2006)⁴

The benefits of organising an event of this nature are immense not only for your school but also for the community as a whole. Frequently parents and caregivers of vulnerable children are unable to get financial and other support from available government services because they do not know what services exist and are available, or they do not have the necessary documentation (birth certificate, identity documents etc.) that are needed in order to qualify for various forms of state support.

Organising an event of this nature is not necessarily as simple as it sounds. You will probably have to link up with other schools to find out whether they would be interested in collaborating in such an event. The next step would be to approach your local council to find out if an event of this nature is a feasible proposition. The local council would have to coordinate the event because it involves getting in touch with a number of officials from different departments. In consultation with other principals in your area you could offer the necessary support to your local council in order to make such an event a reality.



Activity 5

How do you rate your ability to manage a support network?

The principals who were successful in obtaining suitable support from outside organisations were highly committed, had a strong vision of what they needed, were innovative in finding sources of support, had good communication and people skills and were able to coordinate various initiatives to the benefit of their schools. How would you rate yourself in this regard?



Tool 14

Rate your ability to manage a support network

Tool 14 is a self-reflection tool that you can use to examine your own leadership and management ability. This is something the whole SMT can do together.

Comment

The self-reflection activity (above) is intended to encourage you to examine critically how well your management team is able to manage a support network. Regular reflection on skills requirements for management tasks, your abilities and past performance enables you and your management team to identify what expertise you currently have and what gaps exist. This informal needs analysis makes it possible for you to establish who is able to do what, whether you need to bring in expertise from outside to take responsibility for any of the identified tasks, and in which areas you may need support and further training and development. One of the principals we met during the research project realised that her SMT needed additional training in order to be more confident and skilful at managing various support actions in the school. She approached an organisation that conducted management training workshops to build her internal capacity. As principal it is one of your key performance areas to build the capacity of all your staff. Initiate suitable training where possible. You can get help from external individuals and organisations. Also keep a look out for workshops and training activities that are organised by the Department of Education.

Key points

Schools are critical role players in the national multisectoral strategy for combating the spread of HIV and AIDS infection and managing the effects of the epidemic in the local context. Clearly this role is aligned to a principal's key task of mitigating or lessening the effects of HIV and AIDS and poverty on vulnerable learners so that they are able to participate in the learning and teaching activities at the school. Setting up and maintaining networks of support has to be an integral part of the school's overall strategy to provide for vulnerable learners.

In Unit 4 we explored:

- What the benefits of establishing networks of support are.
- What types of support from state and other external organisations is available.
- How to manage support networks to get optimum benefits for your school.

Some important insights we gained:

1. Whether your approach to establishing networks of support for your school is proactive or reactive, establishing and managing a network of support requires strong leadership and good management skills.
2. A well-populated database of contacts that shows the range of support services that is available to the school is an invaluable resource. It must be updated continually and be easily accessible to all members of staff.
3. Government departments offer a variety of resources and services that are particularly relevant for the support of vulnerable children. Management can harness these resources and services to assist them in providing adequate support for their learners. Schools are well placed to be proactive in referring parents and other people in the community to relevant agencies who are able to provide suitable help and support.