

MEDIA RELEASE

Executive Director visits OVC care and support best practice in South Africa

Johannesburg, 10 October 2007... The poorly lit room is the first thing you notice when you enter this child-headed family household in Katlegong Township, near Johannesburg, South Africa. But that in no way dims the bright smiles on the faces of the three children ages 16, 13 and 8, their older brother, 21 and their young cousin, who welcomed UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman, the visitor from “overseas”, who they had been so eagerly waiting to meet. They immediately struck up a friendly conversation.

That was the scene in the Davey family household when Ms. Veneman, accompanied by United States Ambassador to South Africa, His Excellency Eric M. Bost, dropped by the home for a chat with the family to hear about their experiences first hand. Child-headed households have little or no access to basic social services and some forty percent of the children in the area are orphaned or vulnerable.

Ms Veneman, who is on a four-day official visit to South Africa, was the guest of the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW), a UNICEF partner organization, which has developed a unique model of community-based child and youth care known as Isibindi, in response to the growing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in the country.

Isibindi carers work with orphans and vulnerable children identified through a school outreach programme. Key to its success is that children stay in their own homes and communities. The Isibindi child care workers teach them important survival skills like how to prepare meals, how to take care of themselves and younger siblings, how to apply for child support grants and how to stay in school.

Children are also assisted in finding accommodation and are sometimes taken on weekends to visit with volunteer families so they can experience life in a normal family situation. This much needed life

support provides a critical protection and safety net for children and helps reduce the daily stresses imposed on their young lives.

The National Association of Child Care Workers' Isibindi programme, which now oversees some 40 project sites, develops and trains unemployed community volunteers as child and youth care workers to provide emotional support and respond to the needs of OVC. To date, it has trained 575 workers and currently provides services to over 13,000 OVC. The programme has been named a "Best Practice" model by South Africa's National Department of Social Development.

UNICEF South Africa is providing strategic technical support for scaling up the training of community-based Isibindi workers nationwide in cooperation with the Department of Social Development.

At the end of the morning's briefing and home visit, Ms. Veneman shared some heartwarming moments with a small group of Isibindi child care workers, joining them in a hearty rendition of the song, "We will never give up."

For the orphans and vulnerable children of Katlegong, that's the best news.
