

ANNUAL ISSUE

HANDS OF HOPE



NEWS LETTER

Interconneted by diversity!!!

AT A GLANCE



Our newsletter is a labor of love, brought to life through collaboration, creativity, and dedication. Each article, photo, and design element was carefully crafted by our team to share our impactful work with you. Thank you for being part of our journey!



"Dedicated EPM bringing hope and support directly to the community, ensuring no one is left behind. #FieldWork #MakingADifference"



"Hands of Hope team members enjoying a well-deserved break during their retreat trip. Recharging together to bring more passion and dedication to our mission. #TeamBonding #EmpowerTogether"



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Dear Friends, Partners, and Esteemed Colleagues,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Hands of Hope's Annual Newsletter! We are thrilled to share this new platform with you, designed to keep you informed and engaged with our work.

At Hands of Hope, our mission is to support and empower the LGBTIQ community in Zimbabwe, as well as individuals who use drugs and substances, through a range of vital programs. From HIV prevention, treatment, and care to mental health and psychosocial support, we strive to address the unique challenges faced by our communities. Our initiatives, such as community-led monitoring (CLM), socio-economic empowerment, the Free to Be Me program, and index case testing, emphasize inclusivity, advocacy, and resilience.

A society where individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities can thrive as empowered citizens, supported through capacity building, health interventions, strengthened community systems, climate justice, advocacy, economic empowerment, psychological support, and mental health services.



In this first issue, you'll find updates on our ongoing projects, personal stories from our community members, and insights into the impact of our work. We're excited to highlight the progress we've made and the plans we have for the future.

Thank you for your continued support and for joining us on this journey. Together, we are making a difference and building a brighter, more inclusive future.

Warm regards,

Norlex Chabata

DIRECTOR/FOUNDER



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EDITORIAL TEAM

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HIV INTERVENTIONS **PREVENT**

HIV PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND CARE

A Year of Progress in Preventing HIV

In partnership with Population Solutions for Health (PSH), Hands of Hope Organization (HoH) made significant strides in its HIV prevention efforts under the Preventing HIV for Sustained Epidemic Control Program. Operating across five districts Harare, Chitungwiza, Mutare, Gweru, and Masvingo the program aimed to reduce HIV transmission among Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and Female Sex Workers (FSW), ensuring better access to care, prevention, and treatment services.

Key Achievements

Despite challenges like national stockouts of HIV self-test kits, HoH surpassed many of its annual targets, demonstrating resilience and dedication:

- **MSM Outreach:** Reached over 22,000 MSM with HIV prevention messages, achieving 105% of the annual target.
- **FSW Support:** Connected 1,337 FSW to care, representing 131% of the annual goal.
- **Training and Empowerment:** Trained 37 Enhanced Peer Mobilizers to educate and support their communities.
- **Health Services:** Ensured 90% linkage to antiretroviral therapy (ART) for newly diagnosed MSM and 111% for FSW.
- **PrEP Uptake:** Facilitated access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for over 6,000 MSM and 4,000 FSW.





The Chitungwiza team: Exemplifying teamwork and dedication, collaborating seamlessly over the years to make a lasting impact. #TeamWork #SuccessTogether

Community-Driven Results

The program emphasized creating safe, stigma-free spaces for MSM and FSW to access sexual health services. These efforts were complemented by innovative approaches like reverse index testing and community outreach, which strengthened HIV case finding and prevention.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

This year wasn't without hurdles. Transport limitations in districts like Masvingo and Gweru and the prolonged HIV self-test kit stockouts posed challenges. Additionally, reaching older MSM remains difficult due to socio-economic barriers and insecurity.

However, collaboration with public health facilities and stakeholders like the National AIDS Council (NAC) proved invaluable. These partnerships allowed HoH to overcome resource gaps and extend its reach, showcasing the power of

Looking Ahead

Building on this year's progress, HoH is committed to scaling up evidence-based prevention strategies and enhancing its referral systems. Upcoming initiatives include promoting targeted testing through social media to reach underserved populations and strengthening community linkages for HIV case finding.

A Heartfelt Thanks

We extend our gratitude to the dedicated district teams and partners whose efforts have driven this year's achievements. Together, we are empowering communities and transforming lives through HIV prevention and care

INDEX CASE TESTING

Driving Change in HIV Testing and Treatment

The Hands of Hope Organization, with support from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), successfully implemented the Mutare District Index Case Testing (ICT) program from October 2023 to September 2024. The program's mission was clear: increase HIV testing, diagnosis, and access to treatment for those in need, ultimately reducing the spread of HIV within the district. The program focused on testing contacts of individuals (indices) who were already HIV-positive, targeting three public health facilities—Dangamvura Clinic, Sakubva Clinic, and Victoria Chitepo Hospital. Through the tireless efforts of the team, including Community Linkage Assistants (CLAs) and AHF clinical staff, the results exceeded expectations across several key performance areas.

Key Achievements:

- **Surpassing Targets:** A total of 427 indices were reached, a remarkable 190% achievement against the annual target of 225.

- **Contact Testing Success:** Out of 936 contacts tested for HIV (277% of the annual target), 162 tested HIV-positive, indicating a positivity rate of 17%.
- **Linking Contacts to Care:** While 80 HIV-positive contacts were successfully initiated on antiretroviral therapy (ART), further improvements are needed to address the linkage gap.
- **HIV Prevention:** For those testing HIV-negative, 198 individuals were successfully linked to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), achieving 71% of the target.

Facility Highlights:

- Dangamvura Clinic led the way, achieving 299% of its contact testing target and identifying 53 HIV-positive individuals.
- Sakubva Clinic performed exceptionally, surpassing its contact testing target by 311% and achieving a 22% HIV positivity rate among contacts.
- Victoria Chitepo Hospital, though facing unique challenges, contributed with a positivity rate of 27% among tested contacts.



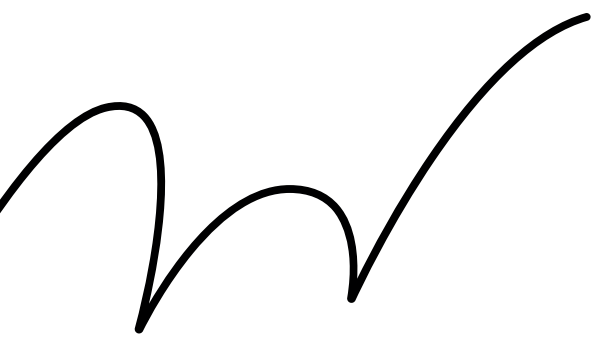
"Index case testing is a powerful strategy in our fight against HIV, allowing us to identify and support at-risk individuals swiftly, ensuring no one is left behind in our journey towards a healthier, more informed community."

Overcoming Challenges: The program's success was not without hurdles. Limited transportation resources, stigma, and the preference for community-based care over static health facilities contributed to a 51% gap in linking HIV-positive contacts to treatment. Additionally, the program faced logistical challenges in reaching patients residing outside Mutare district.

The Way Forward: To build on these successes, the program recommends investing in clinical staff and vehicles to deliver differentiated service delivery—bringing HIV care directly to patients' homes. Strengthening collaboration with health facilities outside Mutare will also enhance the program's reach and impact.

The Mutare District Index Case Testing program has proven that with targeted interventions, dedicated teams, and robust partnerships, significant strides can be made in the fight against HIV. Hands of Hope and AHF remain committed to ensuring no one is left behind in accessing life-saving care and support.

Together, we can achieve an HIV-free future



COMMUNITY LED MONITORING

Letting communities
lead!

Community-led monitoring is a form of public oversight, ideally driven by local information needs and community values, to increase accountability with the main goal of improving the quality of HIV services. The PEPFAR-UNAIDS-funded program sought to put people living with HIV and key population communities at risk at the center. It also sought to identify barriers to achieving the 2025 AIDS targets 95-95-95. The program involved diverse community members as Community Health Advocates (CHA's) in 2 implemented districts which are Gweru urban and Masvingo urban districts. These community members have been at the forefront of advocacy since the program's inception in October 2022. Under the Gweru urban district Hands of Hope (HoH) supported 6 facilities which are Totonga Clinic, Monomotapa Clinic, Senga Clinic, Mkoba 1 Clinic, Mkoba Poly Clinic, and New Start Centre. While in the Masvingo district, we supported 6 facilities namely, Mucheke Clinic, Northwest Medical Centre, Bere Clinic, Nemamwa Clinic, Rujeko Clinic, and New Start Centre.

The program monitored the 5A's (Availability of services, medicines, and commodities, Accessibility of the clinic and services offered for all community members in their diversity, Acceptability of services, that are free from stigma and discrimination, Affordability of services and Appropriateness of services which are tailor-made to the specific needs of different key population groups). This was achieved through data collection for data-driven advocacy at the facility level, district, and provincial level. Through the support from PEPFAR-UNAIDS, Hands of Hope successfully empowered and capacitated community health advocates through training on identifying barriers and advocacy, and were also supported with tablets for data collection and bicycles for commuting to all parts of their catchment area.



"Community-led monitoring empowers individuals to take charge of their futures, ensuring transparency, accountability, and sustainable progress driven by those who know their needs best."

HoH had several engagement meetings with community members through focus group discussions and community accountability meetings in order to hear the concerns of the service users about the treatment and attitudes they experience when they visit the clinic. Engagement meetings helped in getting an in-depth understanding of the issues or barriers as well as recommendations for improvements from the community perspective.

Through strategic and important partnerships with stakeholders like the Ministry of Health and Child Care, National AIDS Council, Masvingo City Health Department, and Gweru City Health Department among other important stakeholders CLM managed to bring to the table identified barriers such as staff shortages, viral load services challenges, staff friendliness issues among others to be resolved or partially resolved. This allowed community members to be served timeously, improved communication between community members and service providers, the realization of enhanced privacy, and improved viral load services such as turnaround period.



"Mental health is not a destination but a journey, and every step taken with support and understanding brings us closer to a healthier, happier life."

The organisation believes in the importance of community and family engagement in mental health interventions. Our programs are designed to support the whole family, promoting a holistic approach to mental health care. The importance of care-givers in supporting those in need of care is one of the priorities of the organisation's mental health and psycho-social program.

Challenges and Successes

While we have made significant strides in supporting 63 individuals and families affected by mental health issues. Hands of Hope faces challenges in mobilizing financial resources to sustain the program and in finding rehabilitation places for those requiring institutional care. Despite these challenges, our systematic desensitization and problem-solving therapies have yielded a high success rate. We are proud of our strong linkages with clinical social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, who have been instrumental in our success.

Impact and Achievements

In 2024, we have:

- Supported 63 individuals, with 21 of these being drug and substance use recipients of care, along with their families.
- Provided training to partner organizations, building their capacity to respond to drug and substance use.
- Strengthened our referral network, including partnerships with PSH and other organizations.
- Strengthened our team of professional counselors from one to two people.

Future plans

As we look to the future, we plan to:

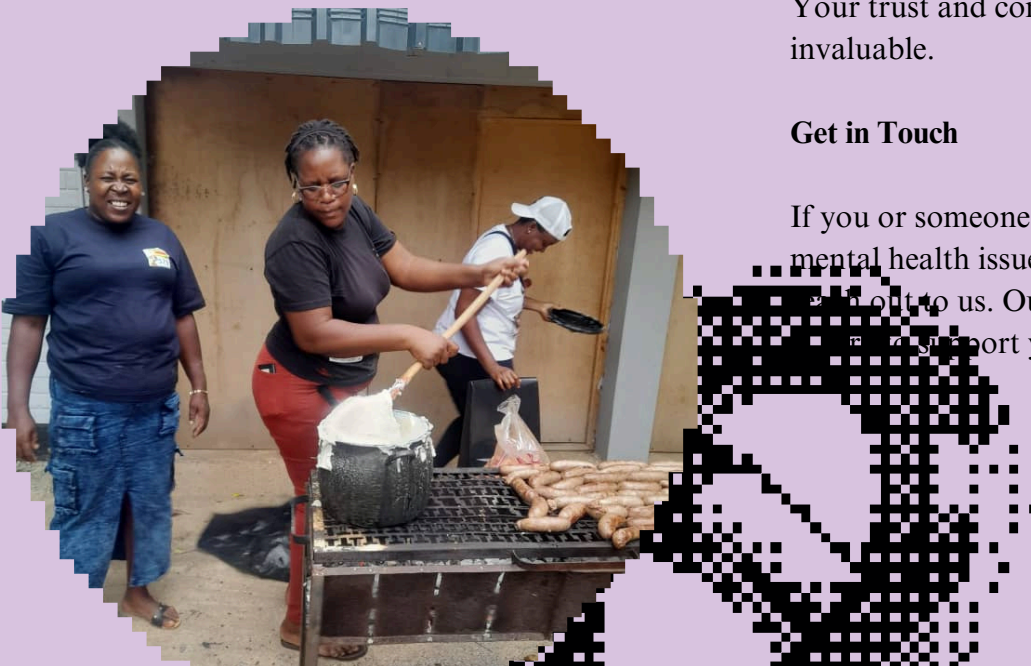
- Train district teams to provide general mental health and psycho-social support.
- Strengthen linkages with local government health facilities to ensure a comprehensive approach to mental health care.
- Mobilize resources to conduct support groups and provide appropriate sustainable care.

A message of gratitude

Hands of Hope extends its gratitude to our partners, and supporters who have enabled us to continue providing vital mental health services. Your trust and commitment to our mission are invaluable.

Get in Touch

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issues, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. Our doors are open, and our team is here to support you.



MENTAL HEALTH

Supporting mental health for all!!

At my lowest point, I felt lost and hopeless, but the counselors at Hands of Hope showed me compassion, understanding and support. Their non-judgmental approach helped me confront my demons and work towards recovery” – JahBee

Today I am proud to say that I’ve completed my treatment program and am walking out of here for the last time as a new person. I’m grateful for the strong support system I’ve built, and I know I can face any challenge that comes my way” – Cynso

“Thanks to Hands of Hope for being a beacon of hope. Thank you once again for believing in me and giving me a second chance at life” – Zakha

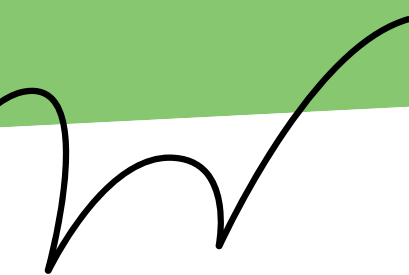


The above testimonials bear witness to the experiences of different people who accessed mental health and psycho-social support services through Hands of Hope’s Apollo Network program. Hands of Hope reflects on 2024, and is proud to share the progress made in supporting mental health services, particularly for key populations and the general population alike. The Apollo Network remains committed to providing a safe, non-judgmental space for individuals and families affected by mental health issues.

Responding to the rise in mental health, drug and substance use

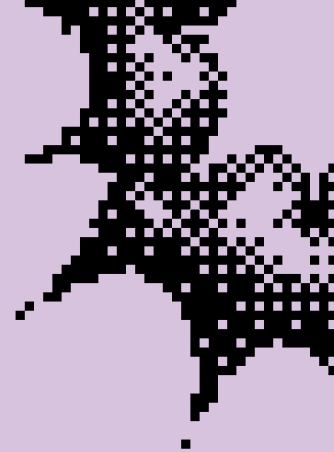
2024 has seen a concerning surge in mental health challenges that are related to stigma and discrimination cases; intimate partner and gender based violence; blackmailing; drug and substance use cases, among others, particularly among young people in their diversity. Hands of Hope has witnessed an increase in walk-ins, often with family members seeking help together. Our harm reduction and problem solving approaches, combined with strong referral linkages with government hospitals, psychiatric units, has enabled us to provide comprehensive support.

FREE TO BE ME





CHAMPIONS OF THE YEAR



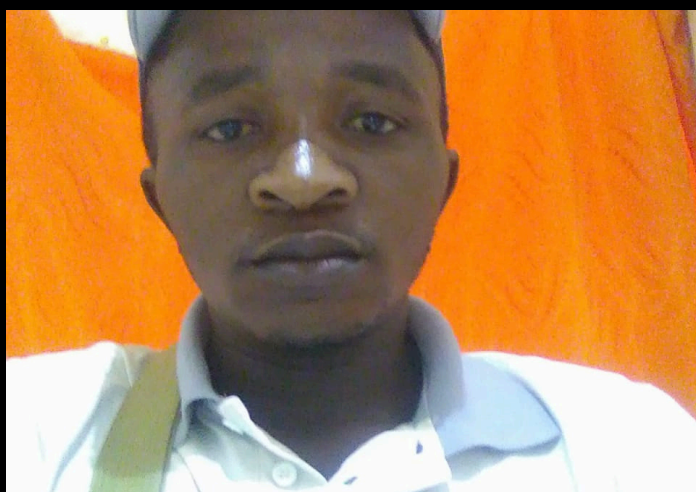
By **Margarita Perez**
Photography by **Francois Mercer**

A short intro or kicker of the article will go here. This part acts as a bridge between the headline and the article itself.



John Joni

"Working with Hands of Hope has empowered me in ways I never imagined. Every day, I am inspired by the strength of our community and the impact we are making together. This job isn't just work; it's my passion, and I love being part of such a transformative journey."

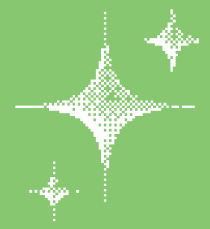


Shelter Dombo

Being an EPM with Hands of Hope has been a life-changing experience. I've grown both personally and professionally, and I'm honored to be part of a team that truly makes a difference. Empowering our community and witnessing positive changes every day is incredibly fulfilling. This is more than a job—it's a mission I'm proud to contribute to."

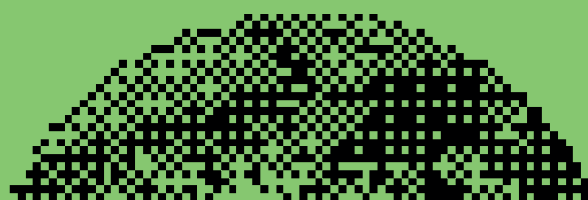


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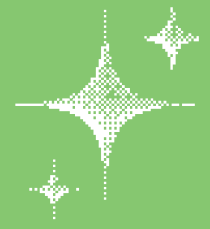


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- DEPENDENCE
- RECOVERY
- VAPING
- WITHDRAWAL
- STIMULANT
- MARIJUANA
- ADDICTION
- DEPRESSANT
- STEROIDS
- ABUSE
- DETOXIFICATION
- NICOTINE
- HALLUCINATION
- INTOXICATED
- OVERDOSE
- ALCOHOLISM



DIGITAL SECURITY 101



Hey there, tech-savvy friends! 🌐🌟

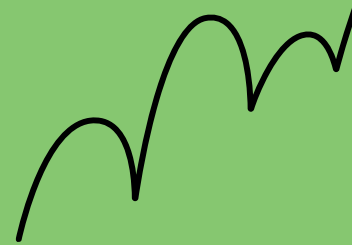
In today's digital age, staying safe online is more important than ever. Here are some fun and easy tips to help you navigate the digital world securely:

1. Update, Update, Update! 🔄 Keep your devices and apps updated. Those pesky updates often come with security patches that keep the bad guys out.
2. Strong Passwords Only! 🗝️ Use strong, unique passwords for all your accounts. Think of it as your digital lock and key—make it tough to crack!
3. Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) 📱 Add an extra layer of security by enabling 2FA. It's like having a secret handshake with your devices.
4. Be Wary of Links and Attachments 📧 Think twice before clicking on links or downloading attachments from unknown sources. They could be traps set by cybercriminals.

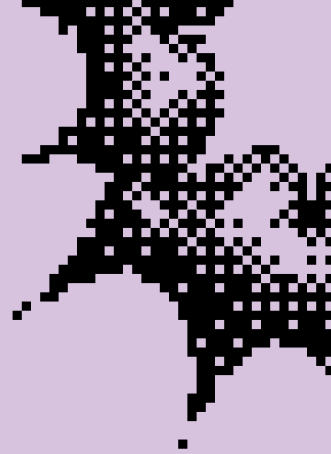
1. Private Browsing Mode 🕶️ Use private browsing or incognito mode to keep your online activities under wraps. It's like having a cloak of invisibility!
2. VPN Power-Up 🌐 Use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to encrypt your internet connection. It's like having a secret tunnel for your data.
3. Backup Your Data 📁 Regularly back up your important files. It's like having a safety net in case something goes wrong.
4. Stay Informed 📰 Keep up with the latest digital security news and trends. Knowledge is power, and staying informed helps you stay ahead of the game.

Remember, staying safe online is a journey, not a destination. Keep these tips in mind, and you'll be well on your way to becoming a digital security superhero!

Stay safe and happy browsing! 🌈💻



CLOSING REMARKS



As we wrap up our inaugural issue of the Hands of Hope Annual Newsletter, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to each of you. Your unwavering support and dedication drive our mission forward, empowering us to make a tangible difference in the lives of the LGBTIQ community and individuals affected by drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe.

Through your generosity and collaboration, we have achieved significant milestones in HIV prevention, treatment, and care, mental health and psychosocial support, socio-economic empowerment, and community-led monitoring. Together, we continue to build a more inclusive, resilient, and empowered community.

Thank you for being a part of our journey. We look forward to sharing more stories of hope, progress, and impact in the issues to come. Until then, stay safe, stay connected, and remember that together, we are stronger.

Warm regards,

Hands of Hope team





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