**THUSANANG’S SELF HELP GROUP PROJECT**

**Introduction**

Thušanang aims to create sustainable community based Early Childhood Development (ECD) services and strengthened families in the Capricorn, Mopani and Vhembe districts of Limpopo. Our core focus is the development and well-being of the young child. The majority of our activities are conducted through community-based ECD centres where we reach the communities through the ECD practitioners, committees and parents.

Many parents and grandparents, especially in the deep rural areas, are made vulnerable by poverty and the impact of HIV and AIDS. The Self Help Group (SHG) Approach as well as the various parent programmes we run, hopes to build capacity of women in particular so that they feel empowered to play an important role in their families and communities in general. Thušanang’s SHG project was started with a group of women who had attended a Parent Capacity Building Programme and has developed from there. Roughly half of the current groups meet at an ECD centre but the project has developed to include other members of the communities who are not necessarily linked to the ECD centres that we are involved with.

**Project Description: The Self Help Group Approach**

Self Help Groups are an informal association of women in a community with a common objective of working together for their economic and social development.

This project is currently taking place in four different areas. There are four community facilitators who live in those areas, assisting with the project. Support is given to the community facilitators by the Thušanang staff through training, on-site visits and monthly meetings. The SHG Approach is based on that developed in India over the last four decades. Thušanang has a Memorandum of Understanding with Sinamandla for the use of their materials. We attend workshops and forum meetings at Sinamandla and are mentored and assisted by them.

Objective

* To empower individual women to take control over their lives and develop self reliance.
* Build capacity and increase the self-confidence of individual women in the group.
* Increase individual household income and savings.
* Increase in personal support from a group of women in a sharing and caring environment.
* Increase the awareness of household and community needs.
* To have a voice within the household and community and the ability to make decisions
* To increase the ability to care for and meet the basic needs of their children and grandchildren.
* To help women to realise their potential as individuals through a savings and loans system whereby group members save from their own meagre resources and administer their own fund.

Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries are rural women of similar economic background. Each self help group comprises of 15 – 20 women. There are currently +/- 800 women of various ages participating in the programme from 40 different groups. It is estimated that a further 10 groups will be formed in 2019/20. This will mean that +/- 1 000 women will benefit directly from this project. Indirect beneficiaries will be their immediate families and in time, the community at large.

Activities

* New SHGs to be formed. This involves meetings in the community, a village “walk through” and home visits and the involvement of community leaders.
* Training the new SHG members on:
* the SHG concept
* the structure of a SHG and responsibilities of the members
* conducting a SHG meeting – rules and regulations
* savings, loans and credit management
* development of small income generating activities
* communication skills
* leadership
* conflict management and problem solving
* The formation of another Cluster Level Associations (CLA). These are made up of selected members of existing SHGs.
* Training the members of the newly formed CLAs.
* Train a new Community Facilitator to expand the programme.
* Monthly meetings held at Thušanang with the five community facilitators.
* On-going support to community facilitators and SHGs and the new CLAs.
* Support, training and assistance with setting up small income generating activities.
* Collect and maintain data on the SHGs
* Exchange visits between SHGs
* Parent information sharing sessions – including HIV and AIDS Awareness.
* Hold a Learning and Sharing Event at the Thušanang Centre for representatives of all of the SHGs.