

Developing a workplace programme

The experiences of Ticharwa Masimira of MASO, Zimbabwe



Ticharwa Masimira

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It all started with one of our funders, GTZ Zimbabwe, inviting their partners to a workplace policy development workshop to share ideas on how to respond to HIV/AIDS from the perspective of an AIDS Service Organization (ASO). At that time Midlands AIDS Service Organisation (MASO), given its experience with an HIV-positive employee, was already toying with the idea of drafting a policy to respond better to the situation, the future, and HIV/AIDS education and awareness for all staff.

We also realized that while programme staff were fully knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS issues, challenges and implications, non-programme staff like drivers, secretaries and administrative staff had a number of knowledge gaps, which needed to be addressed. About the same time, staff were beginning to worry about their future should they be infected. All these issues motivated us to develop a workplace programme and policy.



At the time we hired Frank Guni, a man who was openly living with HIV, there had been an outcry nationally from people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs) and other stakeholders over the need for ASOs to 'walk the talk' by openly creating jobs and employing PLWHAs. It had been argued that doing so would send a positive message about the good intentions of ASOs. On the other hand, PLWHAs themselves felt this would open doors for them to share practical experiences on living with HIV/AIDS with both the infected and affected. Frank had initially been co-opted as a member of our executive board and later as an employee serving as coordinator of our Community Home-based Care Programme. In employing him, we looked at both his

HIV status and qualifications including his experience having worked for the Red Cross Society in Zimbabwe.

Our major expectation from Frank besides being suitably qualified and experienced was to practice what we preached by showing the community that this could be done. In addition, this was our way of fighting the stigma and discrimination associated at that time (1996) with embracing PLWHAs. When I first mentioned my intention to hire an HIV-positive person, there was some uneasiness from some staff initially. However, following discussions with all concerned, Frank was accepted easily into the organization. Fears of the unknown, in this case 'getting infected by him,' were

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dispelled by education. When I took the decision to employ him I expected some resistance because this was a new development for not only MASO but other organizations in Zimbabwe as well.

Learnings and lessons

In developing a workplace programme, we researched and exchanged information with others including attending workshops. Assisted by the Programme Manager and the Chairperson of the Board, I started the programme in 2004. Following conscientization on the importance of prevention, the staff became committed because they knew that their enhanced knowledge

Resources on internal mainstreaming

VSO Mainstreaming Guide

2004 (40 p)



A manual especially developed for VSO programme offices but also useful for other organizations. The guide is divided into two main sections. The first provides background information on the concept of mainstreaming, including a model developed by VSO staff. The second section outlines the six stages for mainstreaming HIV/AIDS, as set out in the model.

www.vso.org.uk/textonly/Images/mainstreaming_guide_tcm9-4795.pdf

Charting the road from policy development to implementation

Processes, experiences and lessons from southern Africa
(DVD & Users' Guide)

Oxfam/CARE, 2006



While there are an increasing number of resources on how to develop HIV/AIDS workplace policies, less has been documented and shared on the actual workings and practical issues of policy implementation, be it from an NGO or private sector point of view. Oxfam has partnered with CARE USA in southern Africa in documenting workplace policy implementation in the form of a DVD with actual interviews of staff, managers and service providers and users. The DVD is broken down into a number of chapters – background and policy formulation; policy implementation; challenges; and work in progress – giving the viewer freedom to choose whichever area interests him/her. The DVD will be accompanied with a Users' Guide that will include copies of documentation developed by each agency. This resource targets any manager involved in developing and managing human resources, in the NGO, public or private sector. It will be available on the market from March/April 2006.

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would help them to become peer educators to their friends, relatives and the community at large. Their response to the workplace programme was as if they were being taught what they already knew, only to discover that there was a lot more to learn. My personal lessons learned from the whole experience were:

- that a leader must take decisive action regardless of the outcome,
- that we must not be prejudiced as this closes windows of opportunity,
- that a leader can be pivotal to influencing 'courage, change and acceptance' to other staff in dealing with fear, stigma and discrimination.

The setting-up of workplace policies is a new development in Zimbabwe with AIDS Service Organizations coming up with their own documents. MASO also has a

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written policy. One of the main things we have learned is that developing and having this policy is not the end. It is the implementation part in terms of resources that is difficult, especially as it relates to extra payment to cover AIDS-related costs. The programme implementation can easily be integrated into organizational activities, resources permitting. However, provision of extra resources is the only solution as part of the overall budget needs.

I believe that our workplace policy and programme could be improved by learning and exchanging information and practices with other organizations. We also have a need for hiring experts/consultants to assist us to improve on what we are currently implementing. ■

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