

The combined tour finished in Cape Town, South Africa. You entered from the NE, but if you had taken Highway #2 from the SE you would have passed right through Khayelitsha, a low socioeconomic area approximately 20 km outside Cape Town, home to about 850 000 people. Homes are either brick structures or shacks or a combination of both. You could also cycle an additional 220 km all along the coast to visit Khayelitsha: <https://cycloscope.net/cycling-cape-town-bike-tour-western-cape>.



GAPA – Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (<http://www.gapa.org.za/>) - started in Khayelitsha and spread throughout South Africa, then to **Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Kenya!** GAPA was started in 2001 as part of a research project by the Institute of Ageing in Africa at the University of Cape Town. An occupational therapist organised workshops and support groups for grandmothers who were affected by the HIV&AIDS pandemic. The interventions were designed to meet the needs described by grandmothers who were part of the study. Grandmothers felt that the information and support they received was too valuable to end with the completion of the pilot program so they formed a committee with the occupational therapist, Kathleen Brodrick, and made plans to spread the information and support to others. They have been very successful at spreading this simple but critical model based on two prongs: education and psychosocial support. The board consists of community members and people committed to the development of grandmothers holding together families affected by HIV & AIDS and poverty.

GAPA has been very responsive as grandmothers continued to identify their needs. Each month GAPA runs an Indaba (meeting), whereby newcomers learn and members speak about current affairs affecting their communities. A local radio station, Radio Zibonele, broadcasts GAPA workshops, reaching a far larger number of community members.

Area representatives recruit emotionally vulnerable grandmothers to join the support groups that they run in their homes once a week (pre-Covid). Here the grandmothers meet others who have family members infected with HIV or who have died from AIDS complications. The group leader counsels them and teaches them about HIV&AIDS. Through the peer support they gradually come to terms with their losses and take charge of their lives. These groups consist often of up to 20 grandmothers. Once emotionally stable, they form cooperative groups more focused on income generation.

Handicrafts made in the income generation groups are often sold within the township. Grandmothers are encouraged to create their own markets and to make items that are wanted by their communities. GAPA has a store on the grounds of its multipurpose centre. In some places, grandmothers have produced items in large numbers for companies.

There is a vegetable garden shared by the Khayelitsha GAPA Centre and the nearby school. Numerous toddlers at group meetings highlighted the fact that their grandmothers could not afford to send them to preschool. Some applications to



sponsors allowed them to send dozens of children to pre-school. This aspect of GAPA's intervention strategy has proved to be very popular and gives grandmothers a real boost to know that they can send their young grandchildren to a safe and stimulating environment while they have some time to themselves. In 2006, 145 children attended preschool through bursaries given by GAPA. The SLF sponsored 89 of these. Shortly after this initiative began, the need for primary school aftercare, especially for certain vulnerable children, was noted by their school heads, and GAPA responded with an aftercare program that now includes hundreds of children.

From a South African grandmother via *Powered by Love*: "Through GAPA I received training on how to care for my grandson and also they provided counselling sessions for the children. My grandson went to help him deal with the loss of his mother. They told him, "Write everything about your mum, how you feel," and at the end of the session he was asked to place a picture of his mum on that letter. And he chose a picture of me and his mum to place on it. That touched my heart so deep, I can't really explain. I guess on that day I felt like my grief was also coming to an end."



Week 4. You ended your official stage tour in Cape Town, South Africa. You entered from the NE, but if you had taken Highway #2 from the SE you would have passed right through Khayelitsha, a low socioeconomic area approximately 20 km outside Cape Town, home to about 850 000 people. Homes are either brick structures or shacks or a combination of both. You could also cycle an additional 220 km all along the coast to visit Khayelitsha: <https://cycloscope.net/cycling-cape-town-bike-tour-western-cape>.



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Week 3. The South African Grandmothers Gathering in Durban - Never silent. Let's time travel to 2016, as we cycle into Durban, on South Africa's east coast. Imagine ourselves riding alongside a throng of grandmothers singing and dancing their way into a crowded conference hall for the 2016 International AIDS Conference. One poster acknowledging the first Conference in Atlanta Georgia in 1985 catches my eye. The caption - 'SILENCE = DEATH' was shouted by AIDS activists in front of 2,000 gathered scientists. There are 2,000 grandmothers here today to deliver their message to the international community – "*You have overlooked us for far too long! Remember: Nothing About Us, Without Us!*"

Mama Darlina Tyawana, wearing a brightly coloured t-shirt with the powerful Grandmothers Gathering logo - two fists clasped together in solidarity and a third raised defiantly in the air - takes the stage while International AIDS Conference Co-Chairs Chris Beyrer and Olive Shisana look on. **She speaks about** concerns of grandmothers tasked with raising a whole generation of orphaned children: food security; lack of training; long walks to clinics where they wait only to be told that there is no medication. "Violence is a constant threat, whether it is rape and assault on our bodies, or physical abuse and intimidation from family members and loan sharks who are after our small savings." She demands that government help nurture these children and youth, who will lead Africa out of the AIDS pandemic. We are among proud Canadian Grandmothers bearing witness. South African Grandmothers around us raise signs demanding that their human rights be recognized and their voices be heard. The collective sound of their voices – raised in song and indignation – is unignorable. Finally, we burst with pride when Mama Darlina Tyawana extends special thanks to members of the **Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign**, and of **Canada's Labour Union Movement**. She presents an unsuspecting government official with a statement prepared by South African grandmothers.



Part of Statement (read the entire statement here:

<https://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/news-resources/grassroots-newsletter/fall-2016/4> or on pages 276-77 of *Powered by Love*, or watch Mama Darlina deliver it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Muz4Q8ZIU3I>).

For years, we have struggled to raise our grandchildren, and hold together our families and communities. We came together in groups, supported by our community-based organizations, and found strength in unity. Our love has transformed the devastation of AIDS. We thought we were doing our duty. We knew we were demonstrating our love. In fact, we were raising a nation.

And we are not alone. Grandmothers across Africa have been gathering for the past 10 years. From Canada, to Swaziland, to Uganda and now in South Africa, we have moved from mourning to a movement. We have been doing our part, and have become experts on how to survive and thrive in the midst of the AIDS pandemic. It takes so much more than ARVs to resurrect a community. South African grandmothers spent two days together in Durban as the world prepares for the International AIDS

Conference, 2016. Today we come to insist that we receive increased support and to have our expertise counted.

Our country created protections for grandmothers. There are pensions, foster care grants and stipends for home-based care workers. To see these measures put in place to protect our rights, gave us hope that our burden would be less heavy. But they are not working. When it can take years for a foster care grant to be processed, when grandmothers have to travel long distances to visit government offices who turn them away again and again, when pensions are hopelessly inadequate and don't start until 60, then we are dealing with a system that is in desperate need of change.

As older women, we face challenges that are still ignored. The health system is failing us and HIV+ grandmothers have special needs that are not met. We wait in lines at clinics for hours, meet with healthcare workers who are often uncaring and do not have the medication we need. Violence is a constant threat, whether it is rape and assault on our bodies, or physical abuse and intimidation from family members and loan sharks who are after our small savings. We suffer without protection. And when we look to Parliament, there is no one who stands for our interests, no one who speaks for us. We are pillars of our communities, and we live our lives as examples, we are caring for so many children, but who is caring for us?

We will continue to struggle, and we will not give up the fight against HIV & AIDS. We will never give up because this grandmothers movement is powered by love. Amandla!



Let's think about these gogos as we spend the remaining two weeks of our Cycle Tour riding through South Africa.



Week 2.

The Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust (HACT)

HACT, founded in 1990, is a registered non-profit organization dedicated to dealing with the HIV and AIDS epidemic by means of **holistic, multifaceted** and **sustainable** interventions, including **prevention, care, community empowerment** and **community outreach**. [Editorial comment from Laurie: Read that sentence again! If we could get western health care practitioners to prioritize these same things, what a wonderful world it would be. These CBOs have it figured out!]



SLF community-based partners, like Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust (South Africa), are adapting to ensure community members have access to health and nutrition supports during restrictions to movement and market closures due to COVID-19 responses. Photos provided by Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust.

The Centre is located in Durban, the third most populous city in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. Durban, including neighbouring towns, has a population of about 3.44 million, making the combined municipality one of

the largest on the Indian coast of the African Continent. The province shares borders with 3 other provinces and the countries of Mozambique, Eswatini and Lesotho.

HACT was one of the first NGOs in South Africa to respond to the HIV and AIDS epidemic and has established a reputation for making significant and meaningful impact on the lives of people infected and affected by the disease. The Centre primarily focuses on serving semi-rural and disadvantaged communities of the 1,000 Hills region of KwaZulu-Natal, one of the epicentres of the global HIV and AIDS epidemic with HIV-infection rates of up to 40% - more than double the national average of 20%.

HACT adopts a holistic, family-centred and asset-based approach to tackling HIV and AIDS, striving to deliver practical, sustainable and community-led projects and services. This approach empowers families and communities to reach their potential and enables them to assist in the growth and development of the country. Focus areas include:

- HIV Education and Prevention, HIV Health Care, HIV Support
- Care for and empowerment of at-risk groups such as orphaned and vulnerable children and grandmothers
- Economic Empowerment
- HACT BIZ – established to increase sustainability as providing skills training and employment opportunities for the people served.

Proactive steps taken due to the COVID pandemic include a prevention education campaign on site and within communities, modelling good hygiene, staying home if sick, reminding immunocompromised people of the special risks to them, the importance of continuing with anti-retroviral treatment and the need for social distancing. In addition, sanitation, hygiene and infection control measures have been further tightened in the Respite Unit with the Centre off limits to groups of visitors and external groups.

References: *Powered By Love*

<https://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/assets/files/SLF-Spotlight-on-Grassroots-Spring2020.pdf>

Check out this 16-sec slide show on FB if you can: <https://www.facebook.com/280100765363756/videos/223843969052225>



Week 1. Swaziland Positive Living (SWAPOL) was co-founded and directed by Siphewe Hlophe and four other HIV-positive women in 2004 as a mutual support group to deal with the stigma and discrimination they were facing, and it now has 5,700 members in 45 communities, and a mobile clinic.

Siphewe Hlophe loves Stephen Lewis because one day he told the king of Swaziland that she was more important than he was. "What kind of man is this?" she asked! When Stephen Lewis, acting as special envoy to the secretary-general of the United Nation, visited her and her people in Swaziland, the prime minister of that country had called Lewis, asking him to abandon his plans and come to the palace immediately, the King had requested him. Hlophe heard Lewis ask: "Is the King leaving the country, no, then tell him to wait, I'm coming," Hlophe cries out, still laughing at the indiscretion. "You know, I love that man (Lewis)."

"When Stephen said we'll continue to meet with the women with the ideas, I was so excited," said Hlophe.

So, they went off to see the agricultural projects that SWAPOL has created.

"He turned to me and said, 'I am going to Ghana tomorrow, but I am so touched I have for you a cheque for 30,000 American dollars.' I was running up and down, I was so excited," she laughs.

Up to that point, her operation was running out of the back seat of her car. Now it had an office and a computer and plans for expansion.



Siphewe Hlophe, organizer of the first African Grandmothers' Gathering and March, cheers on her fellow grandmothers in Manzini, Swaziland on May 8, 2010. (Ricki Horowitz)

SWAPOL helps develop projects like medical care, sourcing nutritious food and developing community safety. They find medical aid for those who are sick and they look after the orphans who are left behind. They have expanded to incorporate projects like community gardens and creating small businesses.

When grandmothers tested positive they continued to offer themselves as public models of how one could live openly and well with HIV. This was radical behaviour that required exceptional courage and leadership. As a result, a new type of trust was built between grandmothers and their communities. They offered a safe space and the first point of counselling for many. Their homes, which

had started as havens for their children and grandchildren, became destinations for others with nowhere else to turn. Thulisile, a SWAPOL volunteer, shares: "I find that people are coming here for counselling and support and to ask me about private matters. Some come here and present rashes or other symptoms and they will ask me what I think it is. I know they are too afraid or ashamed to talk to anyone else. That is when I get an opportunity to talk to them about HIV, about knowing their status and the best way to approach it."

As the years have progressed grandmothers all over sub-Saharan Africa are becoming the growing voice of experience and authority on how community programs in tandem with medication are the only solution for successful treatment.

"Our grannies have changed so much. When we first started to work with them it was because they were the ones in our communities that were the most desperate and needed the most help. For those who have been in groups all these years, they are now the people we work with who are the most advanced, who have the most to offer their communities." says Cecile Dlamini, program co-ordinator, SWAPOL, Swaziland.

Information taken from: stephenlewisfoundation.org and *Powered by Love*

