



## **Lessons learned from nimble adaptations to organisations' responses to the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of adolescents in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.**

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**Country: South Africa**

### **Footprints Foundation**

*Footprints Foundation is a national non-profit organization that implements school-based programs with a strategic focus on enabling educational access to our targeted beneficiaries, mostly in rural or previously disadvantaged urban communities. The organization's vision is to empower lives. The mission is to achieve this by implementing educational programs for learners, whether children, women, or youth hailing from communities who would otherwise not have access to that education. The Foundation's objectives include job creation, skills training, career planning, and development of communities through activities such as workshops. Our offices are based in Johannesburg, but we work in eight provinces, thereby having a strong national footprint.*

### **Were you delivering services to young people before the COVID-19 crisis?**

The Foundation has been delivering the service to young people before the pandemic. Our programs were designed to reach girls and boys in rural communities across the country. We typically reach between 15,000 to 30,000 beneficiaries. Girl learners, in particular, make up at least 75% of the Foundation's direct beneficiaries. This group benefits the most from the following programs:

**AKGIS (Always Keeping Girls in School):** Donation of sanitary pads, career guidance, and facilitation of puberty education.

**Dear African Girl Journal:** Compilation of inspirational personal stories from leading African women that motivate school-going girls and young professionals on how to succeed themselves. So far, three editions of the journals have been compiled, released, printed, and donated to at least 5,000 girl learners in Limpopo, North West, and Gauteng province. In October 2020, we gave away 200 more journals through our social media platforms.

**WASH Model Program:** Based on the UN's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene principles regarding toilet facilities in schools, we have donated hygiene products to ten schools in Taung, North West, and built our first ever WASH Model toilet in Limpopo at Sasekani High School.

**Dignity Packs Program:** Donation of school uniforms, cosmetic and hygiene products to underprivileged learners. At least 500 learners in five schools in the West Rand received school uniforms and dignity packs.

## ***What new approaches did you use to respond to the barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic to reach young people?***

Given that the abovementioned programs were disrupted by the COVID-19-motivated closure of schools, we arranged for Footprints Foundation beneficiaries to come to school for pick-up of food parcels and dignity packs.

To do so, we entered into new partnerships with different government departments and institutions: the Department of Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities (DWYPD), the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Gauteng Social Development as well as the Seriti Institute— an NGO working towards the eradication of poverty. New approaches were developed through the South African Coalition for Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (SACMHM) under the auspices of the DWYPD. Joint efforts were proposed to fundraise and address the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The DWYPD, which chairs the SACMHM, identified additional key partners to support the provision of dignity packs. These partners included UNFPA, WaterAid, as well as Footprints Foundation. DWYPD provided permits to the partners, including Footprints Foundation so that we could provide essential services, including the delivery of menstrual health and hygiene products. A list was also obtained from DWYPD on the support required for shelters, facilities with persons with disabilities, and child and youth health care centres.

## ***Why did you decide to use these approaches?***

The COVID-19 crisis brought new challenges to citizens, the government, and all stakeholders. Schools were closed in March 2020, and lockdown regulations brought a new set of challenges for programs that are implemented in schools, such as the AKGIS program. The partnerships helped us to access, navigate and work towards a common goal because of the protracted school closures, which left many girls and young women who are beneficiaries of these programs without the ability to manage their menstrual health and hygiene in a dignified way. In addition, support was sought for food parcels as many of these girls and young women are part of the school nutrition program and therefore had to also address food security issues.

## ***How are you working to find out if these approaches are having the desired impact?***

SACMHM created a platform where all partners can share their impact. Our delivery model also has a monitoring framework that allows us to track our reach and the areas in which we operate. To date, we have reached 14,573 girls across 115 schools and donated 42,720 packs of sanitary pads in seven provinces. By the end of October 2020, we expect to have reached a further 5,909 girls and donated an additional 17,728 packs of sanitary towels.

## ***Footprints Foundation***

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