



**CAP**



**COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES  
TO ADVOCACY**

Part 2

# Advocacy through Community Engagement

## Acknowledgements

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## What is CAP?

The Child Advocacy Project (CAP) is funded by the Department of International Development in the UK (DFID) through ChildHope UK. CAP is a joint project of the CINDI Network, implemented by Built Environment Support Group (BESG) Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) and the Child and Family Welfare Society of Pietermaritzburg (CWS). CAP has completed a three year cycle of implementation in areas within the Msunduzi (Pietermaritzburg) Municipality, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. While South Africa has many progressive policies relating to the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children, there are serious challenges in the implementation of these policies. Due to this, the rates of abuse, exploitation and neglect of children are very high. In regions such as KwaZulu-Natal the situation is further compounded by the high incidence of HIV and AIDS and the lack of appropriate support services. As a result, CAP's objective has been to enable children, their families and caregivers affected or infected by HIV and AIDS, as well as other vulnerable children, to access their rights in relation to health, housing and welfare. To this end, CAP is geared towards developing strategies based on innovative approaches emerging from partners specialising in relevant fields relating to children's rights. These partners have been able to pilot and review the creative new approaches, and it is envisaged that their findings will influence other organisations and government departments to improve their practices. Such a partnership model therefore aims to influence the lives of many children through promoting effective change through networking and information sharing.

## Introduction

The Child Advocacy Project (CAP) is a collaborative approach to advocacy addressing access to children's rights. Working in partnership, four partner organisations have developed strategies for improving access to health, housing and welfare rights of children and families affected by HIV and AIDS and other vulnerable children in South Africa. This booklet is part of a series on Collaborative Approaches to Advocacy (see [www.cindi.org.za](http://www.cindi.org.za)). It inspires community-based advocacy initiatives through community engagement strategies. Presenting a range of different community engagement methods, the booklet reflects on the strengths, weakness and key learnings of each approach to provide recommendations for others working in this sector.

The booklet is intended for use by other organisations and government departments working to promote vulnerable children's access to their basic rights. It is our hope that it encourages further community engagement and advocacy to empower communities to improve the lives of children and families affected by adversity.

**This project was made possible through the generous support of ChildHope UK and the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK.**

ChildHope



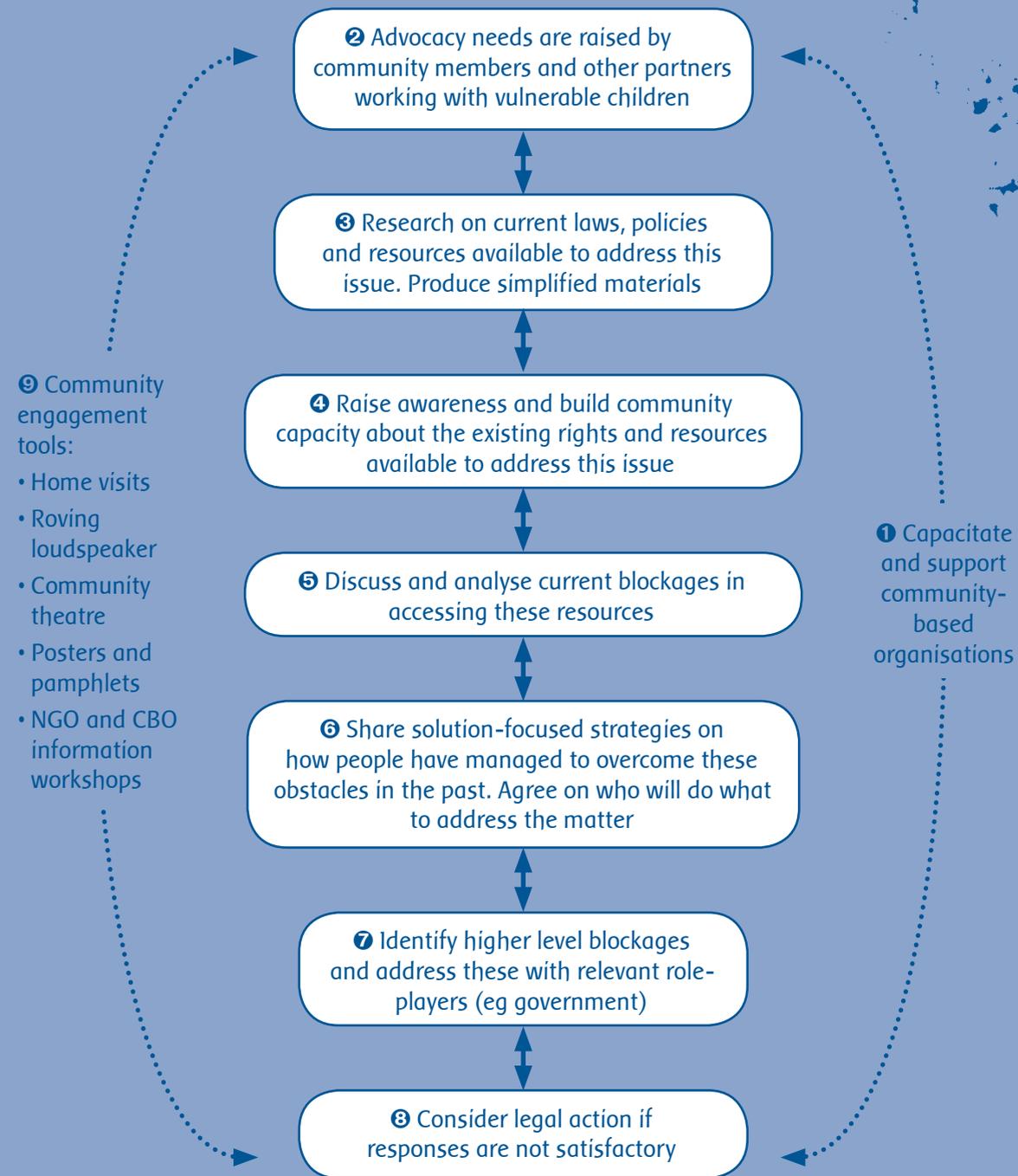
# Advocacy through community Engagement

Drawing on the experiences of partner Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), CAP has developed the diagram alongside to highlight their key learning about community engagement processes.

Each of the boxes is explained in the subsequent sections of this booklet. Boxes 1 and 9 are shown alongside the flow diagram to reflect ongoing activities.



"People think that accessing your legal rights is an end in itself. It's not. It doesn't effectively address the issue - for example of domestic violence in the house. Legal interventions need to be accompanied by social and other interventions, in order to holistically assist people."



### Case Example: Community Advocacy Sites

One of the strategies that CAP piloted was to establish community legal advice centres, called Community Advocacy Sites (CAS). The idea was to hire paralegals to be based in a central location for community members to access legal support. However, CAP felt that the strategy was not successful because:

- It was difficult to find qualified paralegals and find enough funding to pay competitive salaries.
- The number of requests coming from the community for more intensive legal support was overwhelming.
- It was difficult not to raise the expectations of the community regarding the cases that could be taken further.
- It was difficult to know who was using the Community Advocacy Sites as a convenient free service, as opposed to those who really did not have the resources to access other legal support.
- Setting up the sites was like creating a new organisation from scratch, including addressing all the dynamics and systems needed for such an organisation to function effectively.
- The Community Advocacy Sites were not always sustainable.

For these reasons CAP recommends working with existing community based organisations who are able to integrate any new information into their programmes.

## 1. Capacity Building of Community Based Organisations

Effective community engagement strategies rely on well-networked community based structures. CAP has found that their methods had the most effective reach when linked to an existing community based organisation.

Community based structures may be involved in advocacy work through:

- Raising key needs emerging from many people in the community
- Supporting the development of simplified messages around accessing resources
- Attracting the right people to awareness events
- Following up on the awareness events or materials to support people to access the resources
- Identifying and referring the most needy community members requiring further specialised assistance

CAP found that one of the challenges in working with community based structures was around documentation of the cases supported, making it difficult to track the impact of the work. Further work is needed to develop simplified recording sheets to support such a process.

In order to ensure that the impact of such initiatives are sustainable, it is helpful to support community based structures to carry out these tasks, while concurrently building their capacity to engage in advocacy work in the future.

Capacity building of community based structures around advocacy may include:

- Developing effective ways of accessing community information
- Designing locally appropriate methods to communicate the information to the people who most need to access it
- Assisting with the development of recording systems
- Developing effective referral systems and links to a range of other government departments and organisations

## 2. Advocacy Issues are Raised from the community

Advocacy work is potentially most powerful and relevant when the issues to be addressed come from community partners. Linkages with community based structures may be an effective way of hearing the issues people are struggling with that require joint advocacy work. The information could also come from non-government organisations (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) who are part of a network such as CINDI or other community groups. When relevant stakeholders and target groups have been consulted, and it is observed that the same type of requests are emerging from several different organisations, further impetus is added to the advocacy initiative.

### Case Example: Research on School Fee Exemption

Many CINDI Members had heard that it was possible to apply for school fee exemptions for vulnerable children. This was communicated to community partners. However when community partners tried accessing this resource, they found that they were blocked, for example by principals of schools not being prepared to accept and process the applications with the Department of Education.

The first step CAP undertook was to investigate how the process is supposed to take place, the legal rights and boundaries of the policies around this matter.

## 3. Research on Existing Policies

CAP found it helpful to start their response to such a request by researching the existing laws, policies and resources available to address the issue.

Having partners with legal expertise and other organisations with a strong background in social development work was helpful to CAP because these organisations were each able to research issues relating to their field of expertise. The CAP partners were able to make the complex laws and procedures accessible for others in the sector by condensing these into simple handouts in English and isiZulu for NGOs and CBOs in the CINDI Network.

The CAP partners were also able to debate some of the policies and agree on a common message to share with people. For example, it was debated whether people receiving foster care grants should be expected to pay school fees or not. Lawyers for Human Rights felt that the laws clearly stipulated that people receiving foster care grants are automatically exempt from paying school fees. Yet Pietemaritzburg Child Welfare felt that people receiving foster care grants should be encouraged to use this resource responsibly for the wellbeing of both children and community structures like schools. They were able to reach a compromise promoting partial contributions towards school fees by foster carers who wished to make such a contribution.



## 4. Raise Awareness Regarding Existing Policies and Rights

The results of the research were used to present the ideal scenario to community partners and other organisations to raise awareness about people's basic rights.

This was done through a variety of creative methods, such as:

- Community theatre
- Pamphlets
- Community talks and workshops
- Training courses with other organisations
- Inviting people through home visits and a roving loudspeaker announcing the community events

The above community engagement tools are described further in Section 9 of this booklet.

CAP was able to raise awareness on a range of topics identified by their community partners and other organisations in the CINDI Network, including:

- Accessing personal legal documents like Identity Documents and Birth Certificates
- Information around accessing social security like foster care grants and child care grants
- The new Domestic Violence Act in South Africa
- School Fee Exemptions
- The newly updated Children's Amendment Act
- Accessing anti-retroviral treatment (ARVs)

*"The point of legal awareness is that you are made aware of your rights. When rights are being threatened or infringed, you would know what the legal options for relief are."*

## 5. Analyse Blockages

Of course the ideal scenarios around people's rights and the resources which are supposedly available for specific issues are often not well reflected in people's experiences. Information around these rights can go some way to empower people to try to access these rights – either with the confidence and knowledge of this right or with information on the correct procedures to follow. However many people from disadvantaged communities may be blocked by other obstacles, including the costs of accessing such rights, corruption of people involved in service delivery and simple lack of information by those supposed to be delivering the services.

While discussing the reality of the current scenarios and the blockages that people experience in accessing their basic rights, CAP has found it useful to listen out for the following, in order to prioritise their support:

- Children who cannot act for themselves and who then take priority
- People with genuine access problems (eg transport costs)

This becomes a screening process for further support of different forms. It is also a way of listening out for deeper problems or underlying causes that might need to be addressed at higher levels.

### Case Example: Blockages in Accessing Identity Documents

A peri-urban community had access to free basic water. However, they also had a natural spring in their community, which was not being used. They were able to channel this into a stream and into small holding pools so that animals were able to drink from the water. They also made use of this water for their vegetable gardens and for things like washing cars. In this way they were able to make use of a natural resource to supplement what they already had.

*"We went in with an ideal scenario in our heads, thinking we were going to tell people what they need to do to access their rights. But that has changed and now we are looking for solutions from the community themselves. Together we discuss what we need to do to get from here to there."*

### Case Example: Blockages in Accessing School Fee Exemption

One principal was challenged because a child from a very poor family did not apply for a school fee exemption. The principal was upset because he had specifically called a meeting for parents to explain to them the process of applying for school fee exemptions and the mother of this child did not attend. It turned out that the mother was living with AIDS and had been too sick to attend the meeting. An application was not made and the care-giver in charge of the child did not know anything about the meeting. The Principal did not take kindly to LHR's written request for an exemption and made this clearly known. However the mother passed away the day after this situation emerged and the principal felt terrible such that he phoned LHR to explain the context of his prior attitude. Since then he has taken an extra effort to assist other children with parents who need additional support in accessing the school fee exemptions.



### Case Example: Accessing ARVs

People living with AIDS were made aware of their rights to access anti-retroviral medication (ARVs). However, feedback showed that they were struggling to access this right at one particular hospital because the staff incorrectly believed that people needed Identity Documents in order to apply for this treatment. The community role players came together and discussed how it was possible to access the ARVs at another hospital despite not having Identity Documents. They visited this other hospital to learn about how this was done. They were able to transfer the correct information to the staff at the hospital where ARVs were not being given. It turned out that the hospital staff was simply not aware of the new policies and procedures around provision of ARV treatment to people living with AIDS. Once they had this information they were able to process people's applications for ARVs.

## 6. Share strategies

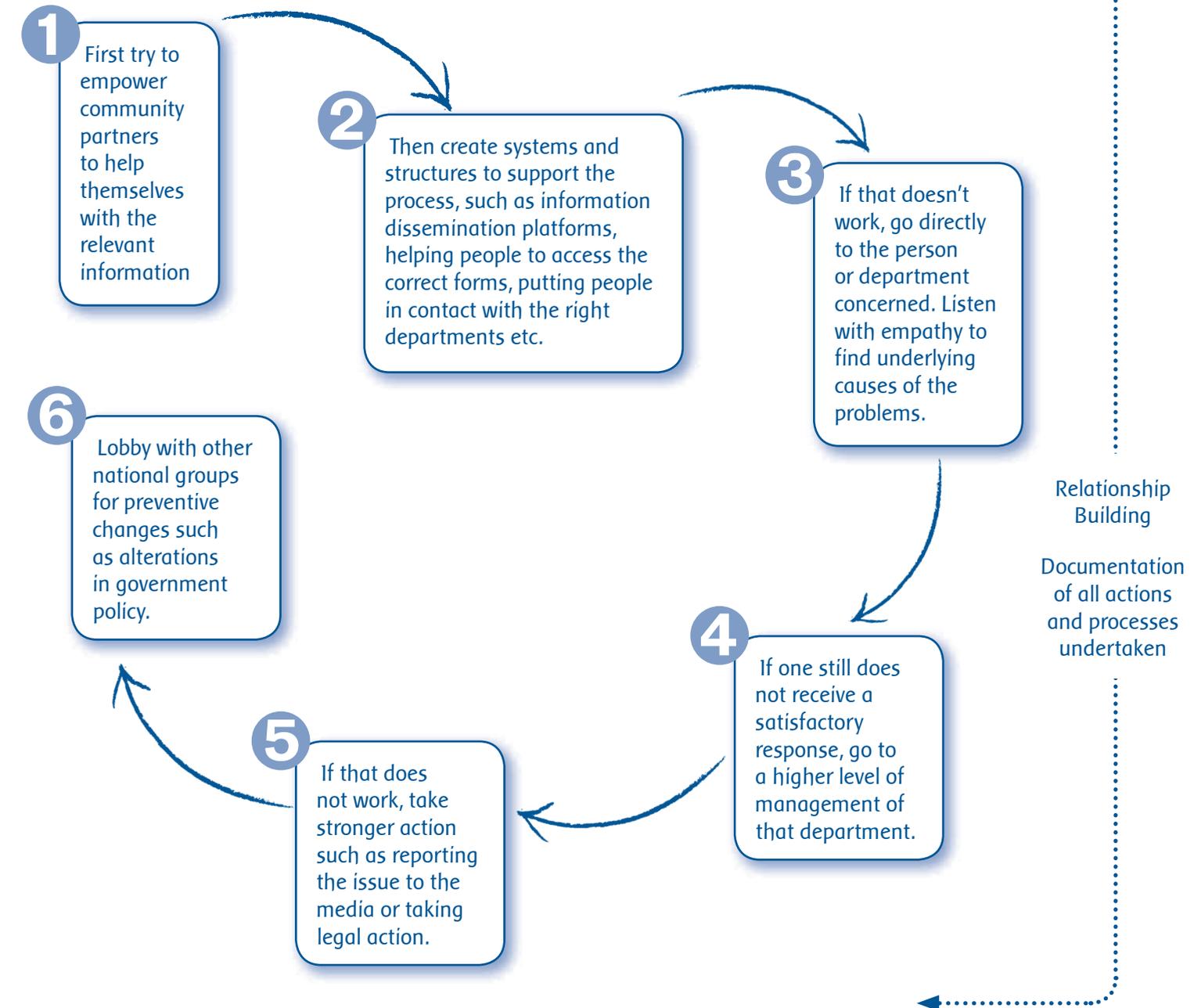
Solution focused approaches may be used to discuss with people what successful strategies have been used before to access rights. Sharing such ideas can then be focused more clearly into an agreement about what each party needs to do to get from A to B. This includes agreeing on:

- What the community partners will do
- What the advocacy team or supporting organisation will do

Such informal surveys described in this case example may go a long way to alleviate the blockages that people are experiencing in accessing their rights.

## 7. Identify and Address Higher Level Blockages

During the analysis of the blockages in accessing basic rights, one will often uncover an issue that needs to be addressed at a higher level. CAP has identified the following stages of advocacy in terms of different levels of action in addressing key blockages:



## Case Example: Addressing Access to School Fee Exemptions

The principal of one particular school write to parents of children who paid school fees and called on them to ostracise those who did not pay. He encouraged parents to find out which neighbours had not paid their school fees and ridicule and tease them. A list of all children not paying school fees was put up at the school. Lawyers for Human Rights immediately contacted the Department of Education, who went to the school and removed the list and stopped further discrimination of non-fee paying children. LHR spoke to the Principal and it turned out that the principal was desperate for funds to pay for school expenses that are not covered by the Department. The Principal did not understand how to access the school subsidies provided by the Department of Education, when the school is receiving little or no income from learners. The difficulties that schools were experiencing in accessing the subsidies became a point for further lobbying with the Department of Education.



## B. Consider Legal Action

In extreme cases where people's basic rights are clearly being infringed, it is possible to consider taking legal action against a person, institution or government department. Lawyers for Human Rights have found that even the threat of legal action (in other words writing a letter of intention) may have significant impact in changing the situation.

At times legal action can be very adversarial, may be very expensive in terms of expert testimonies and can drag on for many years. Although extremely costly, legal action in special cases may have a profound impact on many other similar cases. Successful cases can set new precedents in the law. Lawyers for Human Rights have found it helpful to present such cases to the Legal Aid Board for a thorough assessment about whether or not it is worth the investment to take such cases further.

CAP explains that if you are going to do general legal awareness raising, one should expect that there will be various legal cases that come up that will be expensive. It also takes a lot of courage for people to come forward and then a lot of commitment to process that case. One also never knows what the outcomes will be, or how far the case will go. In this way it may be better to carefully select one or two flagship cases to cause significant change than to build in smaller budgets for many isolated cases. Caution must be exercised not to raise expectations with the community with regard to taking cases on.

## Case Example: Legal Action with a Special Case

A child from one under-resourced community found a test hand grenade in his garden which blew up his hand. The South African Police Services said they could not trace the grenade and refused to take responsibility for the incident, even though by law the State should accept liability, unless it is clearly a privately purchased grenade. Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) called on the SANDF Armoury who traced it to 3 government departments and found that the grenade was originally manufactured by a huge corporate. Although they say that the case feels like David against Goliath, winning this could set a legal precedent for claims against the State and have far reaching implications for uncontrolled weapons. At one stage LHR was even looking at a class action with different cases like this across the country. Calling the state to account for lost arms and weapons is an important issue and state liability is something that develops slowly through cases such as this.

### Case Example: Domestic Violence Play

Initially CAP partners tried to simply share information about the new Domestic Violence Act with communities where this was emerging as a problem. For example, people were told how to apply for a court order. However, the dynamics around domestic violence are complex and it was noted that most people did not see this as an effective solution. In some cases this type of information may actually increase the level of violence at home. So instead CAP developed a play with community volunteers from Rivlife that aimed to change mindsets of community members around domestic violence. The volunteers presented several different scenarios and opened discussion about these cases. The community members identified with the scenarios and enjoyed contributing their ideas. People thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment, which opened a platform for considering alternative gender roles and possible locally appropriate solutions to the problem of domestic violence in the community.

## 9. Community Engagement Tools

Finding innovative ways to attract community members to awareness workshops and to share information in relevant ways can be a fun and creative aspect of advocacy work. CAP has piloted a range of community engagement methods, including:

- Home visits
- Using a roving loudspeaker on a truck to make announcements
- Community theatre
- Posters and pamphlets
- NGO and CBO information workshops

A central aspect of such work is an understanding of adult education. CAP tries to promote consideration of the following model in promoting appropriate learning.

Applying this model to specific community engagements may enhance the extent to which the messages are communicated effectively. The way in which this may be applied here is described with reference to community theatre.

### Community Theatre

Through the community theatre the volunteers at the local community based organisation gained more respect in the community and were seen as knowledgeable. They had a lot more people coming to them with cases, even in their own time. The volunteers were able to bring examples from their own personal experience to make the plays more meaningful.

The volunteers did further research to find out what issues children wanted addressed. One major issue that they wanted to address was sexual abuse – giving the message to a child that you should tell someone who will listen. A play was developed and this was taken to primary schools.

### Model for Developing Community Theatre

The model that CAP developed for this work followed these simple steps:

- CAP Eastwood volunteers choose a relevant and “hot” topic from the core community needs
- They research the topic by finding information from other organisations
- They determine the key simple message that they want to communicate
- They then brainstorm how one could do that – create a song, play or sculpture, come up with different scenarios
- They work out how to put it together (sequencing)
- Scripting (write it down),
- Find ways to animate and “block it” (which means to look outwards at how to communicate so that one’s back is never facing the audience)
- Choose simple props which make a big difference for people
- Practice the play repeatedly to lessen nervousness on the day
- Choose the venue and book it, allowing flexibility for bad weather

*“Many NGOs do not make use of adult learning theory to enhance their communication. This is a pity because there are a few simple principles which may be applied to develop a solid learning foundation.”*

*“There was workshop overload and people were not attending. The plays were an effective way of attracting people, getting the message across and they boosted the moral of the volunteers.”*

### Case Example: Awareness Workshop on School Fee Exemptions

The CINDI Members were experiencing problems accessing information around school fee exemptions. They needed more information about the different scenarios and constraints of this resource. A seminar was arranged by CAP and it was well attended. People especially appreciated the fact that the Department of Education was invited and attended the event. This lent weight to the messages that were being given. CAP noted that after this one workshop there were very few further blockages in accessing school fee exemptions amongst the CINDI Members.

Important to this process was follow up – tracking the impact on the community or school and offering further support. CAP emphasises that the process involves creating space and time for reflection and community participation. This is not just about creating awareness, but includes hearing from the audience the realities they face, while learning about the solutions from those being engaged with.

### Community awareness talks and workshops

Information sharing workshops are another way to communicate key messages around important advocacy issues. These may be presented in collaboration with other NGOs and CBOs working in the sector. The success of the workshops often hinge around addressing a topic that people are highly motivated to learn about. They may be supported with simple written materials such as pamphlets.

### Conclusion

Advocacy work addressing the needs of vulnerable children and families need not be a dry legalistic process. CAP has found that these creative strategies give energy to the advocacy initiatives while effectively reaching many people. Central to this approach is targeting the advocacy issues identified by community partners or NGO networks as priority matters affecting children's wellbeing. Specific methods such as community theatre or linking with existing community based structures may help to consolidate meaningful community engagement throughout the advocacy process.

Having a partner with legal expertise, like Lawyers for Human Rights, helped to inform the community and other organisations of their rights. This helped to provide a platform for engagement with the state and its agents. Being able

to track and show the community that the problems they were identifying were being taken up by the relevant stakeholders, that blockages were being addressed and in many cases solved, also helped strengthen community participation and encouraged community members to access their rights. By bringing relevant government departments to the community level (many for the first time) and creating a space for dialogue CAP helped to strengthen direct grass roots advocacy and get commitment from duty bearers. It also strengthened democratic participation and gave those who had previously been marginalised a platform to voice their concerns.

The holistic approach taken by CAP in using a mixture of processes and utilising individual partners' expertise and their links to target groups and stakeholders, helped strengthen community engagement around advocacy and introduce tangible change both at individual and policy and practice level.

### Other booklets in the series on CAP's collaborative Approaches to Advocacy:

- Advocacy Partnerships
- Advocating for Alternatives to Institutional Care
- Advocating Livelihood Security Strategies for Vulnerable Children and Households
- Advocating for Sexual Abuse Free Classrooms
- Managing Joint Advocacy Projects

## CAP Project Partners

A strategic partnership was formed by members of the CINDI Network which had a history of advocacy work, each with their own area of specialisation. A brief outline of the four CAP member organisations is provided.

### The CINDI Network

[www.cindi.org.za](http://www.cindi.org.za)

The Children in Distress Network (CINDI) was founded in July 1996 and consists of over 120 member organisations who collaborate in the interests of children affected or orphaned by HIV and AIDS in KwaZulu-Natal. CINDI's mission is to foster a spirit of *ubuntu*\* among members, encourage collaboration, enhance mastery of members, co-ordinate research and unlock resource opportunities for the benefit of members through problem sharing, problem solving, information dissemination, raising awareness, advocacy and lobbying and collaborative fund raising.

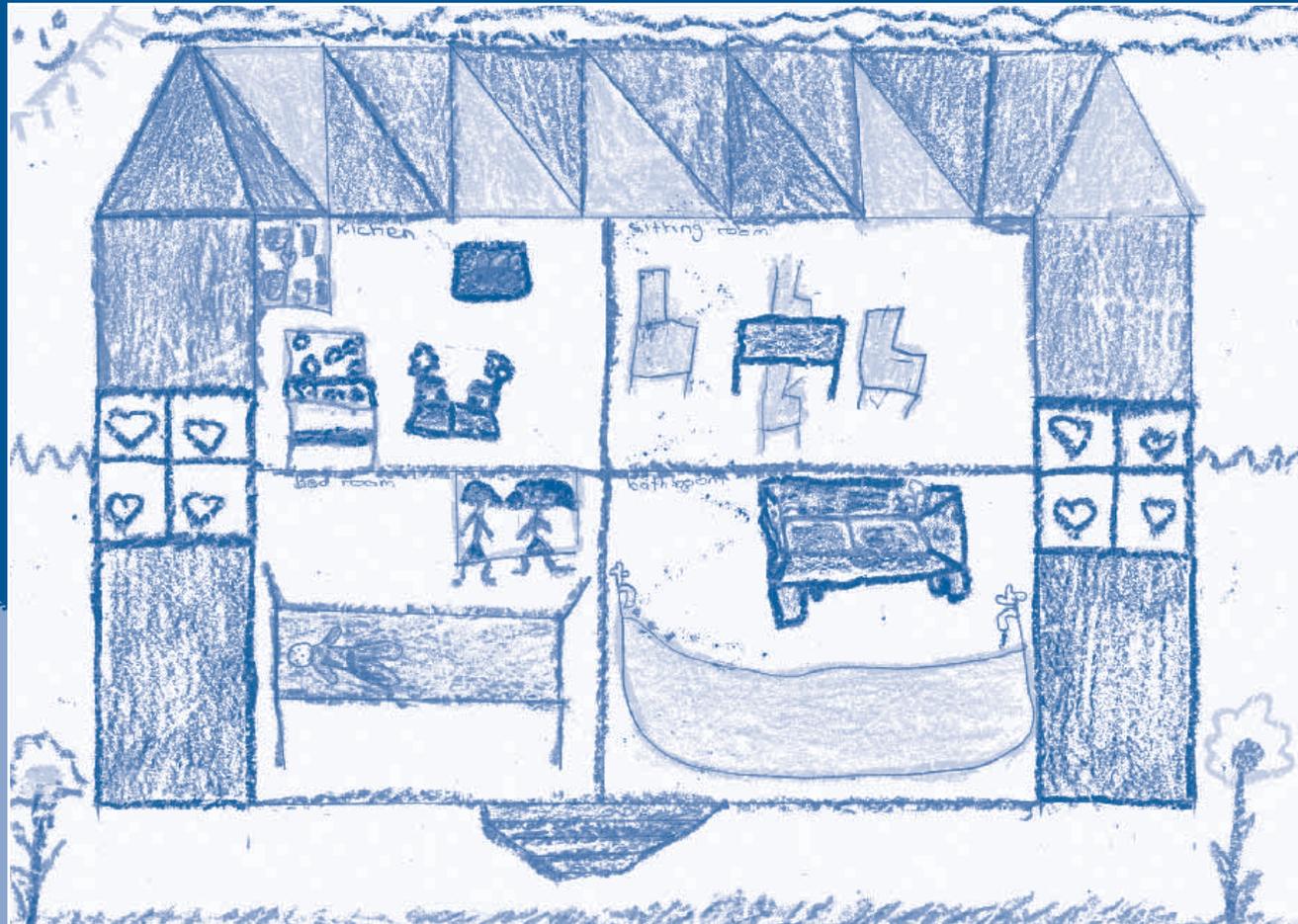
\*"A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole"... Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999)

### BESG

[www.besg.co.za](http://www.besg.co.za)

The Built Environment Support Group (BESG) was formed in 1983 by staff and students from the Department of Architecture and Allied Disciplines of the then University of Natal, Durban, who campaigned in defence of the right of indigent communities to live in urban areas. Advocacy has been core to its work since its inception. Following the new dispensation in South Africa in 1994, BESG became a leading player in community-driven low income housing delivery, as the communities it defended in the early years wanted to access government housing subsidy to develop their areas.

BESG's special needs housing and sustainable livelihoods work grew directly out of its experience of township development. BESG develops innovative strategies and



undertakes research to support poor and other marginalised or vulnerable groups, and uses these to influence enabling policy in service delivery to those groups.

## Lawyers for Human Rights

[www.lhr.org.za](http://www.lhr.org.za)

Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) is an independent human rights organisation with a thirty-year track record of human rights activism and public interest litigation in South Africa. LHR provides free legal services to poor and indigent people from six law clinics around the country.

LHR is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation whose vision is to be:

- A leading, effective human rights and constitutional watchdog and advocate
- An international force in the development and delivery of human rights, with a primary focus in Africa
- A primary contributor to clear strategic policy on the delivery of socio-economic rights for the disadvantaged

To this end, LHR strives to promote awareness, protection, and enforcement of legal and human rights through the creation of a human rights culture.

## Pietermaritzburg Child and Family Welfare Society

[www.pmbchildwelfare.co.za](http://www.pmbchildwelfare.co.za)

The Child and Family Welfare Society of Pietermaritzburg is a non-profit organisation whose mission is "To provide appropriate and cost effective professional services to children and families of all communities in our city".

The organisation offers supportive services to children under the age of 14 years and their families with the emphasis being on family preservation.

Some of the services include dealing with abuse, neglect and abandonment of children, urgent removal of children, rendering of prevention services, placement of children in alternate care, depending on their needs and adoption services.

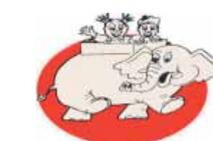
This Society also manages a Place of Safety (Ekhaya LeThemba) where children between the ages of birth to six years are placed on a place of safety basis prior to more permanent placement.

In keeping with the need of making services more accessible to the community this Society also manages a One Stop Welfare Centre in Dambuza, Edendale.

## ChildHope UK

[www.childhope.org.uk](http://www.childhope.org.uk)

Working towards social justice for children and young people: Since 1989 ChildHope UK has worked internationally with girls and boys who face violence and injustice. Today, we work in solidarity with civil society organisations in Africa, Asia and South America, towards social justice for children and young people by addressing situations where children's rights are violated as a result of abuses of power and privilege, poverty, inequality, and violence. Our partner organisations in the Global South are working on 3 broad themes: (a) reducing child abuse and exploitation; (b) improving child justice and participation; and (c) promoting the rights of children affected by HIV and/or AIDS. ChildHope's remit is to improve the processes of international aid and development with actors in both the Global South and North and in particular offer guidance on child protection, gender and monitoring, evaluation and learning.



[www.pmbchildwelfare.co.za](http://www.pmbchildwelfare.co.za)

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[www.childhope.org.uk](http://www.childhope.org.uk)

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# Advocacy through Community Engagement

## PART 2 IN THE SERIES ON COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO ADVOCACY

The Child Advocacy Project (CAP) is a joint project that draws on the innovative approaches of organisations working to improve the access of vulnerable children, families and caregivers affected or infected by HIV and AIDS to their basic rights. This booklet is part of a series on Collaborative Approaches to Advocacy.

Learning from the experiences of Lawyers for Human Rights and other organisations involved in CAP, a model of advocacy through community engagement is presented. Innovative approaches to encourage participation are described, including community awareness events and community theatre. The approach of testing a range of advocacy strategies, from more cooperative to more adversarial methods is discussed. Case examples from various advocacy initiatives are presented to illustrate the community engagement methods.

### *collaborative Approaches to Advocacy*

*"Strategies for improving access to health, housing and welfare rights of children and families affected by HIV & AIDS and other vulnerable children in South Africa"*

