



# DUMIZILE THEODORA MALATJIE

## OVC Coordinator, South Africa



***“I can teach others how to identify vulnerable children in my community so that we can help them and give them the resources they need.”***



### Overview

With more than 4.3 million orphans, South Africa’s social service workforce—comprising just 16,000 professional social workers—is stretched thin. The small social worker workforce struggles to provide services for the country’s growing population of vulnerable children. Children in South Africa are faced with challenges ranging from high rates of physical and sexual violence to high levels of poverty. These factors, in turn, are related to poor access to nutrition, education, health care, and housing. The impact of HIV on children and their families only intensifies these problems.

The situation is no different in Sedibeng district, Gauteng Province, but in this case community caregivers and initiatives like the Thogomelo Project have stepped in to lighten the load of the professional social service sector. The Thogomelo Project works to bridge the gap between needed services and number of qualified social service workers through its accredited national capacity-building program, which trains frontline community caregivers to take on some social work functions in areas where professionals are unavailable. Thogomelo means “to care.” With limited training, the community caregivers provide a subset of direct social services to vulnerable children and their families, while also acting as a much needed source of referrals in the face of the critical shortage of social workers and associated professions.

Dumizile Theodora Malatjie—currently 48 years old and married with two children—worked for five years as a community caregiver with the Emthonjeni Awareness Center in Sedibeng. In April 2013, Dumizile was promoted to Orphans and Vulnerable Children Coordinator and now supervises eight community caregivers.

### Typical tasks and responsibilities

Community caregivers like Dumizile play a unique role in the social service workforce. With their basic social work knowledge and skills, they are the frontline service providers for vulnerable children. Because community caregivers like Dumizile are typically recruited and trained from the same communities in which they serve, they are more accessible and have an intimate knowledge of local conditions and the risks facing children.

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With their more immediate access to rural and underresourced communities and households, community caregivers are often the only available advocates for children's rights, particularly in the face of system failures by the police and courts.

During her time as a community caregiver, Dumizile looked after 168 children (aged 2 to 16 years) in her surrounding community. Her responsibilities included home visits to assess children's needs and provide appropriate referrals. Now as an OVC Coordinator, Dumizile provides support through debriefing and counseling sessions to the community caregivers who report to her. She also mentors new community caregivers and monitors their home visits. Dumizile encourages her supervisees to create relationships with other local organizations so that there is a strong referral network for children to linked to feeding programs, birth certificates and registration through other services.

### Training and skills

In addition to receiving training through her employer, Emthonjeni Awareness Center, Dumizile also attended a Thogomelo training in 2012 to build her skills in supportive supervision and child protection. The training focused on empowering supervisors like Dumizile to create caring environments in their organizations to promote the psychosocial wellbeing of community caregivers, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and the sustainability of their work by reducing staff burnout and turnover.

After the training, Dumizile used what she had learned to start offering training at the Emthonjeni Awareness Center and to employ simple, practical solutions in the workplace to maintain the psychosocial wellbeing of community caregivers. So far, she has conducted three workshops with 30 of her colleagues and implemented a debriefing program. She has also started a netball group for caregivers that meets to train every Friday afternoon and afterwards shares a meal.

### Why she loves her job

Dumizile attributes her promotion to community caregiver coordinator to the skills, knowledge, and confidence she gained through the Thogomelo Project training. She expresses pride in having spent five years as a community caregiver and progressing to the coordinator position. She says, "By my mind, I am very wise. I can teach others how to identify vulnerable children in my community so that we can help them and give them the resources they need. I am so proud and grown. I wish everyone can get the training."

*The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance would like to thank the International HIV/AIDS Alliance for contributing this profile to the "I am a Social Service Worker" series.*

## "Improving the workforce. Improving lives."

### Who is the social service workforce?

While capturing any one definition of the social service workforce is challenging, it can be broadly defined to describe a variety of workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and nongovernmental – who staff the social service system and contribute to the care of vulnerable populations. The social service system is comprised of a set of interventions, programs and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged individuals and families.

### What is Social Service Workforce Week?

During this week, advocates will bring attention to and build support for the social service workforce as well as raise awareness about promising workforce strengthening efforts supported by stakeholders around the world. Organized around daily themes focused on areas of practice, the week will allow Alliance members and the public to engage in a dynamic platform of information exchange and advocacy through various forms of social media.

### What is the Thogomelo Project?

In collaboration with South Africa's Department of Social Development, the US Agency for International Developments' AIDSTAR program is supporting PATH, Health and Development Africa, and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance to work together as the Thogomelo project. The Thogomelo project aims to care for and protect vulnerable children by increasing the knowledge, abilities, and wellbeing of those who are responsible for them. With a dual focus on community caregiver support and child protection, the project incorporates the best and most promising practices from Africa, and is designed to become part of the enduring fabric of South Africa's child protection efforts. The International HIV/AIDS Alliance is responsible for activities under the project's community caregiver component.

### Learn More

Learn more about Dumizile and other social service workers! Join the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #SSWWeek and online at [www.socialserviceworkforce.org/SSWWeek](http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/SSWWeek).