



# Esme Lebi

## Team Leader for Child and Youth Care Workers, Isibindi Program, Zambia



***Isibindi is changing my life and the life of the children, physically, mentally, spiritually. My family and friends have seen this change in me. I am doing a lot of talking, a lot of writing and I love it."***



### Why child and youth care work?

Esme is a 22-year-old team leader of child and youth care workers (CYCWs) in one of the blocks of Meheba Refugee Settlement in Zambia. Esme is among the original group of workers trained in March 2016 by the Zambian Association for Child Care Workers (ZACCW) and the National Association for Child Care Workers (NACCW) of South Africa. When Esme heard that a program named Isibindi was recruiting new child and youth care workers living in the refugee settlement to respond to child protection needs, she was eager to apply. The Isibindi program has trained those living in the refugee settlement to respond to child protection needs of the children living through child and youth care work.

The Isibindi "Courage and Care" project operates in the Meheba Refugee Settlement in Zambia. It is being implemented by the Zambian Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare (MCDSW) in partnership with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), ZACCW and NACCW.

Meheba Isibindi CYCWs work in the life space of at-risk-children, whether in their homes, group homes for unaccompanied children, the Safe Parks, the Transit Centre or other spaces such as clinics and schools. They use as assessment framework called "the Circle of Courage" to assess the developmental needs of children and provide direct support in the lives of children to respond to these needs.

Esme lives near a group home that has been established for five unaccompanied girls living in the settlement. She acts as the child and youth care worker for them and has taken responsibility for their care. In her role as team leader, she also leads a team of four other CYCWs who have a combined caseload of 43 children.

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## The impact of her work

Esme began working with the five girls in order to help address their emotional needs. She began by asking them to tell her about themselves, and when they begin to cry she took her time to get to know them. Their full story has only begun to come out as she builds trust and a relationship with the girls.

All five girls are refugees from Burundi who have lost her parents for a variety of reasons, but primarily as a result of political killings in Burundi.

Esme visits the girls every morning to help see them off to school, and she then returns in the afternoons. While the girls wash their socks and uniforms, she uses the time to talk with them about their day and their struggles and plans for the future. She has helped the girls to establish a routine and create their own budgets. She also talks to them about sex and boys, the importance of staying in school and is planning to create memory boxes with them to honor their deceased family members.

Esme enjoys the girls' company, has fun with them, and sees herself "like a friend, aunt, mother, everything to them." She feels that Isibindi has benefited her as well as the children with whom she works: "Isibindi is changing my life and the life of the children, physically, mentally, spiritually. My family and friends have seen this change in me. I am doing a lot of talking, a lot of writing and I love it."



**"Improving the workforce.  
Improving lives."**

### Who is the social service workforce?

The social service workforce is defined as being comprised of a variety of workers - government and non-government, paid and unpaid - who contribute to the care, support, promotion of rights and empowerment of vulnerable populations served by the social service system.

### 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, the week is an opportunity for Alliance members and the public to engage in discussions and exchange ideas. Daily blogs, worker profiles and resources provide tools and innovative approaches for strengthening the workforce.

### What is the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance?

The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance works toward a world where a well-planned, well-trained and well-supported social service workforce effectively delivers promising practices that improve the lives of vulnerable populations. Launched in June 2013, the mission of the Alliance is to promote the knowledge and evidence, resources and tools and political will and action needed to address key social service workforce challenges, especially within low- to middle-income countries.

The Alliance is funded by PEPFAR/USAID and the GHR Foundation. The Tides Center acts as host and fiscal sponsor of the Alliance.

### Learn More

Learn more about Esme and other social service workers! Join the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #SSWWeek, on our Facebook page and on the discussion boards on our website at [www.socialserviceworkforce.org](http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org).