



MERCY MARIMA

Case Care Worker, Zimbabwe



“Community members know that we are there to protect the children.”



Overview

For the past six years, Mercy has served the children of her community at Ward 16 Chinyika, Goromonzi District in Zimbabwe. Because of her passion for children and her eagerness to help, she was selected by her community to be trained by the Department of Social Services as a case care worker.

Typical tasks and responsibilities

As a case care worker, Mercy works alongside village leaders to identify and register orphans and vulnerable children. Through community sensitization meetings, more and more community members are learning about the services provided by case care workers and are referring vulnerable families to Mercy and her coworkers. After Mercy receives case referrals, she assesses each one of the children's situations and connects the children to the appropriate providers.

For example, after identifying children who have been out of school, Mercy refers them to local schools and ensures that they benefit from the Basic Education Assistance Module, a government-run education assistance program that provides school fees and other services for vulnerable children. In other cases, she accompanies sexually abused children to service providers such as Family Support Trust or Médecins Sans Frontières for medical assistance. Mercy also reports such cases to the police and the Department of Social Services to ensure that justice is met. For orphans and vulnerable children with medical challenges, she connects them with clinics to be treated under the government health insurance policy.

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Training and skills

The Department of Social Services training for case care workers taught Mercy how to identify and connect vulnerable children and their families to education, health, legal, and psychosocial support services. She also learned how to facilitate family club discussions where families join together to discuss topics such as parent-child communication and non-violent discipline. The Department of Social Services provided Mercy with useful tools, such as bicycles and bags, which allow her to do her work more effectively.

Why she loves her job

Mercy knows that as a case care worker in Zimbabwe, it is her responsibility to make sure that the entire family (and not just the child) is thriving. She works hard to build parenting skills, especially in child- and elderly-headed households that are struggling to meet children's basic needs. More importantly, because case care workers are known and trusted by their communities, cases of sexual, verbal, and physical abuse are no longer hidden. As Mercy says, "community members know that we are there to protect the children."

What Mercy loves the most about being a case care worker is identifying and following up on children in difficult circumstances to make sure they receive assistance so that they can have a better future. Based on her own experience, Mercy believes that for someone to be able to work effectively as a case care worker, they must be literate, honest, have a passion for children, and be able to work cooperatively with parents, guardians, law enforcement, and community leaders.

Mercy is proud that she, along with other case care workers in Zimbabwe, is playing an important role in shaping her community.

The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance would like to thank WEI/Bantwana, Zimbabwe Department of Social Services, Unicef and USAID 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 Bantwana Initiative?

Launched in 2006, the Bantwana Initiative helps local communities in sub-Saharan Africa support orphaned and vulnerable children and their caregivers. More than 25 million children have been orphaned and made vulnerable in sub-Saharan Africa by HIV, AIDS, and poverty. Our model of holistic services for the entire family helps bring about lasting change in the lives of these children and the extended families, neighbors, and communities struggling to care for them. Bantwana is an initiative of World Education, Inc., a nonprofit organization founded more than 60 years ago, in 1951, dedicated to improving the lives of the poor through education, and economic and social development programs.

Learn More:

Learn more about Mercy and other social service workers! Join the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #SSWWeek and online at www.socialserviceworkforce.org/SSWWeek.