THIS IS HOW WE LIVE

South Africa may be colourful like a rainbow, but living there can be difficult, especially for kids. The group of South African children who introduced themselves on our world map lives in a children's home in Cape Town. It is called "Elonwabeni", which means "place of happiness". The children live there because their parents or the children themselves have AIDS. They don't live in Elonwabeni for more than 12 months. After this period, they return to their families or find a new home in a foster family who cares for them. Even though the children don't live with their parents, they can visit them on weekends or on special occasions. The children also continue to go to their old school, they do not change schools when they move to Elonwabeni.

AIDS and children whose parents died because of AIDS are one of South Africa's biggest problems. In South Africa, more than one million children have lost their parents to the disease. On the entire African continent, this number reaches around 12 million children. These children often care for their sick parents who are not able to go to work. Sometimes, the children cannot go to school due to these obligations at home.

AIDS is a very serious disease that is caused by a tiny germ called a virus (HIV). When you are healthy, your body can fight off diseases. When you have AIDS, your body cannot protect you, and this is why people with AIDS get very sick and often die. You can get AIDS when the fluids from your body mix with those of someone who has AIDS. But be careful: it's only a prejudice that you can catch it like the flu! To assume that you can get AIDS just by touching or being near someone who has AIDS is also completely wrong! Very few children get AIDS. But if they were born to a mother who had AIDS, they might be born with AIDS. 33 million people worldwide have AIDS. The number is so large, because there is no medication yet.

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Activity: "Watch "Buddyz on the move" and discuss it in class

"Buddyz on the move" is a TV programme that was produced in South Africa by the South African Broadcasting Corporation. It deals with HIV in South Africa. In the programme, a group of children wants to support and cheer up their friend Zinhle who is HIV+ and lives in a convent for rehabilitation. The buddyz want to get a social grant for Zinhle. They also collect money to buy her a cell phone, so that Zinhle can stay in touch with her friends.

Buddyz on the Move
(Picture: PRIX JEUNESSE)

Discussion:

Have the children ever witnessed a family member or a good friend being seriously ill?
What is it like or what do the children think it must be like to lose somebody who is very close to them?

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