

Hamburg, South Africa
Keiskamma Canada Foundation
www.keiskammaCanada.com

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Hamburg, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Hamburg is a small, rural community of 1,300 on the banks of the Keiskamma River, with one small corner shop and a rough dirt road through the town. The life expectancy is 63.4 years. Xhosa, one of South Africa's 11 official languages, is spoken in Hamburg. The unemployment rate is 80%, so many earn income through social security grants. Most people in Hamburg use pit-latrines outdoor toilets, harvest rainwater, and use kerosene lamps for lighting. There is some fishing and tourism in Hamburg.



From 1948-1994, South Africans lived under apartheid, a system of segregation which left a legacy of severe racial inequality in the country. The majority of those living in poverty in Hamburg are Black. South Africa also has the highest HIV rates in the world, and rates are highest among Black South Africans. For years, the government denied HIV/AIDS was an issue and refused to provide treatment for South Africans diagnosed with HIV. In that time, more than a third of a million people in the country died due to AIDS. Many grandparents in Hamburg are the guardians of their grandchildren, as almost an entire generation of younger adults has died due to AIDS.

Schools in Hamburg are chronically understaffed and underfunded, and the majority of students drop out or fail before graduating high school. Due to teacher shortages,

classes are mixed with students of different grades. Some students also struggle when the language of instruction switches from Xhosa, their first language, to English. Local activist groups are actively pushing the government to better support schools and teachers.

The Challenge: Hamburg has extremely high rates of HIV/AIDS, and for those living with HIV/AIDS in poverty, managing their health can be very challenging. There are also high rates of tuberculosis, hypertension, and diabetes in Hamburg. This can present serious health complications, since people living with HIV typically have weakened immune systems. ARVs are now largely available at health centres. There is a clinic near Hamburg and a hospital 60 km away, but both are under-resourced and understaffed, and many people can't afford the transportation costs to get there from Hamburg.

A key component to managing health when living with HIV is proper nutrition, yet many Hamburg residents are unable to afford food, let alone healthy food. There is no grocery store in town, so people have to pay high transportation costs to travel to a nearby city to grocery shop.

Women in Hamburg face high rates of gender-based violence. Young people are not taught consent, sex education, or HIV prevention. Many men in the community feel that they are entitled to sex, and don't respect a woman's wish to abstain from sex or practice safe sex. Partly due to gender-based violence, young women in South Africa are almost four times more likely to become HIV positive than young men.

Glossary

AIDS: Acquired immune deficiency syndrome. This syndrome happens if someone has had HIV for many years without access to the proper medicine. With AIDS, the immune system is severely weakened. Serious infections and health problems happen.

Apartheid: A system of laws that forcibly segregated different racial groups in South Africa. Laws included the forced relocation of Black South Africans, the prohibition of marriage between non-white and white South Africans, ‘white-only’ urban areas, and ‘white-only’ jobs.

ARVs: Acronym for antiretroviral drugs, which keep HIV under control and protect the immune system, allowing people to live long and healthy lives.

HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system, which is the body’s germ fighting system. The immune system becomes weaker, making it harder for the body to fight off infections and some kinds of cancers. Most people who get treatment early and take medicine regularly for HIV can live long, healthy lives. Most young children who have HIV got it as babies from their mothers who are HIV positive, as HIV can be transmitted through breast milk. Older people can get HIV through unprotected sex or sharing needles.

Kerosene Lamp: Lanterns that burn kerosene by pulling it up through a wick. They can be dangerous to use, cause respiratory health issues, and produce harmful carbon emissions.

Pit Latrine: The simple pit latrine is a toilet dug into the ground. It is the cheapest and most basic form of improved sanitation available.

Ntombi

16 year old girl

Lives with grandmother and three younger siblings

Ntombi is a 16 year old girl living in Hamburg. She likes watching videos of her favourite singers on her phone. She would like to learn to play an instrument but doesn't own any.

Ntombi lives with her grandmother because her mother passed away due to AIDS when they were young. Her grandmother has many health issues, so after school Ntombi takes care of her three younger siblings. Taking care of her siblings means she doesn't usually have time to finish her homework. At home, no one is there to help her if she has questions with her homework. At school, her teacher doesn't have time to help her either.

She hopes to graduate high school next year but isn't sure what she'll do after that, career-wise. She knows that she will probably have to leave Hamburg if she wants to find a job.

Nko

8 year old boy

Lives with his mother

Nko goes to school and is in grade three. He has trouble with his English class, but his teacher doesn't have much time to help him. Sometimes, he will show up to school and his teacher won't be there, so he and his friends play soccer all day. His school doesn't have enough teachers so his class is mixed with older and younger grades. This year at school, his teacher has started teaching in English after years of teaching in Xhosa, the language Nko speaks at home.

Nko lives with his mother. Most of his friends' parents are unemployed, but his mom works for a white South African family who vacation in Hamburg. She barely makes enough money for her and Nko to survive on.

Nosisa

54 year old woman
Widowed
Guardian of two grandchildren

Nosisa is the guardian of her two grandchildren whose mother - Nosisa's daughter - passed away due to AIDS. She is still dealing with the loss of her daughter. She works hard to take care of her grandchildren in honour of her late daughter.

Once a month, she has to travel to the nearest hospital with her grandchildren to receive ARVs for the two children who are living with HIV. The trip is one hour away by car, but Nosisa doesn't have a car. Hamburg doesn't have public transportation either, so Nosisa and her grandchildren rely on hitchhiking to get to the hospital, hoping someone picks them up and doesn't charge them too much money for the ride. The instructions on the medication are difficult for Nosisa to follow. She is unable to read because Black South Africans were not allowed to go to school when she was growing up under apartheid.

Lindiswe

38 year old woman
Single
Mother of three children in elementary school

Lindiswe has three children in elementary school. She has been unable to find a job and struggles to pay for groceries. In her relationships with men, she does not feel that she has much say or choice. Lindiswe became HIV positive in her teens, and had never learned about HIV prevention or safe sex practices before then. Her children are also HIV positive, and Lindiswe spends the little money she has to pay for rides to the nearest hospital to receive ARVs.

Lindiswe wants her children to do well in school and become successful, so she makes sure they attend school. She would like to teach her daughters about consent and safe sex, but doesn't know how to go about it.

Themba

26 year old man

Single

Father of a son in Hamburg, lives in East London

Themba is HIV positive and recently moved away from Hamburg. After struggling in school in Hamburg for years with no support, Themba dropped out one year before high school graduation. He spent a few years unemployed in Hamburg, unable to find work. In that time, any boys he went to school with moved away from Hamburg.

He has just moved to a nearby city, East London, to find work. In East London, he finds occasional work in construction. The low wages he is paid barely cover his rent, let alone healthy groceries. However, in East London, it is easier than in Hamburg to get ARVs.

He has a son in Hamburg that he doesn't see anymore, as he can't afford to travel back and forth.

Keiskamma Canada Foundation

Because the South African government was refusing to provide ARVs, in 2004, The Keiskamma Trust was formed to provide the medicine to those in Hamburg. After massive public outcries and the advocacy work of non-governmental organizations like the Keiskamma Trust, the government began providing ARVs, but barriers remained for Hamburg residents struggling to access health care and basic services.

In 2006, Edmonton writer Annette Wentworth became involved in the work Keiskamma Trust. In 2008, along with a group of friends, she began The Keiskamma Canada Foundation in Alberta. The Keiskamma Canada Foundation raises awareness and funds for the Trust, and provides opportunities for Albertans to purchase the beautiful handmade embroideries made by artists from Hamburg.

Read more: <http://keiskamacanada.com/>

Organization Response

Today, the Keiskamma Trust continues to provide support to community members in Hamburg, particularly the most vulnerable - grandmothers, mothers, and children, many of whom are orphans.

The Health Programme's health workers provide home-based care and help patients manage their HIV treatment. They regularly create awareness campaigns about HIV prevention. They also provide emergency transportation services.

The Art Project provides income for women artists living in Hamburg. The women specialize in beading, felt-making, embroideries, ceramics and printmaking. Their work often tells their stories of loss due to HIV/AIDS. The artists often receive commissions. In 2020, they worked collaboratively with scientists to create a science-themed art installation!

The Education Programme reaches over hundreds of children from Hamburg and surrounding villages, offering after-school care, tutoring, and daily meals. The Vulindlela Centre provides high school aged youth with technology training, career guidance, academic support, and numerous life-skills clubs.

The Music Academy teaches committed students aged between the ages of 8 and 17 and provides recorders to kids if they come to each lesson. The music students have garnered acclaim across the country for their unique sound and style.



Tapestry embroidered by Nombulelo Paliso and directed by Cebo Babalwa Ndonga, two artists from Hamburg.