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**Feedback from Elderly Caregivers who were part of  
RobS Family Support Groups in 2007.**

**Family support report:** Khokhwane Community, Izikhokho group

**Venue:** An AB's house in Ekhokwane Community, Elandskop. (AB stands for Abaduduzi Besigane – Zulu term for self appointed comforters of children who work with RobS in their respective communities)

**Date:** 31 January 2008

**Number of participants:** 13 participants (3 younger caregivers, and 10 elderly caregivers, with 2 small children in their care also there. All caregivers were women).

**Facilitator:** Thembeke Magojo (Angela Hough and Jenny Parsley from Stephen Lewis Foundation joined for the later part of the workshop).



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### **Purpose of the reflection workshop:**

During 2007 RobS ran a slightly revised Family Support Group Program using hand making a doll as part of the process. Over a 9-week process a group of caregivers meet to make a doll and learn about listening to, and helping their children cope with the loss of their parents. The making of the doll is both creative and helps the caregiver ‘rest’, have fun and explore play through sharing their experience as they make the doll. The program encourages the caregiver to practice a new way of engaging with their children by setting aside a small amount of time each week to play (same time, same place, same child, new joint activity). This reflection was conducted with a group of caregivers who had participated in groups in 2007. We sought to get some sense of the value to the caregiver some time after the support group. We wanted to know whether the program had retained any value and ‘impact’ in the family after the support group was completed. Our key question: ‘Has the family changed in their reaction/ coping as a result of their participation?’

### **Process of reflection workshop:**

We ran the following reflection process as shown below:

### **Outline of feedback and reflection activities:**

<b><i>Time</i></b>	<b><i>Activity</i></b>	<b><i>Explanation</i></b>
9 – 9.30	<b><u>Song and prayer</u></b> <b>Icebreaker:</b> name and action, mime where you’ve come from today. <b>Introduce aim of today:</b>	You were in a doll making workshop - this is a time to get together and reflect on that workshop and what we’ve used from it/ not used since then.
9.30 – 10.00	<b><u>Collective remembering journey</u></b> Process of remembering what we did in the workshop – the remembering journey on a piece of paper – represent with objects.	Roll out long sheet of paper. On the paper the whole group as a group remember the process - draw write or add objects from the room to represent all the activities and things that they learnt from the Gogo group. Reflect on the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do you have any practical tips to share with others</li></ul>
10.00 – 10.45	<b><u>Process with dolls</u></b> ( <i>each Gogo to bring their doll from Uthando dolls workshop</i> ).	To work in pairs. Need 4 chairs per pair. Put your doll on a chair next to you, sitting opposite your partner and her doll. Now introduce yourself and your doll. Decide who is A and who is B. B goes first. She swops places with her doll. A then asks the doll questions. Tell me about yourself? When do you come out? What is B like... etc.) When are dolls useful? How can we use dolls? Where do I still need help? <b>B is to answer as the doll.</b>

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
TEA	10.45 – 11.15	
11.15 – 12.00	<p>Go out and select something from outside or in the room to show what your experience was of using what you learnt from the training. Share in groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell why you have chosen what you did. What was the most important/significant thing that you learnt</li> </ul> <p>Reflect on following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was this the most significant thing?</li> <li>• Do you have any practical tips to share with others</li> <li>• What worked really well, what didn't work well</li> <li>• Where do I still need help</li> <li>• What is working and I can keep doing</li> <li>• How can I develop in my relationship with 'my' children.</li> </ul>	
13.00	<b>Closing:</b> song, affirmation word for person next to you.	

### **Feedback from the caregivers:**

**Collective remembering journey:** The caregivers were asked to engage in a process of remembering what they did in the workshop by plotting the journey by placing objects on piece of paper to represent activities or part of the journey or what they had learnt.

The caregivers placed objects such as wool to represent knitting clothes and the comfort and warmth the dolls brought to the children.

One caregiver took a candle, which represented the light which she felt is represented in her life. The reason she chose that is because the light is what she feels she got by coming to the training.

Another caregiver took the ball to show that before she came to the training she had no relationship with the children. The ball represents the togetherness she has with her child and that she has become a friend with the child which is something which she did not see as possible.

Another caregiver represented how the programme has helped her by representing it with the stone. The stone represented that now in the family with her children they are solid as a rock at home. So she is thankful to have participated in the training.

One caregiver took a skipping rope which represents the importance of play in children. She says she now has realized that children get in touch with their world through play and that their play should not be disturbed.

The necklace represented the uniqueness that is in the group, that uniqueness which has helped the group to be able to share their worries. It also represents the spirit of togetherness which they say keeps them together. The necklace showed the connection of working together and the connectedness they found in the group.

The wool reminds them of the dolls, which brings warmth to the children that are in their care.

Another one represented it with a car. The car meant the joy she feels when she sees a blue car because has free heart due to what she has learnt in session with other caregivers. So the car represents the people (facilitators) who were in it who help her realize the importance of listening to children.

They used soap to represent the sense of cleansing by being able to tell stories of their loss and difficulties, in caring they washed and cared for their children.



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### **Process with dolls**

Gogos were asked to bring their doll from Uthando dolls workshop. Some could not do that as they had given them to their children. We had brought extra dolls in case of this. The Gogos were asked to tell a story or role-play using the dolls. Many played out scenes of children sharing distress of losing parents or not having money and of another person showing empathy. They said the doll helped them to see mentally where the child was at because they were able to act out what their children were feeling. The caregivers identified that dolls are important because they help to see how much the child has developed mentally. The dolls are also helpful because the children get a friend who understands and they can relate to. The children also get warmth from having a doll as it also gives the child the ability to have something to care for.

### **Select an object:**

Participants were asked to go out and select something from outside or from objects in the room to show what their experience was of using what they had learnt from the training.

The participants in general expressed how grateful they were for the workshop. They welcomed the opportunity to support each other, to realize that they were not alone, that other people also had difficulties they felt that they had really learnt to listen to children. An interesting outcome was that many Gogos expressed that they had learnt not to hit their children, but rather to make time to listen to their children. It is interesting because the workshop never directly addressed discipline or corporal punishment, but it is something that they have internalized through the process of talking about being a child, and games we played as children, seems to have evoked empathy for children.

The caregivers shared that they were usually impatient with the children and always smacked the child whenever they did not listen. Now as they have attended the family support they are able to sit with the child and talk with the child.

### Some examples of objects people chose included:

A green leaf, which showed growth and rejuvenation and life that the participant had gained from the workshop and what she had learnt. She really felt like a strong green plant and very alive.

A cow to show the value of the knowledge that she had gained.

A star to show how the knowledge she had been given was shining and making their lives better.

**Closing:** song, affirmation word for person next to you and share in some lunch.

### **Reflection by Facilitators**

We were greatly encouraged by the attendance and participation. The reflection program worked well and engaged the caregivers in the process. The group had fun while

reflecting, we enjoyed it as well. We were particularly struck by the comments about disciplining children, and delighted that the caregivers see and share changes in the way they interact as a family at home. We were also encouraged that the process offered such support to the caregivers and is remembered as such, that they had retained a lot of the experience and that their play with children at home had strengthened them and the child. Play and communication has continued in these homes long after the support group program came to an end – this is good news!

**Report by:**

Thembeke Magojo and Angela Hough



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