Delivering Essential Nutrition Services Far and Wide

Vitamin Angels Field Partner News, Issue 8

In this issue, you’ll hear about unique ways that Vitamin Angels’ Field Partners are reaching people in need around the world.
Moving Mountains to Fill the Gap

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, or so the saying goes. But for these hard-working Nutrition Volunteers at Agape Rural Health Program (ARHP), the mission of delivering nutrition services such as vitamin A supplementation to children knows no boundaries or distance.

Vitamin Angels’ Program Advisor for the Philippines, Dr. Luz Escubil, recently had the privilege of joining the team of the Provincial Nutrition Office of Palawan (a sub-grantee of ARHP) and the Municipal Nutrition Office of Roxas as they visited a remote village in the mountains of Sitio Manabu. The purpose of this trip was to conduct nutritional assessments, supplementary feeding, and vitamin A supplementation as part of the kick-off of their Malnutrition Reduction Program. Dr. Escubil accompanied the team on this journey to witness the program in action and conduct a monitoring visit. In order to reach this remote village, Dr. Escubil and the nutrition volunteers rode in a carabao-pulled cart for three hours high up into the mountains. They crossed the same meandering river over thirty times through the dense forest.

The team was only too happy to reach their intended destination, despite the literally bumpy ride, because they knew that they were providing the much-needed nutrition services and interventions for children who rarely receive regular health services.
Flying Low to Meet High Need

Flying Medical Service (FMS), based in Arusha-Tanzania, is a non-profit, volunteer organization that provides preventative and curative health care as well as health education services. Last year Joygrace Muthoni, Vitamin Angels’ Africa Region Technical Specialist, had the opportunity to conduct an eLearning orientation and a monitoring visit for the FMS staff.

FMS is the true definition of reaching hard-to-reach populations. They provide routine services including vitamin A supplementation, deworming, and prenatal multiple micronutrient supplements (MMS; multivitamins) to the most remote pastoralist communities in Tanzania. As the name suggests, FMS accesses these remote areas via small airplanes. On land, the journey would take between 6-8 hours under the best conditions. These communities do not have health facilities located near them, so FMS has stepped in to fill in the gap in medical services. In addition to routine health care, FMS also provides emergency flights and evacuations to hospitals for people who are very sick.

As Joygrace describes, “FMS provides the services in an incredible setting which you have to experience for yourself to believe.” They make use of what is available at the moment, whether that means administering vitamin A under the shade of the plane’s wing, or counseling pregnant women in the small, makeshift antenatal room built in a cluster of trees. FMS recognizes that even the most difficult-to-reach and remotely located communities deserve access to quality health care, and they are a shining example of going the extra mile.
Latin America & the Caribbean:

**Fundación Ayú – Mexico**

For the last 25 years, Fundación Ayú has been committed to helping women and children in marginalized populations improve their health and economic conditions. They work in areas of high need in Oaxaca, Mexico, including hard-to-access rural communities as well as urban areas that do not receive basic health supplies and services. Some communities were initially hesitant to receive this support because these types of basic services were unfamiliar to them. To address this, Fundación Ayú focused on educating these communities, by going through local health organizations that the communities were already familiar with. Fundación Ayú continues to work hard to ensure the local communities know that even in hard-to-access areas, “siempre habrá alguien que piense en ellas”—there will always be someone who thinks of them.

Africa:

**Reseau Congo Moringa – The Democratic Republic of Congo**

Reseau Congo Moringa (RCM) serves rural, hard-to-reach and low-income communities in Mbuji-Mayi, one of the largest cities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some of the primary health concerns in this area include malnutrition and parasitic infection, so the RCM team works hard to overcome distribution and transportation challenges in order to provide children and pregnant women with access to essential micronutrients and deworming agents. The community they serve is very accepting of the interventions they offer, and seeing the reactions from parents as children regain their health and appetite is one of the most rewarding parts of their work.

RCM has also been integral in connecting Vitamin Angels with more local organizations in the DRC, spreading access to micronutrients and deworming treatments even further. Thanks to their dedicated support and partnership, Vitamin Angels has gained over 40 new partners around the Mbuji-Mayi area! Year after year, RCM continues to strive to support their active community and transform lives.
Asia:

*Kandhamal Zilla Sabuja Vadihya Sanghthan – India*

Even if it means walking over six miles through hilly terrain and forests, Kandhamal Zilla Sabuja Vadihya Sanghthan (KZSVS) is determined to provide health care to the rural areas of the Daringbadi block of Kandhamal in Odisha, India. Many of the villages they serve are inaccessible by vehicle and beyond the reach of existing health services. KZSVS service providers are committed to reaching these remote communities and always “make sure to go the last mile.”

When KZSVS began partnering with Vitamin Angels in 2013, the local community was not fully aware of the importance of the nutrition interventions offered by Vitamin Angels and many of their children were frequently falling ill from measles and diarrhea. After just one year of regularly distributing vitamin A supplements and deworming and raising awareness, KZSVS began to get community feedback that the children were much healthier! As parents were eagerly bringing their children in for their next doses, KZSVS realized they were succeeding in changing the local mindset and improving the health of the community. KZSVS recognizes that the problem of malnutrition will not be solved in a day. They attribute the success of their program to thoroughly understanding the needs of their community and providing ongoing and repeated education on the importance of these essential nutrition interventions.

US/Canada:

*Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre – Canada*

In 2013, Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre (SRHC) began in a church basement for six patients in Ontario, Canada. Today, their center provides evidenced-based health care to over 5,000 patients and is the only place in the region that manages the ongoing health needs of refugees regardless of their Canadian immigration status. Many of SRHC’s clients arrive from war and famine-stricken countries and have experienced long-term malnutrition, making them some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

Although some clients may be unfamiliar with antenatal care, SRHC offers free prenatal multiple micronutrient supplements and education to help promote healthy pregnancies. SRHC has created a welcoming space where patients can access a wide variety of services on site, including mental health assessment, trauma counseling, dietary advice, help with applying for disability benefits, and more. Clients come to SRHC not only in times of great need, but also in times of celebration. SRHC has fostered the growth of a strong and connected community—one that celebrates birthdays, the joy of family reunification, and good health.
Vitamin Angels Shares Innovative Learning Technology at eLearning Africa Conference

Vitamin Angels representatives Adedoyin Adesina (Nigeria), Joygrace Muthoni (Kenya), and Elizabeth Hagee de Zambrano (USA) recently attended the 2019 eLearning Africa Conference that took place 23-25 October in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. This year’s theme was: *Expanding Access and Use of Digital Technology to Under-Served Communities. Subtheme: Connectivity: ‘off-the-grid’ solutions.*

The Vitamin Angels team attended the conference to learn about new opportunities that are changing the world of learning, hear from a variety of speakers, and participate in workshops. Joygrace and Elizabeth also led a presentation session and shared Vitamin Angels work on using QR codes as one way of overcoming the challenges in collecting user data for hard-to-reach populations that do not have regular or reliable access to the internet. The session was well-received and the participants were excited about the idea of using mobile technology to gather data. The conference also provided an opportunity to network with other organizations and to share information on Vitamin Angels’ activities in various countries of the world.

For more information on the innovative technology that Vitamin Angels is using to distribute our Learning Tools, please contact technicalservices@vitaminangels.org

Building New Evidence for Alliances for Improving Nutrition

Come and meet the Vitamin Angels team at the Micronutrient Forum 2020. We look forward to seeing you there!

5th Global Conference 2020
March 23-27, 2020
Bangkok, Thailand
conference.micronutrientforum.org
Vitamin Angels partners with a wide range of field partner organizations – each with their own distinct models and community contexts. Creating effective training tools that all field partners can use is a difficult task, but an important one. Vitamin Angels has developed a “toolbox” of learning options that field partners can select based on their context and needs to effectively deliver essential nutrition interventions. eLearning is one such tool, and recently, Vitamin Angels sought to understand if eLearning could be effectively used by different types of learners in different settings to safely deliver vitamin A supplementation and deworming (VAS+D) to children under 5.

To test who can successfully use eLearning, we asked service providers from various field partners around the world to take the VAS+D eLearning course. We then compared results of that course based on the learner’s education levels and familiarity with computers. Results of this study were presented at a poster session at the American Society of Nutrition (ASN) 2019 conference in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. The objective of the study was to examine the relation between a service provider’s education and computer skills with how well they learned the information to be able to safely deliver VAS+D to children.

The results, as shown in the figure on the left, showed that learners of all education levels and computer skills learned how to safely deliver VAS+D. Learners who did not often use computers and who may not have completed formal school scored the same as learners who had college education and knew how to use computers. Out of a possible score of 11, learners from both groups scored an average of 9+. These results are encouraging and demonstrate that we have succeeded in creating an effective learning tool for service providers of all skill levels.

You can access the eLearning course and other training support tools on our website at https://www.vitaminangels.org/vasd-service-delivery
Additional Resources

Medic Mobile

Medic Mobile builds mobile applications to improve health in underserved communities. They see communication gaps through the eyes of health workers and patients, and work with local implementing partners to co-design health care delivery systems to fit their needs. They are committed to making their best tools accessible to small, grassroots organizations and clinics with limited resources. Medic Mobile helped to build the Community Health Toolkit, which helps health workers ensure safe deliveries, track outbreaks faster, treat illnesses door-to-door, and keep stock of medicines, among many other uses.

Medic Mobile runs on a Windows desktop or laptop and communicates with any phone in the field, improving communication and coordination between pregnant women, community health workers, and clinic staff. Using Medic Mobile, health workers can register pregnancies in their communities, receive automated reminders, quickly report danger signs to clinical teams, and communicate with managers and clinical teams at clinics. Learn more at www.medicmobile.org

Jhpiego

Jhpiego provides the global health community with information, expertise, and opportunities to support high-quality health systems in limited-resource settings. Their website offers evidence-based materials and state-of-the-art learning opportunities in a range of technical areas. These resources can be used by health care professionals, educators/trainers, program staff, and others for the following uses:

- Update knowledge, skills, and attitudes of service providers
- Create or update service delivery guidelines
- Develop plans for program implementation
- Implement program interventions in an effective, efficient, sustainable manner

Jhpiego is an international non-profit health organization affiliated with The Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, USA. For more than 35 years and in over 150 countries, Jhpiego has worked to prevent the needless deaths of women and their families. Learn more at http://resources.jhpiego.org/

Suggestions or topics for our next newsletter?

We would love to hear from you on what topics you would find most useful to hear about in our next newsletter. Please send suggestions and feedback to programs@vitaminangels.org. We look forward to hearing from you!