

Programs for South African orphans assessed

December 31, 1969 6:00 AM Joseph Halm
jhalm@tulane.edu

South Africa has the largest population of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS on the African continent. Millions of dollars go into programs designed to help them and their families, but are the programs working? Tonya Thurman, a new School of Social Work researcher, is stationed there to study that vital question.

Tonya Thurman

A Tulane alumna, Tonya Thurman is the newest research associate professor for the School of Social Work, based in South Africa. (Photo from Tonya Thurman)

Thurman, a Tulane alumna who founded the Tulane International office in Durban, South Africa, is now a research associate professor in social work.

Working full time in Durban, she leads a team on a multi-million dollar federal grant to learn how effective funding has been for HIV- and AIDS-related programs for children.

“Ultimately, we are trying to contribute to the evidence base on programs for orphans and other children made vulnerable by the disease,” she says. “A lot of money is directed toward support of these children.

“For instance, through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the U.S. government provided over \$300 million in 2010. However, this investment is not matched with evidence on what care approaches work best to improve their lives.”

In addition, says Ron Marks, [social work](#) dean, Thurman's work will “expand our global programming into South Africa, including an area that we already have a great deal of interest in, namely, vulnerable children and families.”

Thurman is completing a study of various intervention programs. In 2010, the researchers surveyed 1,800 children and caregivers who subsequently received services from humanitarian organizations. This year, a follow-up survey examined

the impact of that assistance.

Another longitudinal study in its early stages focuses on preventing HIV and improving the psychological health of adolescents affected by HIV/AIDS.

“With our established relationships with local government and other stakeholders, we have a receptive and eager audience for the results, and we are hoping these studies will have some important policy implications,” says Thurman, who holds a doctorate from the [School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#).

Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.