

You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.
Let your light shine before others
and glorify your Father in heaven

Salt & Light

November 2025



Supporting children living with HIV

"Because I have HIV, I was forbidden from playing with my cousins and the other children in the community.

My plate, spoon, and pots were separated from the rest. I was never touched."

After losing both parents to HIV-related complications and living with HIV herself, Grace was placed in her uncle's care.

Despite having a large extended family, Grace's basic needs of love, healthcare, education, and dignity went unmet.

"I lived in a shelter, with a broken door too weak to protect me. This was frightening as there was danger in the community. I was not enrolled in school and had no soap to clean myself.

My family stopped my antiretroviral (ARV) treatment and gave me traditional herbal medicine."

Grace's caregivers, overwhelmed by poverty and misinformation, believed her condition was

caused by witchcraft.

The consequences were devastating. Grace's viral load escalated, placing her life at serious risk. She suffered from malnutrition and the crushing weight of stigma and discrimination.

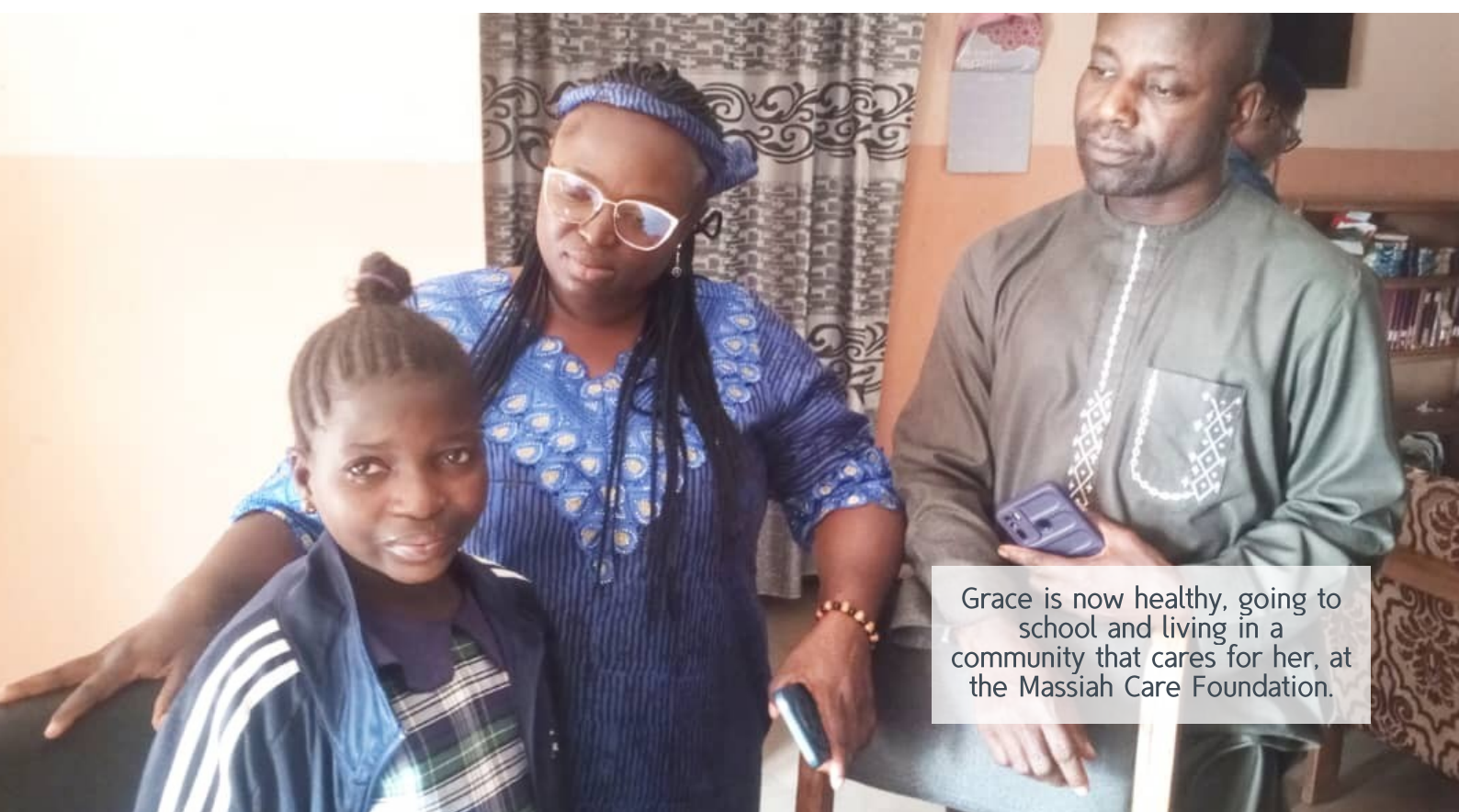
But just when hope seemed lost, a door opened, and ACET Nigeria stepped in.

Following a comprehensive needs assessment and with the full consent of her uncle, Grace moved to her new home at Massiah Care Foundation.

The Foundation provides free education and comprehensive healthcare services for every child under their care.

At the foundation, Grace has restarted her lifesaving ARV treatment, is receiving proper nutrition, and attending school.

Most importantly, she is finally surrounded by a community that truly cares for her wellbeing and future.



Grace is now healthy, going to school and living in a community that cares for her, at the Massiah Care Foundation.

Grandma Nandi

Empowering community protectors of children

"Lots of our children are suffering from sexual violence and unplanned pregnancies. The sad part is the fathers of the babies disappear after they find out about the pregnancy.

Then, the girls are forced to get married at the youngest age, to older men. Many of the men have HIV."

In Kwa-Zulu Natal, where Crossroads works, sugar daddies prey on children by offering them food, money or phones, and then later demand sex in return.

Nearly 1 in 4 girls in South Africa become pregnant as a teenager - in many cases as the result of statutory rape (where a child is simply too young to consent to sex).

Early pregnancy forces girls to drop out of school and be trapped in a cycle of poverty.

They may also be forced into an early marriage, increasing their chance of experiencing intimate partner violence.

This all contributes to South Africa having the highest HIV infection rates in the world.

With your support, Crossroads is working with the local community to prevent new HIV infections and protect children through health education, HIV support groups, and community projects.

"My grandchildren live with me as my children had to leave South Africa to find work.

There are many orphaned children in the community because their parents died from HIV-related illnesses

Crossroads has supported us with our own warm home with a door that locks. I also receive clothes and food for my grandchildren.

They teach us grannies to keep an eye on the children, to make sure they are not playing where you cannot see them.

In our communities, it seems ok to let a child walk naked, but we need to make sure this does not happen.

We now teach our grandchildren that they must not talk to strangers and also not to take anything, even money, from strangers.

We are taught health education - it is very important to educate yourself about safe sex, to avoid HIV and unwanted pregnancy.

Women and girls need to stand and fight for gender equality, by empowering ourselves with skills and better education, so that men can see they shouldn't treat women like slaves.

Crossroads has taught me hand sewing, crochet, and baking skills. With my hands, I can sew morning gowns and sell them.

I would love to buy a sewing machine to teach the girls to sew so they can make a living."



"I lost 4 children, each before their fourth birthday. The grief was overwhelming. My heart ached with questions and sorrow.

5 years ago, after I became pregnant with my fifth child, I met with ACET Nigeria, and during my health screening, I found out that I was HIV positive.

This was a moment that deepened my despair.

But it became a turning point.

With care and compassion, ACET Nigeria quickly linked me to a hospital and I was placed on antiretroviral therapy (ARV) without delay.

They explained that for the health of my baby, I should give birth in a hospital and not breastfeed my baby.

Thanks to this timely treatment and follow-ups, I gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

And with ACET's support, I remain diligent with my appointments and ARV medication.

Today, that baby boy is four years old and is HIV negative!

Eight months ago, my joy grew even more with the birth of another healthy HIV negative baby boy.

Both my husband and I continue our ARV treatment without missing a dose.

I just want to say a big thank you to ACET Nigeria for standing by us. I am truly happy."

Your support is transforming lives in Nigeria

Patience's story is a living testimony to the **power of early HIV intervention** and ongoing support.

Mother-to-child transmission may only be one factor driving Nigeria's HIV epidemic, but taking steps to reduce it is an important part of the fight against the virus. **More babies are born with HIV in Nigeria than in any other country**, and the number of babies infected through **breastfeeding** is also significant.

You are helping ACET Nigeria work with some of the poorest communities where the HIV burden is highest. The first step is providing **HIV testing and counselling** in these underserved areas, so that individuals can **know their status** and then be supported in accessing antiretroviral (ARV) treatment. This not only improves their health but,

as their viral load is suppressed by the ARVs, the chance of passing on the virus is vastly reduced.

ACET Nigeria's work with pregnant women also tackles **other issues** contributing to HIV infections in babies: **only one in three babies is delivered in a health facility**, over 40% of pregnant women **do not use antenatal services**, and HIV can be passed from **mother to child through breast milk**, unless the mother has an undetectable viral load.

By **supporting pregnant ladies in accessing antenatal and HIV prevention services**, more babies are being safely delivered in a hospital, and the ladies are getting the right advice and support about breastfeeding and medication.

Hence, **more babies without HIV!**



Shining Star's Teen Mums, Zimbabwe

"I was still grieving the death of my mother when I became pregnant at 17.

I had to drop out of school and my father reminded me every day how much he was disappointed in me.

Being a mother at such a young age destroyed my self-esteem as I wondered how I was going to take care of a child or have a future."

Like Unashe, almost a quarter of girls in Zimbabwe become pregnant when they are teenagers.

This puts them at great risk of poverty, death in childbirth, HIV, child marriage, and turning to sex work to survive.

Thanks to your help, Shining Star's Teen Mum Programme supports young mothers who are at risk, mentoring them in parenthood while equipping them with credible career options and pathways back into education.

"My favourite thing about Shining Star is the parenting mentorship as I can now care effectively for my child's wellbeing.

I learnt to accept my child as a gift from God, and that having a child does not mean I can no longer fulfil my dreams. I am still as capable as I was before.

They also taught me that my sexual reproductive health should be my priority.

I have a right to choose which birth control measure to use, and I now know how to protect myself from HIV.

Shining Star paid for my enrolment at West Gate College to do a Hotel and Catering course.

I am now on a placement at Simbisa Brands, a leading fast food establishment in Bulawayo.

I plan to do rewrite my O-level to acquire more subjects and run a small-scale business so I can take care of my day-to-day expenses.

Shining Star has taught me to take charge of my life and set goals and not base my worth on the judgment I get from society."



Unashe with her child.



ACET Thailand's Smart Life and Safe Life programmes help protect children from abuse, HIV and early pregnancy.

14-year-old Hom's story

"My father is a drug addict, and my mother had to go to Bangkok to find work to support us. She left me and my younger brother with my grandmother and great-grandmother.

Because of the age difference, I often quarrelled with my grandmother. I withdrew more and more to social media. I started dressing up and posting pictures on Facebook, and men would often give me attention and come to talk to me.

I started dating a boyfriend online. He was 35. It started with talking, joking, and playing games online. Then he'd send me money and buy me things in exchange for photos. First, it was photos of my face, then he'd give more money if I revealed more.

Then it was nude photos. Then he started threatening me.

He said if I didn't meet him, he'd post the nude photos on social media and in my friends' groups. I was full of fear and shame, and I didn't want to go to school. My studies were not good at all.

Then I remembered ACET Thailand from their Smart Life teaching at my school. The team had been kind, open to listening and offered advice and ways to help. So, I decided to talk to them.

They stayed by my side when everyone else blamed me for my behaviour. They gave me advice and acted as mediators in communicating with my family.

The ACET team supported me in solving the problem so I could escape from blackmail, and so that it would not happen to other children.

We met with government officials, but they looked at me as a bad child; they did not care what I thought. They only focused on catching the culprit. Sometimes I was so angry with myself that I hurt myself.

But ACET supported me – it's great to have someone on your side. They helped me to live my life, to love myself and forgive myself.

They have taught me how to protect myself. I now know I have the right to refuse, the confidence to not put myself in risky situations, and the knowledge of where to seek help.

This project has made me believe that I am someone that God loves; that I have value. It has given me confidence in how I live my life.

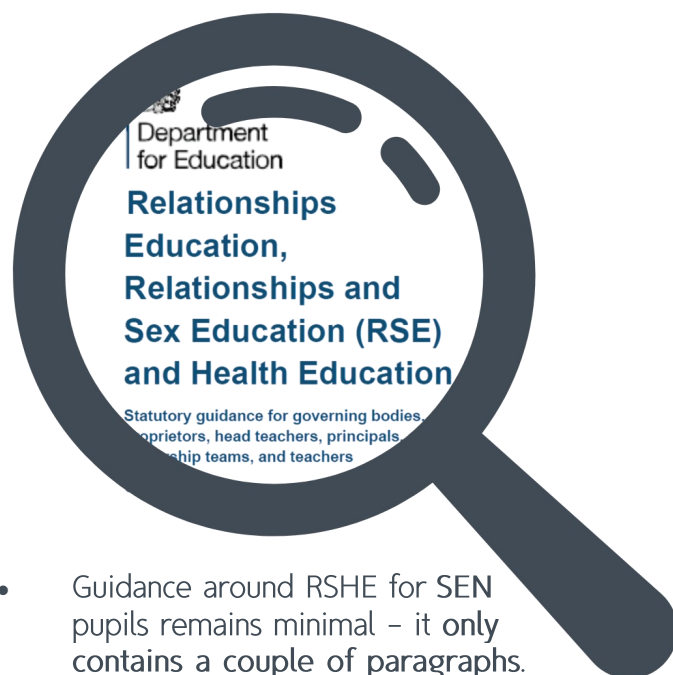
In my family, we talk more often now, and I have cut down on social media and am more careful. Even my grades are better!"

With your support, ACET Thailand's Smart Life and Safe Life programmes empower young people develop the life skills needed to protect themselves from abuse, teenage pregnancy, and HIV.

They also support children like 14-year-old Hom tackle problems when they get into difficulty and don't know who to turn to.

A first look at the new statutory RSHE guidance

An important event in our field of Relationships, Sex (and Health) Education (RSHE) is the recent release of **updated statutory guidance for RSHE** from the Department for Education (DfE). You may have seen **some debate** about this in the news; here, we will **summarise the main changes** and let you **form your own opinion**.



- There is **no change to the underpinning law** (the Children and Social Work Act 2017). This is the DfE's guidance on how to apply the law, **statutory from September 2026**.
- There is a significant amount of **new content** compared to the 2019 version, including a **70% rise in the number of learning outcomes** schools are required to hit by the time children leave secondary school.
- The new 2025 version **continues to encourage the use of external experts**, such as **acet UK**, as they provide **expert knowledge** and a different way of working, and can be **blended with delivery by school staff**.
- There is a **slight shift in tone** from the concept of minimum standards of what *must* be taught, to stating **some prohibitions**, e.g. when talking about mental health, the guidance lists both **what to say** and some **things that you should not say**.
- Guidance around RSHE for SEN pupils remains minimal – it **only contains a couple of paragraphs**.
- **Engagement is emphasised** – both engagement with pupils, and engagement and transparency with parents.
- There is a **little more clarity over what constitutes 'Sex Education'** e.g. Paragraph 14 states that Relationships Education *shouldn't* include details about sexual activity but *can* cover sensitive topics such as sexual violence, in order to keep children safe.
- The new guidance states that pupils should not be taught as a fact that all people have a gender identity, but does include topics such as sexism, misogyny, and gender stereotypes. (We are awaiting updated guidance for schools from the DfE on supporting gender-questioning young people).
- For Primary Relationships Education, there is **greater emphasis on teaching young people skills**, e.g.. around improving relationships, and body boundaries.
- **New outcomes in primary include:** talking about loneliness, grief, loss, and going into more depth about online risks and safety.
- **New outcomes in secondary include:** marriage legal protection, misogyny, violence against women and girls, gender stereotypes, sexism in the media, AI (e.g. deep fakes, AI-generated explicit images, chat bots), and going into more depth about personal safety.
- The term **self-esteem** is used for the **first time** in this version of the guidance, with an emphasis on balancing the needs of others without neglecting your own. It also talks about assertiveness versus control, boundaries, and managing emotions.

KEY POINTS

No changes to underpinning law

To be implemented from Sept 2026

70% more learning outcomes

SEN guidance still weak

Values external experts like us

Slight shift in tone

Supporting RSHE educators

Gareth and Rachel recently ran an online CPD workshop for members of the Esteem network, and the Esteem team are offering twilight workshops to primary and secondary schools to help them navigate the 2025 changes to the RSHE guidance and plan for its implementation in 2026/27.

This is in addition to other CPD workshops run for members this year, and other twilight workshops available for schools which provide deeper dives into trickier topics such as naked picture sharing, and dismantling sex myths created by porn and other media.

We are also constantly reviewing our resources for network members and developing new ones, for instance, those around pornography and naked picture sharing, to take account of things like AI

and deep fakes, so we can support older young people in critically challenging content that they come across.

In the autumn term, we hope to release pelvic health materials to our members which we have been developing for the last couple of years with sixth formers. This resource covers pelvic health matters that are not STI or pregnancy related.

We will also continue to release new primary Relationships Education resources that we have been piloting.

In the medium term, we aim to explore influencer culture as a way of attacking some of the issues around online misinformation. We will also think about refreshing our resources around consent and healthy relationships, to review how we teach about the law and address sexism.

Our Esteem network of RSE educators (those who have been trained by us and choose to stay as part of our network so they can be resourced and supported by acet UK) reached over 66,000 young people in the 2024/2025 school year.

This is in addition to the 7,638 students reached by our own Esteem team! The network currently has educators across the UK, as well as in Turkey, India, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Austria and South Africa.

How Esteem is planning to help

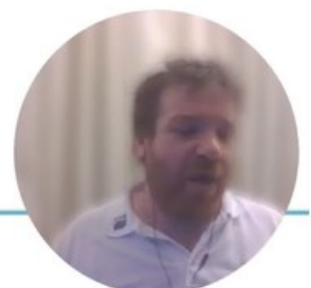
Short term

- New pelvic health lesson
- Update content on porn
- Update content on sexting
- Continue release of new primary resources

Gareth and Rachel ran an online CPD workshop for Esteem network members on the RSHE

Medium term

- Explore “influencer culture” content
- How to teach laws & address sexism
- Student voice activities





An art therapy session



Coping with trauma in Ukraine

ACET Ukraine's amazing 'Teens and Joy' programme helps children overcome the consequences of trauma caused by the war in their country, and aims to prevent PTSD. The programme involves seven thematic meetings with the young people, including discussions, practical psychological techniques, and art therapy.

In the first 6 months of this year, 530 young people and 124 parents took part in the project, and 115 young people and 14 parents also received counselling with the ACET Ukraine's trauma psychologist.

Thanks to this programme, the ACET Ukraine team was able to help children who became internally displaced due to the war, children who lost their parents due to the war, and children who were held in Russian captivity.

Also, within the framework of this project, the team psychologist conducted psychological training for a further 110 adolescents and 75 parents of adolescents, to enable them to provide better care and support to their peers.

"The war has changed my daughter a lot. She abruptly became more mature, stopped rejoicing as before & stopped believing in something good. Now I see her smile more often, she made a map of her dreams at your meeting & hung it on her wall. I am glad that you helped my child become more open and happier. Thank you for being there!" Osana

"After talking with the psychologist, it became much easier to perceive everything: the war, difficulties with school & my parents. I stopped worrying, I became balanced & calmer. I enjoy life & the moments that I have every day. I became more positive & open to people. And those around me noticed that I had become self-confident & understood my strengths even more." Olya 16

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