

# Preventing Abandonment at Pumwani Maternity Hospital

## VIDEO SUMMARY

Abandonment of infants often takes place due to a range of stressors affecting vulnerable mothers, which collectively erode their confidence, result in feelings of isolation and make caring for a newborn overwhelming. Early detection and support that is strengths-based and focuses on social and emotional development, provided in supportive peer communities, is key to empowering women, building their confidence and subsequently reducing the rates of infant abandonment.

In this video, Grace Mwangi takes a critical look at the social work approach, and the impact different approaches can have on outcomes for women and their children. She emphasizes the importance of being relatable, prioritizing relationship-building and seeking first to understand a woman's situation


and perspective before intervening. She unpacks the benefits of a psychosocial development approach, which focuses less on direct intervention and more on building confidence, resilience, ownership, skills-sharing and the empowerment of women in peer group settings. She cautions social workers about the potential long-term harm to women and children that can stem from making rushed reactionary decisions on the basis of surface level information. Grace also raises the important issue of sustainability. She points to the ability of community-based social work practice to better withstand fluctuations in funding or donor interest due to their low-cost, high-impact nature. As a result, practitioners are better positioned to deliver consistent support to clients within the context of long-term programs.

## DISCUSSION TOPIC


In this video Grace highlights how, in the vast majority of cases, the decision to abandon a child is the result of underlying pressures and issues that a mother feels unable to resolve. She states that it rarely comes from an actual desire to relinquish the child as all mothers experience a level of attachment to their babies even in their worst situation. As a result, Grace implores social workers to refrain from rushed decision making and taking the stated desire to relinquish a child at face value. She asks social workers to look below the surface, recognise the humanity in every client and 'seek to make that humanity strong' rather than weaken it by removing a child.

Throughout the course of the video she unpacks how this requires social workers to take a totally different approach, one that invests significant time and energy in building relationships, listening and seeking to understand before reacting. She also shows how many of the underlying issues require responses that focus on building women's self-worth, confidence and social support networks rather than direct interventions.


## In your context:

-  How much value is placed on building strong relationships with clients and really seeking to understand what's under the surface before decisions about interventions are made? How is this facilitated? How could this be improved and what would have to change in terms of your program or practice to enable that? What, if any, are the barriers to making those changes?

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-  What are the types of underlying issues that typically affect your clients or beneficiaries? Reflect on the importance of psychosocial development with respect to the root issues facing your clients and discuss whether your current practice has the right balance between direct intervention versus building clients' resilience, capacity and social support networks.

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-  What are other examples you've seen or heard that highlight the risks of premature decision making and intervention? What can be put in place in terms of processes, systems, and structures to safeguard against these risks?



## DISCUSSION TOPIC

In this video, Grace highlights the role peer groups and opportunities for peer-to-peer skills exchange play in the prevention of abandonment. She emphasizes the importance of 'mothers teaching mothers' in contrast to the more common top down approaches to training and skills transfer. Whilst the skills the mothers learnt from each other are in and of themselves valuable, what Grace is really drawing attention to in this video is the shift in approach; from one that focuses on deficits to one that focuses on strengths and assets. She is recognising the role strengths based social work and/or asset-based development plays in empowering women and building their confidence, self-esteem and resilience, all of which are critical to enabling them to provide care for their children in situations of adversity.

## In your context:

- ① What social work or community development models underpin your practice and what are the strengths and weakness of that model? Is there a sufficient emphasis on strengths, or could this be enhanced? If so, how and what would the next steps be?

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- ② Discuss effective examples of strengths based social work programs you have been involved in or seen. How did they achieve a good balance between developing strengths and managing child protection risks? Discuss what achieving a good balance would look like in your practice or program.

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- ③ What role could/do peer support or informal social support groups play in supporting the clients you work with? If these are yet to be put in place, discuss how they could be established and what would be required in terms of resources and next steps.

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- ④ Discuss what your key takeaway points are from the various insights shared by Grace in this video. How will you seek to apply this learning to your practice/ program?