

Victoria tenderly cuddles baby Mahlatse Madupo in Polokwane, in Limpopo, and meets one of the youngsters in the Kliptown Youth Program in Soweto (right) during her three-day visit to South Africa to raise awareness of HIV and Aids



EXCLUSIVE PHOTO DIARY

WRITING ONLY FOR HELLO!

**VICTORIA BECKHAM
TELLS OF HER LIFE-CHANGING TRIP TO SOWETO
AND THE HEART-BREAKING STORIES OF THE
CHILDREN SHE IS DETERMINED TO HELP**

'As a mother I want nothing but a happy and healthy future for my children and that's all any mother would wish for. We have to support the women in these countries and communities to offer the same for their children. With simple, affordable and available medication, mothers with HIV have the opportunity to give birth to HIV-free babies, creating an HIV-free generation'



Spraying her own message – Dream Big – to the young girls at Kliptown on a special graffiti wall (above and right)

'The councillors at the youth project at Kliptown, Soweto, are heroes in my eyes. Educating, empowering and encouraging young girls, who have suffered tragically through sexual abuse and poverty. Reminding these girls they have a future; that if they keep themselves healthy and educated, they have opportunities outside of their situation'

Cradling a baby in her arms, one of the many she met during her trip to Soweto in South Africa, it was clear the cause about which Victoria Beckham feels so strongly had vibrantly come to life for her.

On a three-day visit organised by the Elton John Aids Foundation (EJAF) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (UNAids) to help raise awareness of women and children with the virus, Victoria, seizing on her new role as a UNAids international goodwill ambassador, threw herself into the hectic schedule, engaging with the people – mothers and medics, babies and teenagers – and places she visited along the way.

"It was fantastic to see how Victoria connected with young women and young mothers and their children in the townships, at community youth centres, in clinics and hospitals," said Anne Aslett, executive director of EJAF, of which Victoria is a patron. "Her energy and commitment to engage and learn from everyone we met was inspiring."

"Victoria is a lovely woman," her good friend, Sir Elton, told HELLO! "She brings that compassion to the fight against HIV."

SPEAKING OUT FOR OTHERS

Speaking exclusively to HELLO!, the designer, businesswoman and mother of four told how it was a "privilege" to visit the various projects around Johannesburg and Polokwane.

"I'm incredibly honoured that the UN have invited me to become a global goodwill ambassador for UNAids," she said. "I want to lend my voice to the women affected by gender-based violence, HIV and Aids and raise awareness of the issues they face and, where possible, help the communities and organisations that work so tirelessly on the ground to support these women and children."

Among the projects she visited was the Kliptown Youth Program in Soweto, a service for young girls, many of whom have experienced sexual abuse and poverty. Like online and digital mobile magazines funded by EJAF, it is encouraging young women to protect themselves from

'The graffiti project was a way of communicating messages about sexual behaviour, health & education in a more relatable way. I sprayed the wall with the words "DREAM BIG XVB"'

As a role model for youngsters, Victoria inspires once more as she chats with the girls at the project



The women of Soweto give a rousing welcome to their guest. "It was fantastic to see how Victoria connected with young women and young mothers," Anne Aslett of the Elton John Aids Foundation tells HELLO!





Another day and another cuddle: Victoria, joined by Mothers2Mothers founder Dr Mitch Besser (far right) plays with a young tot at the charity's project at Ramokgopa Clinic in Polokwane, where she also meets Mokgadi Madupo and her granddaughter Paballo (below left) and shows off photos of her own baby, three-year-old daughter Harper (below right)

'In the more rural community of Polokwane, I visited a Mothers2Mothers project alongside Dr Mitch Besser. In very difficult circumstances, the women of this community are amazing. Strong, proud women, they are supported by the mentor mothers of M2M who encourage women to "know their status" through early testing and then support them through the journey of talking to their partners, families, through their treatment, births and onwards'



HIV. So far the message has reached more than half a million people, and Victoria reinforced it, urging the girls to stay safe. She added her own motivational message, spraying "Dream Big" on a graffiti wall at the centre.

GIRL POWER

The next day, she visited the Mothers2 Mothers project at the Ramokgopa Clinic in Polokwane, where mentor mothers support pregnant women with HIV. Over the past three years, the project – one of many across Africa and funded by EJAF – has had staggering success, with more than 600,000 pregnant women across nine countries getting HIV testing and support, with more than 60,000 babies born HIV free as a result.

"I was moved by the strength of the women I met," Victoria told HELLO! "By supporting each other, they are growing stronger together, overcoming dreadful challenges to create happier, healthier futures for their children."

Victoria talked about her own children with the women and, when one of them asked what daughter Harper, three, looked like, brought out her phone to share some pictures.

"As a mother, I want nothing but a happy and healthy future for my children and that's all any mother would wish for," she told us. "We have to support the women in these countries and communities to offer the same for their children. With simple, affordable and available medication, mothers with HIV have the opportunity to give birth to HIV-free babies, creating an HIV-free generation."

The mum of four's love of children is clear as she takes time to talk to everyone she meets at Ramokgopa, from this schoolboy to a small baby (above)





Victoria is shown around the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, a world leader in the field of preventing HIV passing from pregnant mothers to their unborn babies

'My final day was spent on the maternity ward at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, the biggest one in South Africa. With a hugely successful prevention of mother-to-child transmission programme, it was a wonderful experience meeting mothers and their tiny, beautiful, newborn babies'



Hospital workers take the opportunity to chat with the former Spice Girl and give her a valuable insight into their lives treating and caring for the area's mothers and children

Dr Mitch Besser, founder of Mothers2Mothers, accompanied Victoria on her visit. "We need a luminary who can be a role model for working mothers," he said. "Victoria is a hard-working mother of four children. We celebrate her interest in supporting efforts to re-energise people's interest in this cause."

On her third and final day, Victoria had the opportunity to cuddle yet more babies at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, which set up the world's first programme to prevent HIV passing from pregnant mothers to their unborn babies.

"There are 23,000 babies a year born in the hospital and I think Victoria would have hugged every one of them if she'd had the chance," Professor James McIntyre, who set up the centre's Perinatal HIV Research Unit, told HELLO!

"She loved being here and her visit was a wonderful treat for the mums, nurses and community workers. As doctors and nurses, we can provide the medicines and care, but people like Victoria can give so much inspiration and hope."

STARTING A LONG JOURNEY

After her appointment was announced last month, Victoria flew to New York for a UN press conference – missing the launch of her new shop in Mayfair to do so. "It's taken me to get to 40 to realise I have a responsibility as a woman and a mother," she said. She also vowed she would do "whatever I can to raise awareness".

This trip, she realises, was just the beginning. "I'm at the start of this journey and it is important for me to educate myself and learn what I can from these inspiring women," she told HELLO!. "I will then take their messages to the next level – to the tribal leaders, governments and whoever I need to encourage change and do whatever it is I can to help create an Aids-free future." **H**

REPORT: ROSALIND POWELL
PHOTOS: JENNIFER BRUCE

Thanks to British Airways and the Saxon Hotel



The designer shields her eyes from the glare of the South African sun during a visit to the Meadowlands area of Soweto, where she meets and chats to resident Nhlanhla (below left) to discuss how to protect babies from getting the virus. Staff at the hospital are all smiles as they pose with Victoria (below right)

