

SHE RECALLS HOW CARING THE COUNSELLOR WHO BROKE THE NEWS TO HER WAS NAKUYA IS LIVING POSITIVELY WITH HIV

As Uganda prepares to commemorate the World AIDS Day on December 1, Vision Group is spearheading the drive to get everybody back and involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. For the month of November, *Sunday Vision* will publish a series of stories to highlight key issues for action. Today, JACKIE NALUBWAMA shares a story of Teo Nakuya, who chose to have a positive attitude to her HIV positive status

Teo Nakuya did not know what to make of her situation as she had nursed her husband till he died. Her husband's death in 2001 left her hanging in the balance.

"He fell sick and was diagnosed with T.B. They gave him drugs until he finished the dose. He fell sick again and this time, it was meningitis. He suffered for three months," she recalls.

Bravely, she went to Masaka Hospital's The Aids Support Organisation (TASO) branch to check if she was also HIV-positive.

"I got so worried because I had a baby of four years and I feared that I would not live long enough to raise him," she says.

They took a sample of her blood to check it for HIV, which she said took a month back then in 2001. Nakuya remembered how caring the counsellor who broke the news to her was.

She explained that at TASO, patients give all their details and since she did not have a mobile phone then, the counsellor came looking for her in Masaka; till he arrived at her house.

"He dilly-dallied, asking what I would do if I were positive and I told him I would feel bad, but I also knew that I would start taking drugs. I told him to just say it, and he told me, 'Olina akawuka'," she said.

Nakuya was immediately given Septrine, which affected her. She started falling sick with a fever, got sores, lost weight and her hair grew thin.

TASO then referred her to Uganda Cares, an organisation that provides drugs to HIV-positive patients and Nakuya began her



journey with ARVs in August 2003. Her CD4 count was 77 then, which she says was so low compared to the normal that stands of between 500 and 1,500.

"They gave me Nevirapine, but it also gave me side-effects. I started vomiting, got diarrhoea, but was treated. I remained weak and sickly for five years," she says.

A thought then crossed Nakuya's mind: what about my son? "I took my baby for checkup and I was so happy that he was fine. He is now 18 years old and going to sit for his S6 exams at Kimanya Secondary School," she says.

Nakuya is grateful to God for having saved her son from HIV because she worried a lot about his future and still cannot quite get her head around the fact that he has grown into a young man.

REARING CHICKEN

Sadly, Nakuya, who was a teacher, left her job after her late husband decreed that she does so. "I was a teacher and our results from Nsanvu Teachers' College were out. I had passed three and failed three papers, so my husband stopped me from going back in 1996," she said.

Since then, she embarked on rearing local chicken using the free-range method and farming to sustain her son and herself.



Nakuya has been living positively since 2001. Her 18-year-old son is HIV-negative

Staying alive

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

As some grapple with living with HIV, Nakuya is managing it pretty well.

"In the beginning, it was not easy, but my parents supported me. They used to visit us frequently and encourage me. They told me I would live to raise my son. They cared about me deeply. God is good," she says.

Her attitude has also helped improve her viral load because she revealed that after a checkup, the doctor's hardly found the virus.

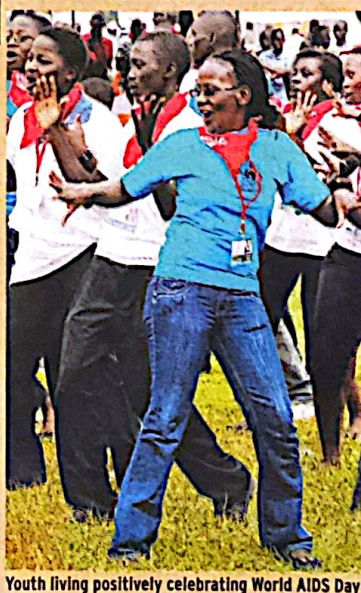
ADVICE

Living positively, Nakuya has realised that life has a lot to offer, especially through her son, whom she shares tenets of wisdom with.

"I advise my son because he knows I am HIV-positive. I told him when he was seven because he knew and used to see me taking drugs.

I tell him to keep safe and if necessary, to wear a condom. He sees my condition and knows better," she says.

Nakuya also advises other children to live responsibly.



Youth living positively celebrating World AIDS Day

HIV FACTFILE

33%

Adults living with HIV, but still not on treatment

Treatment

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is the use of HIV medicines to treat HIV infection. People on ART take a combination of HIV medicines every day, referred to as antiretrovirals or ARVs.

ART prevents HIV from multiplying and reduces the amount of HIV in the body. Having less HIV in the body protects the immune system and prevents HIV infection from advancing to AIDS.

ART cannot cure HIV, but it can help people with HIV live longer and healthier lives. ART also reduces the risk of HIV transmission. In Uganda, for example, the number of new HIV infections, which had increased by 21% between 2005 and 2013, reduced from 140,000 in 2013 to 52,000 in 2015. Researchers explain that this drop in HIV is because of robust treatment and prevention initiatives.

The number of people on HIV treatment has been increasing till the country was able to treat more people than were getting infected. This directly caused a tipping point in 2013, when the number of new infections per year was less than the number of people beginning to receive ARVs. However, about 33% of adults living with HIV are still not on treatment.

ARVs have come a long way. From multiple pills several times during the day and the night, HIV can now be controlled with one pill a day. Each pill combines several medications that used to be taken separately. The newer pills have fewer side-effects. Researchers are working on weekly or even monthly pills or injections.

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