

Monica-

Monica was diagnosed with HIV in 1997 and came to Wola Nani in 1998 where she was trained as a beader so that she could earn a sustainable income to support herself and her son. She has since left working with the bead group and has been trained as a lay counselor and home carer for Wola Nani; an experience she finds rewarding and is happy to perform.

Monica regularly cares for 6 women with children on ARVs. She understands that disclosing one's status is difficult to do, but believes it is the most important step one can take to prolong their life. Even after disclosing for nearly 10 years, there are still some people in Monica's community who do not believe she is HIV positive. "Some believe, some don't believe. I am not skinny, I do not look ill and I do everything, so some people think I am lying." But the truth is, despite the negative stigma, she has accepted her status and has a positive outlook on life. "If you stay positive and accept your status, you live longer." Monica began ARV treatment in 2003 when her CD4 count was less than 180; it is currently over 1000. Monica's choice to be open about her status has helped on a personal level but has also helped those whom she counsels. When she knocks on her client's doors she is able to relate to the women, and show them that it is possible to live long fulfilling lives with HIV. When they see how she has been living positively with HIV, they are inspired to do the same. She also encourages her clients to be open about their status, especially to their families because if their families are aware, they are better equipped to help them if they fall ill. When clients are open about their status Monica is also able to visit more regularly without sneaking around. "So many people die, and their families think it is from TB or something else, but if they had known about HIV they could've helped them and they could've lived longer." In addition to helping counsel and advise clients and caregivers of children on ARV treatment, Monica hopes that one day the clients she counsels will be able to help others in the same situation and ultimately provide the care and hope that she provides for people everyday.

Monica's son, who was 10 years old when he moved in with her after she was kicked out of her grandmother's house, is now 18 years old. He plays the marimba for extra income and is planning on taking a math and physics course to complete his high school education and earn his leaving certificate so that he may pursue further study to become an engineer. They remain sources of emotional support for one another.

Monica's story is a beacon of hope at Wola Nani. She approached our organisation when she had no place else to go, and has since come full circle to being employed as one of our home carers.