

Nontlahla-

Nontlahla was born in the Eastern Cape in a town called Mthata and gave birth to a baby boy in 1995. When the child was six months old he fell very ill and Nontlahla noticed he was suffering from several ailments including discharge from his ears, diarrhea, and a cough. She packed up her things and moved with her son to Cape Town in 1996 to search for a job and medical treatment. Nontlahla moved in with her sister and found temporary jobs doing domestic work for families, but none of them lasted long. When she took her son to the hospital he was tested and discovered to be HIV+. She soon discovered that she was HIV+ as well. She asked her boyfriend in the Eastern Cape how she could have gotten the disease but he wanted nothing to do with her, so they separated. The Red Cross Hospital in Cape Town referred her to a clinic in a township called Nyanga, and that is how Nontlahla first discovered Wola Nani. She decided that she didn't want anyone to know about her status and felt that it "was her own," although she still attended support groups with the other women. When she saw that her child's health was still deteriorating, she decided to head back to the Eastern Cape to try and figure out a plan to bury him when he died, as she had no money to give him a proper burial. Once back in the Eastern Cape, Nontlahla received a call from Wola Nani's then director, Pat Francis, who encouraged her to return to the Western Cape because Wola Nani was facilitating a programme to administer ARVs to children. Nontlahla made the journey back to Cape Town and her son started ARV treatment. At this time, Nontlahla also joined Wola Nani's income generation programme as a member of the bead work team, where she was trained in the craft and produced beaded jewellery and other bead work that she would bring to Wola Nani on a weekly basis for income. The money she earned from the program allowed her to visit her son in the hospital and bring him some of his favourite treats, like yogurt. The money she made from craft production also gave her the ability to move out of her sister's house and into a place of her own that she shares with her son.

Nontlahla can't help but smile when she talks about her son. She says he was dead, and Wola Nani helped bring him back. He is now 12 years old, enrolled in school and is planning on earning his leaving certificate. Nontlahla says that he is incredibly bright and speaks English very well. His extraordinary grasp on the language, she says,

can be attributed to all the time he spent in the Red Cross Hospital talking to doctors. His favorite subject in school is social studies and he loves to draw. She says that you would never know he has HIV because he is so active and both she and her soon look well, like any other healthy mother and child.

Nontlahla now selectively shares her status with people whom she trusts and is comfortable with. She finds being open with the ladies she works with in Wola Nani as well as others helps relieve stress and makes her “feel free.” She cannot say enough how much Wola Nani has helped her, and as a longstanding client tries to offer the same support and encouragement to newer clients that Wola Nani offered to her when she first arrived.