

Victoria-

Victoria was born in a town called Ciskei in the Eastern Cape. In 1986 she became pregnant but was very young, so her mother had her move to the Western Cape so she could live with her sister, finish grade 10 and have the baby. Sadly, after giving birth, her daughter became sick from poison and passed away. After losing her baby, Victoria ended up dropping out of school and landed a job with a framing company in 1989. She remained with the same company for 10 years. When her manager relocated to Australia, she resigned from the company, as the replacement manager refused to uphold the proper wage for the company's employees. Victoria soon found work performing domestic duties for different families. In 2000, she found out that she was pregnant again. As a precautionary measure, she voluntarily went to get tested for HIV. She tested HIV+ positive, and her thoughts immediately went to her unborn child's health; she did not care about herself, only about the health of her child. She followed the recommended medical treatment and when she was 8 months pregnant, she was administered a drug called AZT, which decreased the risk of passing HIV to the child during child birth. At birth the child too was treated with AZT to prevent transmission of the virus. Her child tested negative.

In the meantime when Victoria had discovered that she was HIV+ she sought solace in her brother, who was also infected with HIV. He supported her but passed away in 2005. Although her brother made the decision not to disclose his status to their family, Victoria felt differently and shared with her family that she was HIV+. They did not understand what she was trying to tell them but eventually accepted her.

Victoria joined Wola Nani's support group in 2001 after hearing about the organization at a clinic in her home of Khayelitsha. Funeka, another woman in the programme, then told her about the income generation programme, where she could be trained in a skill and produce crafts to make a living. In 2002 Victoria was trained and became part of the bead work team, but has also been trained in papier maché. She says that the money she earns is better than nothing and allows her to buy food for herself and her son. In addition to the crafts, she also recently started helping with a research project with the University of Cape Town whereby she talks to children and their parents about their stress and other problems, then offers counseling. At the same time, she says that

she also gets stressed out and it helps to be part of the support groups at Wola Nani. At first she was scared to go to the groups, but now realizes that the groups free her and give her the opportunity to open up and discuss her own problems with other women who also have HIV. She finds talking with the other women encouraging and enjoys exchanging advice. Victoria's ability to advise combined with her work at UCT gave her the opportunity to travel to Zimbabwe, Malawi and Italy to help run HIV workshops regarding body maps and good health. Victoria truly feels like she is making a difference because a lot of people that she met when traveling have such a negative attitude about HIV and do not accept it nor discuss it, just like in many South African communities. Victoria hopes that talking about HIV combined with the new announcements on television and billboards will make disclosing one's HIV status easier and help squash the stigma.