

Zukiswa-

Zukiswa is originally from Port Elizabeth and moved to Cape Town in 1999 looking for greater opportunities and something more out of life. She had attended school in Port Elizabeth but wanted to continue her education in the Western Cape and was incredibly ambitious. Zukiswa became pregnant and at 12 weeks into the pregnancy decided to go to a voluntary counselling and testing site so she could be aware of her status; she was not ill and did not think she would be HIV+. She indeed tested HIV+, which triggered feelings of depression and hopelessness. She thought that she was just going to die and so gave up pursuing her education.

After giving birth in 2000, Zukiswa found out about a Wola Nani centre from a friend, in Khayelitsha. However, she still did not feel ready to go to the support groups. She didn't feel comfortable disclosing her status to anyone, not even to other HIV+ women, and so continued to hold the weight inside of her. She didn't want people to see her and now looking back, couldn't believe how ashamed she was. After a few months she came around and started to attend the support groups. It is ironic that now she has finally disclosed her status yet some people think that she is lying. But for the few who don't believe her, there are still many others who do believe Zukiswa and look to her for support and guidance. Zukiswa has become a role model in her town, Guguletu. When others need information about HIV they know they can go to her and she will be receptive. Friends and neighbors even send their children over just to chat or to get advice.

When Zukiswa was first diagnosed she felt so defenseless; but, dealing with the experience has really allowed her to take on more responsibility and matured her into a wise young woman. The Wola Nani support groups also help her a lot because there are other young women that attend so she doesn't feel alone. She also finds that working as part of the bead group is very satisfying as she can now afford food for her family and is preparing to wed her fiancé in December 2007. She realizes that having HIV is now out of her control, so she focuses on what she can control in life in order to live a healthily and positively.