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Getting a second chance at life

In Malawi, 60 percent of people living with HIV are women, putting pregnant women at risk of transmitting the virus to their unborn children. But for Agness Mkweu this was not an option.

Agness Mkweu, 39, is an expert when it comes to having children. As a mother of five, there's not a lot she doesn't know about being pregnant, giving birth and being a mother. But nothing could prepare her for the news she received the day she found out she was pregnant with her fifth child. Agness was told she was HIV-positive...in front of a room full of people. She was shocked and confused. Knowing very little about HIV, she left the clinic feeling anxious about the fate of her unborn child.

Luckily for Agness, her local clinic

had a prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) program available that she was able to enroll in. While attending her prenatal clinic, she came across a job advert for mothers2mothers (m2m), an NGO that works to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV through peer education and support. Wanting to share her own experiences living with HIV, Agness decided to apply for the advertised position as a "Mentor Mother"—a woman living with HIV who works alongside doctors and nurses offering critical information and support to other women. Successful in her application, she became one of the first women to start mothers2mothers at Kawale Health Centre.

A life-changing experience

Soon thereafter, Agness gave birth to a healthy HIV-negative baby girl. Together with her new job, this was a



SUPPORT GROUP. mothers2mothers Mentor Mother holding a support group in Malawi. PHOTO: MOTHERS2MOTHERS

life-changing experience for Agness. In fact, she was so happy she named her daughter "Mwai" which means chance, as it was because of her that Agness got a second chance at life. Agness felt empowered, and it didn't go unnoticed. "I am a role model to many, when they see me they are encouraged to take a stand and fight,

they got motivation in living positive lives. All that fulfills me."

As a Mentor Mother, Agness runs support groups that provide education and support for pregnant women to ensure babies are born HIV-free, teaching them about available medicines, living positively, infant feeding and other issues the women require support for. "I am happy to be part of a such an innovative program. We use what we have, HIV-positive women. It's a simple way of reaching big goals."

Since joining m2m Agness has gone back to school and is currently studying HIV/AIDS management. "When I met mothers2mothers, I was still fragile and raw. mothers2mothers has given me strength to look forward to life. I have been empowered to think further than today."

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