

BETTER

TOGETHER.

m a g a z i n e



Water

What we are doing

Eye care nurse
Passion to serve

HIV-positive
Mentor mothers
changing lives

Mentor Mothers

Information provided by mothers2mothers



Phumeza Dyantyi, a Mentor Mother, at the mothers2mothers organisation.

More than 200 babies are infected with HIV every day in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of them are infected by their mothers during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding. Effective and inexpensive medical interventions are available that can keep mothers and babies healthy. Without these interventions, up to 40% of babies born to HIV-positive mothers will contract the virus. With treatment, this can be reduced to 2%.

The organisation mothers2mothers (m2m) trains, employs, and empowers mothers living with HIV as frontline health care workers in understaffed health centres and within communities. Through one-on-one and group sessions, these Mentor Mothers provide essential health education and support to women on how they can protect their babies from the HIV infection and keep themselves and their families healthy. Mentor Mothers' intimate understanding of the social and cultural challenges of living with HIV gives them a unique ability to form trusted relationships with other women.

“ A MOTHER’S STORY

My name is Phumeza Dyantyi. I am 33 and live in Khayelitsha – a township just outside Cape Town. When I fell pregnant in 2008, I was just 24 years old. As far as I knew, it was people who have had many sexual partners who got HIV, so I thought I was safe.

But my whole world changed in a matter of seconds when my test came back positive. The first thing that came to mind was that I was going to die and I couldn't breathe for a moment. It felt like the sky was falling over my head. And I thought my baby was obviously also HIV positive.

However, my life changed once again when I was introduced to mothers2mothers that same day. Seeing other pregnant women and hearing the Mentor Mothers disclose their own status made me realise I was not alone.

As much as all this gave me hope, it was a little too much to deal with in one day. I was exhausted and I had to go home and process everything. Disclosing to my family was not a problem. But my boyfriend was a different story. As soon as I told him about my status, he kicked me out of his house and said he wanted nothing to do with me or my dying child and that I should never call him again.

The thought of being a single mother scared me a little, but I had all the support I needed from my family and the support group at mothers2mothers. My baby was born a few months later and he tested HIV-negative. I had achieved the first step in giving my son a bright future.

I now work for mothers2mothers as a community Mentor Mother. I go to households and educate women and their families on the importance of testing for HIV and going for antenatal care, and I trace those who miss their appointments.

I also educate mothers, caregivers, and teachers on how to stimulate young children so they can understand the importance of developmental milestones. I help them make toys out of what you and I would think of as junk. I organise playgroups where we help children learn through play and also assess whether or not they are meeting their developmental milestones.

After four years of working for mothers2mothers, I still love it with my whole heart. At mothers2mothers, we are not just focused on making sure babies are born free of HIV, but that they also have the opportunity to thrive.



MOTHERS2MOTHERS

Mothers2mothers (m2m) is an international NGO founded in Cape Town, South Africa in 2001. M2m employs and trains HIV-positive women as Mentor Mothers to deliver health services, advice, and support to women and their families at health facilities and in local communities. From an initial focus on eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV, m2m has expanded into five related areas to deliver benefits for women and their families at all stages of life. As well as a continued focus on HIV-prevention and education, m2m's services now also include early childhood development, paediatric care and support, and adolescent mentoring.

Playgroups form part of mothers2mothers' Early Childhood Household Stimulation (ECHS) Project. Each intensive session is designed to improve children's cognitive, social, emotional, motor and language development, and physical growth through drawing, toy-making sessions and playing mentally stimulating games.

The broader ECHS Project was designed by m2m to ensure that children thrive, rather than just survive. Delivered by m2m's Mentor Mothers, the ECHS project empowers caregivers to create the safe, high-quality environment required to underpin successful

early childhood development for their children (0-5 years old). Playgroups and one-to-one education and training is delivered at household level and at local venues such as community crèches.

In 2016 alone, m2m and its partners enrolled almost two million new clients into care across seven African countries. Results show that m2m has virtually eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV amongst its clients, and is making significant strides in expanding the scope and scale of its other services.

M2m's programme also has a positive impact on the Mentor Mothers themselves. The employment enables Mentor Mothers to gain financial security for themselves and their families. By virtue of being professionalised, Mentor Mothers become role models in health centres and their communities, putting a face to empowered, strong, and healthy HIV-positive women, and thereby reducing HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

Mothers2mothers is funded by the Western Cape Government for Home Community-based Care services in the eastern sub-district.

For more information, visit: www.m2m.org.

OUR '90 90 90' STRATEGY

The Western Cape Government is committed to achieving our goals of an AIDS-free generation by 2030. If you don't know your HIV status, get tested so that you can help prevent the spread of HIV/Aids.

South Africa has adopted the new UNAIDS Strategy aimed at bringing about an HIV-free generation called the '90 90 90' strategy. It aims to ensure that by 2020:

- 90% of all people living with HIV know their status;
- 90% of those eligible for treatment with anti-retroviral treatment (ART) will be on sustained treatment; and
- 90% of people on ART will have suppressed viral loads.

The aim of this inclusive strategy is to ensure that everyone living with the virus receives treatment.

- **Mark van der Heever, Department of Health**



HIV MYTHS AND FACTS

It's easy to tell the symptoms of HIV

Wrong. The symptoms of HIV can differ from person to person and some people may not get any symptoms at all. Without treatment, the virus will get worse over time and damage your immune system.

Everyone who has TB has HIV

Wrong, even HIV-negative people do become infected with TB. It is true, however, that if one is living with HIV, they are at an increased risk of contracting TB. Especially if they are not on treatment and have a low CD4 count.

HIV-positive women cannot breastfeed

False, HIV-positive women can breastfeed. Yes, there is a chance that a baby can contract HIV during breastfeeding when neither the mother nor the baby is taking treatment. Taking treatment correctly during pregnancy and breastfeeding can virtually eliminate the risk of passing the virus to the baby.

Partners who are both HIV positive do not need to use condoms

Wrong, even if you and your partner are both HIV positive you still need to practice safe sex in order to prevent yourselves from contracting drug-resistant strains of HIV, as you and your partner could have different strains of HIV.

Male circumcision can prevent HIV

Although male circumcision can reduce the risk of contracting the virus by up to 60%, according to several studies, it does not prevent HIV infection.

Having sex with a virgin can cure HIV/Aids

This is not true. This has become a popular belief in South Africa, however, there is currently no cure for HIV/Aids.