Welcome to this 8th edition of the newsletter!

We are celebrating the last four years of the READY+ programme and looking forward to the future. We’re delighted to have secured funding to support our vital work with adolescents and young people living with and affected by HIV for the next six years. Read on to find out more.

We’ve achieved so much, but above all we honour the brave and passionate young people we lost along the way. We will always remember them – they remain our heroes and the reason why READY+ exists.

Join me in celebrating CATS, who are on the frontline, supporting their peers to manage their HIV status and stay on treatment. Without their leadership, READY+ wouldn’t be the same. We share young people’s pride in their emerging leadership from the country to global level. And let’s not forget collaboration between young people and healthcare providers. Thanks to the READY+ care scorecard, youth-friendly services delivered to adolescents and young people living with HIV have vastly improved. During the COVID-19 pandemic, health workers and CATS have supported young people in many ways.

Our achievements go beyond Eswatini, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The READY movement, led by the Global Network of Young People Living with HIV (Y+ Global), with support from the READY+ consortium, has reached many young people across the globe. I’d like to thank everyone who trusted in youth leadership. Together, we’ve changed the narrative and proved that young people living with HIV aren’t ready to find out their status. Within communities, some young people living with HIV are reluctant to learn about HIV, claiming that they know everything about it, yet they don’t.

CATS set the agenda and helped organise it all. I was proud to be a country focal point to the world?

How did you feel when you were asked to become a CATS?

Finally, what advice would you give to a young person who had just become a CATS?

We would love to advise and encourage our peers who had just become a CATS. Working with young people isn’t easy and sometimes you need to be patient and calm, but it’s exciting at the same time because you can share ideas. Being HIV positive doesn’t mean it’s the end of the journey – you can still live a healthy life.

The sky is the limit for Ntsiki

Ntombikayise Ncube from Y+ Global said,

“The amount of work they do, it’s a good thing they’re being celebrated because they are the backbone of the community, dealing with barriers at the community level. They know the struggles, challenges and advocacy issues of young people living with HIV.”

There was a session on impact that mapped how CATS gained not only knowledge but also confidence and self-esteem, overcoming stigma and discrimination.

“They influence others to live positively and accept themselves as they are,” said Sister Virginia Matthew from the Mphilo Centre of Excellence.

All around me, CATS looked mesmerised and happy, and took lots of pictures. There wasn’t a dull moment. Later on, we connected online with CATS from other cities and READY+ countries. We listened attentively and watched, eager to know more, and enjoyed songs in different languages.

“I got more than I expected,” said Thandekile, a CATS from Bulawayo District. “I learnt that even with challenges, as long as we work as a team, we can withstand it all.”

Everyone was grateful to READY+ and the whole Africaid team for bringing us together. It made me think that we don’t need to be negative about being HIV-positive.

At first, before shooting the video I was scared to disclose my HIV status, so publicly and I wasn’t sure how my relatives and boyfriend would react. But I quickly realised that the video would help a lot of young people living with HIV to accept themselves and I was excited to do it.

You are now a READY+ country focal point, advocate and mother. You’ve inspired and helped so many young people living with HIV to accept themselves and be recognised.

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WHAT DOES READY+ MEAN TO YOU?

"It has been very exciting and fulfilling being a READY+ implementing partner. The echo of the good work READY+ is doing is heard near and far in our community. Increasingly, young people are realising that sexual and reproductive health information and services are their rights - and they are demanding them."

Welbraid Manyama, READY+ M&E Officer, Kimis Peer Educators, Tanzania

"The highlight of my work was seeing how young people talked more openly about issues such as their sexuality, and the changes in their behaviour."

Rosa Massanga, Maternal and Child Health Nurse, Boane Health Centre, Paedartic - Adolescent Treatment Africa (PATA) Mozambique

"READY+ brought comfort to young people in knowing someone cares. Engaging with someone who gave time and attention and provided them with counselling support helped young people realise they’re important. This gave them hope that a brighter day would come."

Vongai Munatsi, Mental Health Specialist, Africidad, Zimbabwe

"I’ve seen young people become role models in the community. Something people come to them seeking solutions to their health issues."

Dr Jane Sheteule, Temeka Regional Referral Hospital, PATA Tanzania

Meaningful youth engagement in practice

BY JANET BHIKA, FRONTLINE AIDS TRUSTEE, ADVOCATE AND MENTOR

As an advocate and representative of young people in the READY movement (an awesome initiative), I was privileged to chair a session on READY during a Frontline AIDS Board meeting in the UK. A representative from the Dutch Embassy was present: this demonstrated Frontline AIDS’ willingness to include young people in such important spaces. I really like the way that every READY publication and tool is done by and for young people. The READY+ consortium listens to young people because it is in listening that action takes place.

As a black African young woman living with HIV, I’ve learnt a lot in my role on the Frontline AIDS Board, reinforcing the notion that young people’s voices matter. In some spaces, it’s difficult to contribute as I was brought up in an African setting where you’re taught not to speak until spoken to and not to talk while your elders are speaking. Although I’m the youngest on the Board, people take my suggestions seriously, mentor me and make sure I feel comfortable speaking up.

I have four suggestions to strengthen the Board – these apply to Frontline AIDS as well as other organisations working with and for young people:

1. Include at least two more young people since being the youngest in the room is intimidating.
2. Assign the young person to a committee made up of hands-on implementing organisations.
3. Include team building sessions to ease the tension in group dynamics and help a new member join.
4. Have more virtual meetings every quarter, while maintaining the two face-to-face meetings.

Overall, I can make a strategic contribution because I bring issues raised on the ground to the Board meeting. This means I have the power to ask about youth participation in the organisation and relay directly what young people feel should be done to achieve meaningful involvement.

Resources

Over the years, the READY+ consortium has produced a wide range of resources, reflecting the rich diversity of our work and promoting sustainability of the programme. See our READY resources here.

Thank you!

Y+ Global and Frontline AIDS would like to thank our current READY partners: Africidad, Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organisations (CANGO), Esawini Network of Young Positives (ENYP+), Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), IDealab, Life and Hope Services, Network of Young People Living with HIV and AIDS in Tanzania (NYP+), Paedtraffic - Adolescent Treatment Africa (PATA), Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (RPSPI), REJUSSDA Mozambique and Zimbabwe Young Positives (ZY+).

We would like to thank the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their support.