

# READY

RESILIENT & EMPOWERED  
ADOLESCENTS & YOUNG PEOPLE

#ActOnHIV



# Peer power!

This newsletter is dedicated to Selma Pires, who died, aged 18, on 25th August 2017. Selma recently trained as a community adolescent treatment supporter (CATS), helping other young people living with HIV in Beira, Mozambique. Nicola Willis, Executive Director, Africaid-Zvandiri, said, "During training Selma showed immense insight and maturity. We knew she was going to be a fabulous support to her peers." Even when very ill, Selma helped others. She, in turn, was supported by READY+ implementing partner, Oasis.

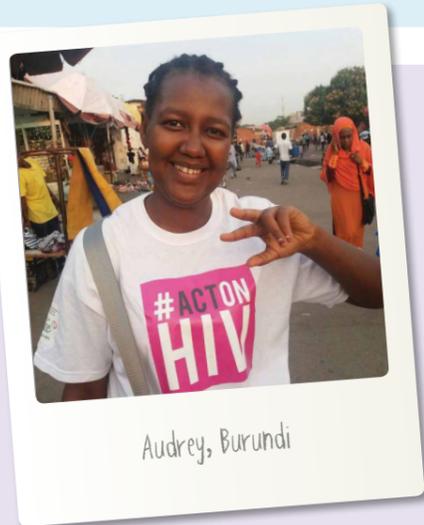


Selma's death is a stark reminder of why READY+ is needed. By the time many young people become CATS, they will have been living with HIV for two decades. Monique Kamphuis, Senior Policy Advisor, Health and HIV/AIDS at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mozambique, which funds READY+, said, "I hope that counselling CATS will help in that no one loses hope. Their work is so valuable."

**#WEARE READY** Welcome to the second issue of the READY newsletter! There is now strong evidence showing the effectiveness of peers – people of similar status and age – in promoting health and wellbeing. Over the page we summarise new data, learning and useful tools.

Evidence is of course crucial. But we want to show the human side too. That's why we're proud to share a unique conversation between a CATS and client in Swaziland. We also look at how CATS are recruited and trained. CATS and other peer supporters care for others, but who cares for them? We explore this key issue and resilience in the newsletter.

At the RNJ+ centre in Burundi I see the power of peers every day. Recently, a young woman turned her life around thanks to a peer educator. "I was scared to disclose my HIV status but when some peers approached me, I knew I wasn't alone," she said. "I used to suffer from self-stigma and I didn't take my medication correctly. But after speaking to one of the RNJ+ peer educators I found



the courage to face my problems. Later on, I became a peer educator too and I've helped many other young people. Nowadays I'm healthy and I support my peers who struggle to accept their HIV status."

*Audrey*

AUDREY INARUKUNDO, GUEST EDITOR, DIRECTOR, RÉSEAU NATIONAL DES JEUNES VIVANT AVEC LE VIH (RNJ+)

"If we really want to attract adolescents and young people into our health services and make sure they keep coming back – then welcoming, youthful, knowledgeable peer supporters and navigators who are recognised, trained, mentored and paid at each of our public sector clinics is, in my opinion, a non-negotiable!"

LINDA-GAIL BEKKER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, DESMOND TUTU HIV CENTRE

"Peer supporters are there to act as a pillar of strength to their peers by providing information, encouragement, support, counselling, instilling confidence through shared experiences in order to boost self-esteem. I've changed lives by sharing my story."

SHANINE MUSHONGA, DIFFERENTIATED CARE YOUTH AMBASSADOR AND YOUTH ADVOCATE OF AFRICAID AT ZVANDIRI

## Creating resilient adolescents for life

BY KAREMA MUSHI, PROGRAM OFFICER, REPSSI TANZANIA AND CHENGETAI DZIWA, ADVISOR: MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E), INTERNATIONAL HIV/AIDS ALLIANCE

**Adolescence is a critical stage of life** Adolescents become more independent, ready to move from their families into the wider world. For adolescents living with HIV, this can be a particularly difficult time. Most, however, can overcome challenges when supported by adults and the community.

Resilience is the ability to adapt and bounce back when things don't go as planned; to learn from mistakes and move on. Resilience among adolescents and young people living with HIV helps them to adhere to treatment and access sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services; develop mechanisms that protect them against mental health problems; and maintain balance in their lives.



**#WeAre READY** In September, CATS and their mentors finished their training in Bukoba, Tanzania

**We all need to love and be loved** The community can help adolescents become resilient by encouraging them to spend time with family and friends, and develop a support network. When everyone helps foster resilience in adolescents, they build strong relationships with adults and their peers. They become role models, who are independent but able to seek help when necessary.

How do we measure resilience in adolescents and young people living with HIV? One way is to elicit their responses regarding various resilience factors, using a set of questions or scales. The **Child and youth resilience measure** tracks the availability of internal and social resources that increase the likelihood of demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity. Another way is the projective storytelling technique, which draws information from adolescents and young people living with HIV on their thoughts, feelings and relationships relating to resilience.

## CATS chat



Thabiso Mashaba (aged 15) recently found out his HIV status when he fell sick, and was encouraged to go for testing. He lives with his mother who is also HIV-positive.

Thabiso and 17-year-old Siphon Bhambo, who is a CATS, have built up a close relationship in just two months. Siphon conducts home visits where he provides psychosocial support and adherence counselling to Thabiso. He also supports Thabiso at the health facility and teen club sessions.

The conversation took place in Manzini, Swaziland, in October 2017, and was facilitated by Simphiwe Tshabalala, M&E Assistant, Coordinating Assembly of NGOs (CANGO).

**Thabiso:** What do you find rewarding about your work as a CATS?

**Siphon:** So many of the peers I support now see me as their role model and want to be like me. They usually go out of their way to look for me at the clinic until they find me.

**Thabiso:** When you're feeling low, what motivates you to come to work every day?

**Siphon:** I've developed this passion for young people. Even if I tell myself that I won't go to the clinic today, I then think that these young people leave their homes and are motivated to come to me for help – if I don't go to the clinic to help them, who will they talk to about their problems?

**Siphon:** How has having me as a CATS helped you?

**Thabiso:** I shut down when I found out my HIV status. But you've been very supportive and I feel better emotionally.

**Siphon:** In what ways have you changed?

**Thabiso:** When I first started treatment I would feel very dizzy and wanted to give up, but you encouraged me not to give up and keep taking my medication. I can now talk to you freely as you are my peer.

**Siphon:** What about stigma? At first, you felt like you were the only person living with HIV – how do you feel now?

**Thabiso:** I feel okay because I understood that I won't die because my sister and mother are also on treatment. I decided that if I continue to waste time and not take my treatment, I might just die.



## How to train CATS

BY FELICITUS FARAI NGUBO

I'm the Regional Capacity Building Lead with Africaid-Zvandiri in Zimbabwe. Recruiting CATS has never been easy. In most countries, apart from Zimbabwe, this is a brand new initiative, which is amazing.

The health facility and implementing partners look for young people living with HIV generally aged 18-22 who have shown good adherence over the last year and who aren't at school or working. They must know their status, and feel comfortable talking about it. They must be passionate about working with adolescents and young people living with HIV, willing to learn, and demonstrate leadership.

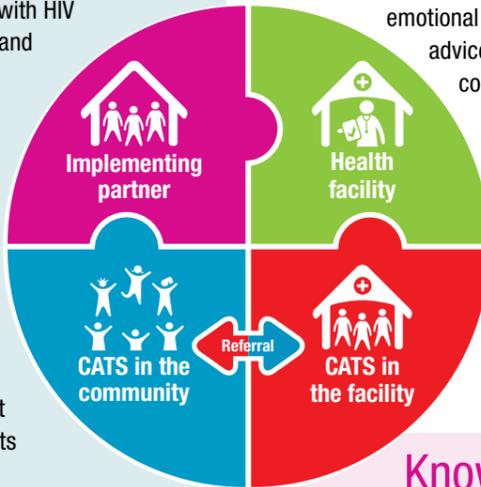
CATS are trained and mentored for ten days. Half that time is in the classroom and the other half is in health facilities and the community. This equips CATS with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support their peers.

Disclosure is still a challenge in the four READY+ countries. It's hard to find young people willing to share their life experience with their peers. But CATS are integrated within health facilities and they work with expert clients and peer educators in the community.



Newly trained CATS in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

I've learnt that CATS differ in terms of their culture, their experience of contracting and living with HIV, their expectations and how they see the world. We have to appreciate their diversity. I'm so proud of the CATS we've trained. They're resilient, vibrant and bright young women and men.



## Caring for CATS

BY LEOPOLDINA SEMO SEMO BANCO, MANAGER, OASIS MOZAMBIQUE

Oasis looks after 12 CATS who support other adolescents and young people living with HIV with adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART). Our role is to motivate the CATS. We give technical support to help them overcome any difficulties they encounter, and provide a one-to-one service in situations of emotional crisis. We keep in touch with their families, give health information and advice, and refer them to the doctors linked to the READY+ project. We also contribute financially.

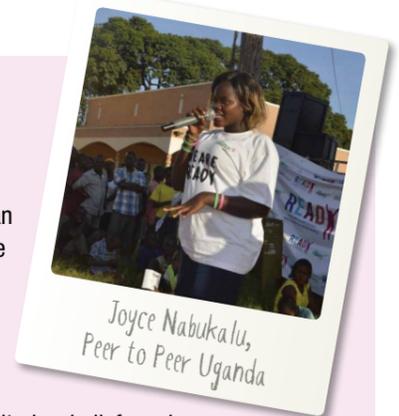
Caring for CATS isn't easy because they are young people who need looking after in a crisis. We rely on the support of a social psychologist. Occasionally, CATS – who are vulnerable to opportunistic infections – face serious health problems. When they're ill, the memory of Selma's death is fresh in our minds.

To overcome these difficulties, we request ongoing technical support from REPSSI, especially psychosocial support, and funding for education, training and medicine.

## Know your peers

Peers are people of similar status – and often age – who share experiences, circumstances or background. This shared knowledge and understanding means that peers can often reach underserved communities. Peers operate in the health facility, community or are flexible, like CATS. Here's a brief guide to the many terms used to describe peer interventions:

- **Peer educators** communicate health information and values. They aim to influence a person's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour so that they have the tools to make a healthier choice.
- **Peer supporters** promote health, wellbeing and/or build people's resilience. Usually on a one-to-one basis, peer support focuses less on conveying information, increasing knowledge or changing attitudes, and more on providing emotional support, encouraging adherence and building confidence.
- **Peer providers** provide a service to their peers. These services do not usually require medical training (e.g. condom distribution), but with training and mentorship peer providers can achieve a great deal.
- **Peer counsellors** work on a one-on-one basis to help their peers acknowledge and address difficulties, and develop problem-solving and coping skills.
- **Peer mentors** are like peer supporters but are more experienced. Peer mentors provide health information or advice, and may support other peers.
- **Peer navigators** accompany clients to health services and support them in accessing and moving through complex health systems.



Nice Novat is a 20-year-old CATS from Tanzania: "I am ready to provide information to my peers about HIV and to ensure that they come out to test."

## To make peer support work ...

"... we need to create mechanisms for continuous learning, mentorship, feedback and improvement."

DIANA N AMANYIRE, HEAD, YOUTH AND KEY POPULATIONS, MARIE STOPES INTERNATIONAL UGANDA (MSIU)

"... young people need training, tools and ongoing help. Young people know what their peers need – they can reach out and inspire others."

NIENKE WESTERHOF, ADVISOR – SRHR AND GENDER, AIDSFONDS

"... we need parents on board and follow-up from service providers."

CHRISTINE NDAGIRE, PROGRAMME COORDINATOR, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION OF YOUTH AGAINST HIV/AIDS (COYAA)



## FOLLOW THE MOVEMENT! DATES FOR THE DIARY

Support the READY movement by following these events and posting to Facebook and Twitter #ActOnHIV and #WeAreREADY. Visit [www.aidsalliance.org/ready](http://www.aidsalliance.org/ready) and follow us at [fb.me/READYMovement](https://fb.me/READYMovement)

- 13–15 November AIDS Impact Conference, Cape Town, South Africa
- 16 November International Day for Tolerance
- 25 November International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
- 1 December World AIDS Day
- 4–9 December ICASA Conference, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
- 10 December World Human Rights Day
- 12 December Universal Health Coverage Day
- 14 February Valentine's Day
- 1 March Zero Discrimination Day (UNAIDS)
- 8 March International Women's Day



## RESOURCES AND TOOLS



Paediatric Adolescent-Treatment Africa has produced a new tool – PATA Peer support programme handbook – outlining a peer support model aimed at improving access to and quality of ART for adolescents and children living with HIV. The handbook promotes the integration of peer support into health services, and provides valuable guidance to health providers on how to recruit, train, supervise and mentor peer supporters. <http://teampata.org/portfolio/2829/>



Link Up illustrates the power of peer educators in helping young people living with and affected by HIV claim their SRHR. In Uganda, Link Up partners trained young people

living with HIV as peer educators as part of a strategy that encompassed training health providers, creating youth-friendly spaces in health facilities and conducting community dialogues. For more information, see [www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/002/147/2015\\_Alliance\\_Case\\_Study\\_Link\\_Up\\_Uganda\\_YPLHIV\\_Full\\_online\\_original.pdf?1453290806](http://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/002/147/2015_Alliance_Case_Study_Link_Up_Uganda_YPLHIV_Full_online_original.pdf?1453290806)

In 2014-2015, Africaid conducted an operations research study in Gokwe South District, Zimbabwe, to evaluate the effectiveness of CATS among adolescents on ART. The 12-month survey found that adolescents receiving CATS services had improved adherence, retention and psychosocial wellbeing, compared with those who received standard of care alone. For more information, see [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/94334/1/9789241506168\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/94334/1/9789241506168_eng.pdf?ua=1)

### Thank you!

The Global Network of Young People Living with HIV (Y+) and International HIV/AIDS Alliance would like to thank our current READY partners: Africaid, AIDS Legal Network (ALN), Aidsfonds, Alliance Burundaise contre le SIDA (ABS), Community Health Alliance Uganda (CHAU), Community Organisation of Youth against HIV Uganda (COYAA), Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organisations (CANGO), Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), Marie Stopes International Uganda, M&C Saatchi World Services, Network of Young People living with HIV/AIDS in Tanzania (NYP+), Nakaseeta Initiative for Adult Education and Development (NIFAED), Organisation for Social Services, Health and Development (OSSHD), Paediatric-Adolescent Treatment Africa (PATA), Peer to Peer Uganda (PEERU), Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI), REJUSIDA Mozambique, Réseau des Jeunes vivant avec le VIH au Burundi (RNJ+), Stop AIDS Alliance, Swaziland Network of Young Positives (SNYP+), Tanzania Council for Social Development (TACOSODE), Ugandan Network of Young People Living with HIV (UNYPA), Zimbabwe Young Positives (ZY+).

We would like to thank the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency for their support for READY.