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-Zwandiri, 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, YOUTH ADVOCATE OF AFRICAD AT ZWANDIRI, said, “I love that counselling CATS will help in that no one loses hope. Their work is so valuable.”

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 Sipho Bhambo, who is a CATS, have built up a close relationship in just two months. Sipho 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).
How to train CATS
BY FELICITUS FARA NGUBU

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 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.

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.

To make peer support work …
DIANA N AMANYIRE, HEAD, YOUTH AND KEY POPULATIONS, ORGANIZATION OF YOUTH AGAINST HIV/AIDS (COYAA) and peer educators in the community.

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

Caring for CATS
BY LEOPOLDINA SEMO SENO BANDCO, 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.

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 give 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.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

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.aidaalliance.org/ready and follow us at 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

Pediatric 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.aidaalliance.org/assets/000/002/2147/2015_Alliance_Case_Study_Link_Up_Uganda_VPLHIV_Full_online_original.pdf?1453290806

In 2014-2015, Africand 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/trial/ bitstream/10665/64334/1/9789241506168_eng.pdf?ua=1

Thank you!

The Global Network of Young People Living with HIV (Y+1) and International HIV/AIDS Alliance would like to thank our current READY partners: Africand, AIDS Legal Network (ALN), Aidsfonds, Alliance Burundaise contre le SIDA (ABIS), Community Health Alliance Uganda (CHAU), Community Organisation of Youth against HIV/AIDS (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+), Nakaessa Initiative for Adult Education and Development (NIFAEAD), Organisation for Social Services, Health and Development (OSSHOD), Paediatric Adolescent-Treatment Africa (PATA), Peer to Peer Uganda (PEERU), Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPS), 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+).

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