

**Nozandulela “Nozi” Samela
Mentor Mom, mothers2mothers**



Nozi's Story

I found out that I was HIV positive in March 2005. I was 19 years old and pregnant with my first baby. At that moment I felt cold. It was like someone put a stop to my life. I didn't know what to say.

My counselor sent me to **mothers2mothers** where I met Gloria. She could see the pain in my eyes even though I was not crying. She tried her best to talk to me, but I wasn't ready. Even though I didn't speak, I listened to what she said.

In my mind I had a serious meeting, asking myself if God is punishing me. I reflected on all the things that happened in my life. I lost my mother when I was 7 years old. I never knew my father. I was raised by my aunt and her husband.

I was worried about my child, worried that he would grow up like me, and lose the chance for a good life, like me. I went home and slept until the next day.

When I woke up that morning I decided that I would tell my aunt. I wasn't strong yet and I cried. She didn't say a word and I knew that I had killed her. I know that I awakened a pain in her heart, a pain we will never forget. We had lost my cousin to HIV in 2003. She was sick with TB and meningitis, in and out of hospital and had to take at least 16 tablets a day. She lost so much weight and spent most of her time in bed. My disclosure brought back memories we all wanted to forget. I was also afraid that I would go through what she went through. In addition to all these fears I was scared that I would infect my baby.

Just a few weeks after my disclosure, my aunt was diagnosed with diabetes. She got sicker every day. I knew that she was stressed by my HIV status. I told myself I was going to be strong, not just for me, but for my aunt. The only way to do this would be to attend a support group. I went and absorbed every bit of information I could get.

When I felt ready, I told my partner. I didn't care how he was going to respond because we had broken up anyway. He denied knowing anything about his HIV status. After I gave birth he told me that he had known since 1999 that he was HIV positive. I told myself that I wasn't going to do anything about that since it wasn't going to change anything. I was going to find a way to survive.

It was when I felt strong that my aunt's health improved. She said that she was worried she was going to lose me the way she had lost her daughter. I had to make her believe that I would survive. In June 2005 I gave birth to a boy. He was tested at six weeks and the results came back negative. I was very happy, as were my aunt and his father.

At the support group I shared my story with other mothers, giving back what I had received from other moms who are living positively with HIV. At that time I was attending **mothers2mothers** at Nolungile Clinic with Monica as my site coordinator. She saw that I could make a good mentor mother, and since there was a site in need of mentors, she referred me to Site B, where I currently work.

I started working as a mentor mother in September 2005. I told myself I was going to make the most of my job. Who would have thought you could get a job just by being HIV-positive? In June 2006 I was promoted to site coordinator.

Sometimes I feel like I was destined to help others.