

Meeting Women on our Virtual Tour of sub-Saharan Africa – August 29, 2021

During Week 2 our virtual tour took us through Idah Mukuka Nambeya's home town of Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. Idah's father lost his job as a mechanic in 1992 when the World Bank forced Zambia into the structural-adjustment program (SAP) that privatized many industries. She managed to finish high school but there was not enough money for her to go to university. She went instead to Kara Counselling where Winstone Zulu, one of the first Africans to live publicly with HIV, trained counsellors. Idah became an extremely effective HIV counsellor, able to convince even the most reluctant to get tested, to use condoms, etc. Then she met Felix Mukuka, got pregnant, then married him. He died of AIDS and she found out that she was HIV+. Because of her position as a well-known counsellor, she was stunned and mortified to learn of her positive status. She had feelings of self-loathing and was profoundly discouraged. She didn't want to tell anyone but Winstone gradually convinced her. Being open about her status made her an even more effective counsellor. And she ended up hiring many of her clients to run support services in the public clinics offering anti-retroviral medicine.

For as long as she can remember, Idah has been blazing a trail as a force to be reckoned with, breaking stereotypes and pushing boundaries to influence and embody the type of leadership that could bring about sustainable change in her community. Idah's passion and her commitment to ensuring the inclusion of a strong feminist voice, in shaping responses to the challenges faced by women and girls, is what continues to drive her. Her first taste of leadership began in primary school, where she acted as a class monitor. This was unusual at the time since boys dominated these coveted leadership roles. Undeterred, Idah has since tackled leadership positions at the community level with fierce determination and bravery, accessing male-dominated spaces to give a voice to women. She is the only female member of the executive team at her church and has left her mark at prestigious organizations such as the Chilenje Childcare and Adoption Society in Zambia, YWCA, Centre for Infectious Disease Research, and Abataka Women Living with HIV and AIDS in Zambia. Currently, Idah uses her lived experience and unique insight to strengthen the Grandmothers Campaign at the SLF, giving presentations and talks to grandmothers and members of the public, across Canada and in other countries, as opportunities arise. We have had the good fortune to have Idah speak here in Victoria on more than one occasion, including being part of the welcome team for Cycle Tour 2017. She met the cyclists at Centennial Park, whooping enthusiastically as they entered the park for lunch, then made it down to the Legislature to give an inspiring speech at the Welcome Home celebration.



"I am inspired to stay connected to the work when I see the tangible successes that come out of it," says Idah. "Visiting the different countries, it was clear to me that without intervention, HIV and AIDS could wipe out the entire continent. But witnessing communities becoming healthy again, and the rebuilding of families, thanks to community-led initiatives, I became even more strongly motivated to stay involved."

Information taken from: <https://stephenlewisfoundation.org/iwd2021/> and "28 Stories of AIDS in Africa"