

ZAPHA+ Zanzibar Association of People Living with HIV&AIDS

One story to represent the hundreds served by ZAPHA+ throughout the Island

Suhaila Msham Mwarimwana is 19 years old and lives in Zanzibar City, 22 miles offshore from mainland Tanzania. She was born with HIV and lost both parents before she was nine. But, despite the difficulties she faces, she is an inspiration for other adolescents living with HIV.

“When I was about 12, I overheard neighbours saying I was HIV-positive. So I asked my oldest sister, who said I had a bone-related disease. But I sensed this was not the truth, so after some time I insisted and she took me to the Zanzibar Association of People Living with HIV&AIDS and I discovered my HIV status.” Ms Msham Mwarimwana says her first thought was for her youngest brother, who also tested HIV-positive. She felt hopeless and desperate. “I thought HIV was a death sentence,” she says.



At a ZAPHA+ children’s club, Ms Msham Mwarimwana learned how to live positively with HIV. She started HIV treatment and has stuck to the regime since. After secondary school, she began volunteering for ZAPHA+. She facilitates clubs for children and adolescents and is also a member of the Young Reporter Network, a national consortium of community-based children’s radio projects that reaches millions of listeners. She and other young reporters produce a 30-minute programme each fortnight, using audio diaries, commentaries and interviews to share their stories.

Ms Msham Mwarimwana has big dreams and plans to study journalism. “My role towards getting to zero—zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths—is to get my story heard to **confront stigma and discrimination** and draw attention to community issues that affect children and youth,” she says. Looking back, Ms Msham Mwarimwana says she would have liked her parents to tell her she was HIV-positive as it is very important for children to know their HIV status. “I could have started my treatment even earlier,” she says. “Parents of HIV-positive children need to educate society that HIV can affect anyone and there is no shame.”

AIDS-related illnesses are a leading cause of death among adolescents in eastern and southern Africa because many adolescents are unaware of their HIV status and do not know that there are life-saving treatment and support structures available to them. “ZAPHA+ is my second home,” she says. “I am so thankful for the support I have received there.” She has a simple message for her peers. “**Accept and be open about your HIV status, be confident and believe in yourself.**”

Story from

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