

# OUR EYES WILL BE OPENED

*Noku Mabelana - Stepping Stones participant  
Heavens Defence Force - Atteridgeville*

"I didn't know what to expect when I came here but I am happy with what I discovered," said Noku Mabelana (25) Atteridgeville just after she attended a *Woza Asibonisane!* community dialogue for the first time. "Now I know what kinds of things I need to watch out for."

Noku was part of a group where they talked safer sex, about how men and women can have better relationships, how to build trust and respect within relationships and working towards happy families and communities.

She and most others in the group also heard about things like Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) for the very first time. "Some people get raped and they don't know what to do afterwards. Then they get HIV because they didn't know what steps to take," Noku said.

PEP is ARVs that are taken for 28 days to prevent HIV infection. PEP works best if taken within 3 days of possible HIV exposure.

"There was a family friend who was raped once but we didn't know what to do," said Noku. "Now if I meet someone who has been raped, I would know how to assist them because of what I have learned today. I would be able to support them, go with them to the clinic and they could access PEP, to prevent HIV."

**"I feel like I have direction now and feel prepared for any circumstances that I may come across."**

During the sessions participants are given condoms to take with them. They are also referred to HIV counselling and testing centres.

"We didn't know details about HIV and how to prevent pregnancy. I learned the importance of knowing my status. As a person, I shouldn't sit back and say that I am okay when I am not sure. If I am positive, I must continue living because it is not the end of the world. If I am negative,



Noku Mabelana

I should keep it that way by using protection all the time. "I feel like I have direction now and feel prepared for any circumstances that I may come across."

Noku believes that young people are fearful of knowing their status because they are ill-informed about the virus. They still believe that HIV will kill them. She plans to invite her friends to the dialogues and to encourage them to use condoms at all times.

"It's tough convincing guys to use a condom, but I stand by my words. If I have a boyfriend and he doesn't want to use a condom, we will argue with words. If you don't want to do what I want, I can't do what you want," said Noku. "In any relationship, my life matters the most. No condom, no play."

Noku says that by her coming to the sessions as a young person other young people can be helped. "This kind of information must spread. I have come today as a young person. Tomorrow another young person will come. More and more of us will be enlightened. Our eyes will be opened.

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