

# Kick4Life



## Celloane's Story

Celloane's mother died in 2004. She was initially told that her mother's death had been caused by a stomach ulcer but later learned that she had actually died of AIDS. Denial of the disease is a common occurrence in Lesotho, where 15 year old Celloane lives. People want to avoid the stigma and shame that still surrounds HIV and AIDS. Celloane used to have three sisters and two brothers but in 2005 she lost a brother and sister to AIDS. They were aged four and ten at the time. Her father had already left in 2002, "My older sister Refiloe told me that my father left when he found out my mother was HIV positive. She went to have a test secretly. She told me that he was violent towards my mother saying she had sex with other men. All we know is that he eventually went to South Africa to work in the mines." Her sisters had been sexually abused by her father. Celloane had not.

The four surviving children now live with their elderly grandmother who has no income, in a small two-roomed shack, "All of my aunties and uncles who are in our village have passed away, otherwise we could have lived with them. My grandmother did not need our burden, but now we care for her. My sister that passed was my best friend, we were very similar. We did many things and laughed together a lot. For a long time I didn't understand why all this had happened and didn't talk about it much. It was a while before I knew that they had died of HIV as well but I didn't understand it. I just took it as a normal part of life. Before she died she became so very, very sick. I basically remember her slowly dying in our small house. The doctors were eventually called but it was too late. With the knowledge I have now, I guess my sister became infected through child birth or from the abuse of my father."

Celloane and Refiloe, 20, take care of their grandmother and younger siblings, "When times were tough, when mother first died," says Selloane, "Refiloe asked me to leave school to sell things on the roadside with her, mainly vegetables. The drought made this very hard. It was certainly not possible to have three meals a day. Many people do this. It was the only way we could get by. And we did."

Celloane knew some girls in her village who worked as prostitutes on Kingsway, the main street in Lesotho's capital Maseru. They made a lot of money and put a lot of pressure on she and Refiloe to join them, "They said it was our responsibility to earn as much money as possible to support our

family and in our situation that would have been through prostitution. Thankfully we stayed firm and did not do it.”

Despite their difficult circumstances, at the end of 2007 Celloane was able to go back to school. However, she was not allowed to take exams at the end of the year because she had not paid all of her fees, which are compulsory for secondary education in Lesotho. In school and in her community she faces daily pressure to take part in drinking, drugs and sex. From the age of 11 there was a strong pressure from boys and older men to have sex.

In January 2008 Kick4Life coach Molikoe Scoco was recruiting youth in her village to take part in the K4L Curriculum when she met Celloane and persuaded her to join the course. Initially Celloane thought it was great because it was something to do after school, “I love playing sports, especially soccer, it is a national obsession in Lesotho, everybody plays, boys and girls!” However, on the first day of the health education and life-skills course she realised that these activities were not only fun and engaging but that they were also carrying a life saving message, “It was not long before I developed a strong passion for Kick4Life.”

Over the next six weeks she took part in the Curriculum twice a week and graduated in February 2008, “The whole community embraced the programme. Some people were in denial and refused to change their ways but many have done the opposite. It has created an atmosphere of positive peer pressure in the village to fight HIV and fight against everyday pressures of sex, smoking, drugs, alcohol and boyfriends. It also broke down the stigma of HIV in the village and for the first time people were comfortable talking about it with each other. So many times the disease has been hidden as when my mother passed away. That is a huge problem that the Kick4Life programme is able to break down. The Curriculum also helped to banish myths about HIV. Many men in the community tell the women that condoms are not effective. Before Kick4Life I was unsure what the truth was. Now I know they were lies.

“At the end of the programme, most of the participants decided that we must get a test for HIV. The K4L trainer went with 21 of the group to the local New Start testing centre. I was so very nervous. I knew because of my mother and brother and sister that I could be HIV positive even though I felt well. But I felt strong to be going through it with others in the same position. The counselling before the test was good; it helped me be more calm. The counsellor asked me how my life would change if the test was positive. I gave an informed answer and she was pleased and surprised. I said my mother and brother and sister had died of HIV but even if I was infected I was more fortunate than them because I could get on antiretroviral drugs. Even though I knew this was the case, I was desperate for the test to be negative. Before I knew it she had taken a finger prick of blood. My throat was dry and my heart was pounding outside of my body. The next five minutes were a big deal in my life. I was praying very hard! The result was negative and I was very happy.”

During the Kick4Life Curriculum Celloane had shown great enthusiasm and was selected to be trained as a volunteer peer educator, “This made me very proud! I couldn’t wait to get started. I needed to tell others. I delivered the programme to other people in my village. The most amazing story is that one of my friends who was a prostitute has now stopped. She had no idea of the dangers of HIV and sex. I even managed to persuade her to go for an HIV test. She was positive but she is fortunate as she is now on antiretroviral treatment which has made her feel a lot better. I

have to spend a lot of time with her to make sure she takes her tablets everyday. If she doesn't do that her body will become resistant to the drugs.

"I have also delivered the education activities at events with the England Manager Fabio Capello and Prince Harry. Soldiers from England were over working at a disability school and they took part in an awareness and education event Kick4Life held to launch the programme in the Butha-Buthe district. The Prince even played soccer with us afterwards."

Celloane now gets tested every six months and was tested at the Test Your Team event attended by Fabio Capello and former England goalkeeper Ray Clemence in April 2008, "The whole city was excited about the England coach coming. It was fantastic."

During the event, Capello and Clemence observed a boy being tested for HIV. Afterwards the coach said, "We need to encourage and support this type of programme. I suppose you could say this was a very good experience for our soul because it makes you understand the hardships in the world. I feel enriched because I have seen things that make me think and whenever you think, you get richer." Thankfully the test came out negative and the boy, along with a friend who is HIV positive, were invited to England to meet the national team.

Celloane is one of the first people to be enrolled on Kick4Life's OVC Initiative and is determined to complete her education that so that she can build a better future for her family, "Kick 4 Life has changed my life very much for the better. All of us in Lesotho need to be committed to get rid of HIV from our nation." As part of her scholarship she also now helps run the Maseru Street League, "The children come each day and take part in sport and we deliver the K4L Curriculum to them. They love it very much! They also play soccer everyday and do dramas and sing songs and perform them in the streets."