

Changing gender norms and building the resilience of adolescent girls and young women in the City of Johannesburg, South Africa

“It has taught me to be open and share who I am, and has built my self-esteem.”



Stepping Stones participants with staff from NICDAM and CDS in Lawley, Johannesburg, in May 2017

In the community of Lawley south of Johannesburg, South Africa, a group of women gather to discuss their lives and relationships. However, this is no ordinary meeting. These women are participating in Stepping Stones, an evidence-based training which applies participatory learning approaches to guide participants through a series of topics including gender, sexuality, HIV, GBV, communication and relationship skills.¹

The 19 participants spoke positively about their experiences with Stepping Stones. “Now we understand each other and get along better as women – we are empowering ourselves and growing,” said one participant. Another noted that the group has helped her deal with her emotions and communicate better: “I had a lot of anger and it was getting out of hand. Now I know how to calm myself down, think about what made me angry and address it with others.” Together the women have developed a trusting and supportive environment where they are able to share their experiences and challenges. This has translated into better relationships with partners as well as improved self-care: “I put my health first and know I have the right to protect myself...I went to test for HIV after one session and felt free to share my status with my friend,” one participant shared.

South African civil society organization National Institute Community Development and Management (NICDAM) is implementing the *Community Gender-Based Violence and HIV Prevention Initiative for Adolescent Girls and Young Women* under the USAID-funded Capacity Development and Support (CDS) program from July 2016 to July 2018. The goal of the project is to improve existing services to address GBV and the risk of HIV through community mobilization and norms change activities, as well as provision of post-violence care and psychosocial support to those affected by GBV.

¹ Read more about Stepping Stones and access the curricula at: www.mrc.ac.za/gender/stepping.htm

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

For more than 25 years, FHI 360 has been working as a strategic partner to the Government of South Africa and South African civil society. We have implemented a wide range of technical assistance projects at national, provincial and community levels to strengthen policies and programs that prevent the transmission of HIV, provide high-quality HIV care and treatment, strengthen nutritional assessment and counselling and support, improve reproductive health, increase access to family planning, and strengthen partners' technical and organizational capacity.



Learn more about NICDAM at:
<http://nicdam.co.za/>

About FHI 360

FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing – creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

NTOMBI'S STORY

Ntombifuthi (Ntombi) Ndungwana is 23 years old has lived in Lawley for most of her life. She and her two-year-old daughter live with her mother and several other family members. She completed secondary school and wanted to become a teacher, but did not have money to study further.

Ntombi began attending Stepping Stones due to her friendship with one of the facilitators. "Usually I am shy, but I am able to be open with the other women because we can relate to each other's experiences," she said. "I see it as a support group." The sessions are held once a week for 2-3 hours. Ntombi attends the group regularly because of the bond she has formed with other women. She has learned more about her own body and how to protect herself. "I didn't know much about my reproductive cycle, but now I understand how my body works, and I am confident to use contraceptives and condoms," she stated.

Ntombi's involvement with Stepping Stones has improved her relationship with her boyfriend. "When we fought before, he would sometimes hit me and I would hit him back. After learning about dealing with anger in one of the sessions, I sat down with him and explained that fighting doesn't resolve anything and destroys relationships. We agreed that when we are angry, we will separate and discuss the issue after we have taken some time to think about it."

Stepping Stones has also prompted Ntombi to be more intentional in her parenting. "I want to be a good mother and want us to have a close relationship," she said. "I want my daughter to feel comfortable to tell me anything when she is a teenager. I have learned I need to build that open communication even now – I listen to her and ask her what she needs. I read her bedtime stories to make her eager to learn."

Ntombi is using what she has learned at Stepping Stones to support her family and friends. "My 15-year-old niece is using the information I shared with her on reproduction and hygiene, and I am thinking about volunteering at my church to teach the children about handwashing and other basic health lessons."

While Ntombi has experienced challenges in her life, she looks forward to new opportunities: she has a sponsor from her church to continue her education, and has new confidence and skills to protect and support herself and her family.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

CDS is implementing the *Community Gender-Based Violence and HIV Prevention Initiative for Adolescent Girls and Young Women* in collaboration with three partners in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces in South Africa. As of June 2017, these partners have reached more than 11,500 people with services. The project is part of the DREAMS initiative, which is being implemented in 10 sub-Saharan African countries to help adolescent girls and young women become **Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe**.

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CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT PROGRAM

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