

TAKING IT ONE DAY AT A TIME

*Teresa Nelson & Thando Tenza - Stepping Stones participant and facilitator
Isizinda Sempilo - Diepsloot*

Teresa Nelson was recruited to join the Stepping Stones programme by Thando Tenza, a *Woza Asibonisane!* facilitator working for Isizinda Sempilo (ISO). They live in Diepsloot, in the north of Johannesburg.

Thando had noticed that Teresa Nelson seemed to be troubled. One day, Thando approached Teresa Nelson and told her about the *Woza Asibonisane!* programme and its activities, which are geared towards assisting community members with HIV and gender violence prevention. Teresa Nelson needed help, so she joined the Stepping Stones sessions. Stepping Stones is a programme that runs over 10 weeks. It helps participants explore their relationships with the opposite sex.

"As a child, my uncle raped me constantly," says Teresa Nelson. Every time I went to report the rape to my grandmother she would hit me and say I don't know what I am talking about. But I knew. When I went to school, they noticed that something was wrong with me. They asked me what was wrong but I couldn't say. I feared that I would get punished by my uncle and grandmother."

Teresa Nelson decided to run away from home. She settled in Diepsloot. This is where she met a man who promised to look after her. He took her into his home and became her boyfriend. It wasn't long before he started beating and raping her. After three years of being together, he said he wanted Teresa Nelson to have his baby and, for fear of being cast out to the streets, she complied. She became pregnant and he continued to beat her and force her to have sex with him. If she refused he pulled out a knife and threatened her and the unborn baby. He would kick her out of the house and she would sleep outside in the toilets. Three days after the baby was born, he beat both of them. Nurses found that the baby had a swollen head and potential brain damage from the physical abuse.

"This was when I met Thando who told me about Stepping Stones". Teresa Nelson says, "She taught us a lot of things about life and we spoke about the dangers of staying in abusive relationships. A person would hit you today, wake up and claim that they love you the next day. That didn't make sense."

Teresa Nelson had also found out that she was HIV-positive but she wasn't willing to take ARV treatment because she just wanted to die. After attending the sessions she realised that there was still hope for her and she decided to go to the clinic and start taking treatment.



Thando Tenza

Thando referred Teresa Nelson to social workers in the community. Teresa Nelson gained the confidence to search for a job, which she found. This gave her the courage to move out of her boyfriend's home and find a place for herself and her daughter to rent.

The father of her child still bothers Teresa Nelson. He and his current girlfriend call and swear at her. She has since gotten a protection order against him to protect herself.

Thando believes that Teresa Nelson has to continue getting professional help and counselling. "Teresa Nelson's problems are not completely over," says Thando. "But now she is much better. The advantage of Stepping Stones is that participants create real relationships with facilitators. These relationships do not just end after the sessions have been wrapped up because a solution might still be unravelling.

"We continue to follow up with Teresa Nelson and assist her," says Thando "The effects of her life-long abuse cannot disappear in just 10 Stepping Stone sessions. The great thing is that together we have started that process and helped her on the road to recovery and to finding a safe and fulfilling life"

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