

A PAINFUL PAST TO HEAL OTHERS

*Thembisile Magubane - Stepping Stones Facilitator
DramAide - KwaZulu-Natal*

An African proverb says, "One hand washes the other". This is the lesson that Thembisile Magubane has come to learn through her work as a Community Facilitator for DramAide in Mayville KwaZulu-Natal.

Thembisile had a tough upbringing, so she can relate to the most painful stories that people share during Stepping Stones sessions. From the age of 7, until she was 11, Thembisile was raped by a relative.

"It happened while I was staying with my grandmother. So I know the pain rape," she says. "My parents were not even aware of it. As a child, I was not able to talk to them about such things. I only told them when I was older. I never went for counselling. With the passing of time I got to heal."

Thembi remembers a story shared by a participant during a Stepping Stones session of a married woman with children who was keeping a secret: she was a lesbian. The woman continued to stay in her marriage for fear of being ridiculed by her family who had always expected her to marry, bring them lobola cows and bear children. She couldn't defy them. "What was most painful was when she said that she feels like a piece of material that is just there to be used for sex by her husband whom she doesn't even love," Thembi says. "The only reason she stays is because she doesn't want to disappoint her family."

After the *Woza Asibonisane!* intervention, the woman was referred to social workers for further assistance to deal with her situation.

Being open about her status has encouraged others to speak out and to receive the support that they need. 🙏

Thembisile has had her fair share of troubles with men, to the point that she herself once thought of giving up on heterosexual relationships and dating women instead.



Thembisile Magubane

A few years ago, she fell pregnant and gave birth to her first child. This is when she discovered that she was HIV-positive. She started taking ARV treatment, which has helped her to continue living. Being open about her status has encouraged others to speak out and to receive the support that they need. This has its challenges in the Stepping Stones sessions because some participants are in relationships and they fear disclosing their status to their partners.

The work that Thembisile does has extended to her family; her mother has also become a community activist and has joined local organisations that help bring about change. She also apologised for not being there for Thembisile during her five-year rape ordeal and for not being aware of what was happening to her.

"I have learned that what I do is not just a job," she says. "People come up to me on the streets and thank me. They tell me how their lives have changed since they came to the sessions, even though some changes don't happen overnight. Such moments humble me and make me feel like I am doing something special. I use my pain to heal others"

257 Brooklyn Road, Block D, Equity Park, Brooklyn, Pretoria, Gauteng, 0011, South Africa
TEL: +27 12 366 9300 FAX: +27 12 366 9301
www.ccisa.org.za

