

Dear Reader, Welcome to your weekly e-bulletin, let's boost our sharing, access and utilization of information; on upcoming events and provide regular updates on activity status.

68 HIV Exposed Infants Declared Free of Infection in 18 Months

...celebrating the first Mentor Mothers graduation ceremony in Kenya

Responding to global AIDS campaign of 'Getting to Zero'¹ which runs till 2015, APHIAplus Nairobi-Coast led the Coastal community in celebrating the first ever Kenya Mentor² Mothers Program (KMMP) Graduation Ceremony for HIV Exposed Infants (HEI) dubbed 'Graduation to Health'; realizing a total of 68 babies declared HIV free.

In a ceremony marked with high emotions, the Kilifi parents, Mentor Mothers and well-wishers, who had to wait for the 18 months period before hearing, stood proud and affirmed the declaration as being a double effort from the healthcare workers and them. *"My wife and I are overjoyed to have our twins Fatima³ and Fatuma⁴ given a clean bill of health. We worked very hard to see this day come true in our lives,"* said a jubilant Chengo while hugging his wife Zainabu and extending his arms to reach the children.



"I found out that I was HIV positive on my first visit to the clinic at the first trimester. Before this revelation, my husband had known that he was positive but was afraid to tell me. After accepting my situation, immediately the Mentor Mothers advised me to start treatment and counseling at the clinic. Through the monthly support group meetings, I was taught how to prevent my babies from contacting HIV all through pregnancy to until I gave birth. Then I followed advice and breastfed exclusively for six months, and am now overjoyed that my babies have turned out healthy and HIV free," explained Zainabu while holding Chengo's hands.

"I accompanied my wife to the monthly session at the clinic. I was happy to because the clinicians told me that supporting her was important for our well-being and that of our babies. Through group and family therapy we learnt that HIV is not a death sentence - we wanted our babies to start on a clean slate and not to blame us when they grow up. Today I rejoice seeing my queens happy and strong," added Chengo.

Occasion held at Kilifi County Hospital, and graced by Mrs. Meyu Kibarani the Ward Representative, strategically pulling a crowd of potential mobilizers, parents and children who could be registered in the program. Messages of every parent want the best for their children - happiness and good health - filled the air. Prisca Musiswa, a Mentor Mother shares her innermost sentiments...

"We (Mentor Mothers) are extremely happy to see them (parents and HIV free children grandaunts) experience the joy, something we (Mentor Mothers) once did when our babies were pronounced HIV negative. We are glad

¹ <http://www.worldaidscampaign.org/world-aids-day/world-aids-day-2011/>

² The National Guidelines for the Kenya Mentor Mother Program (KMMP) integrates and standardizes peer education and psychosocial support for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) programs Barriers to uptake of PMTCT are addressed through a peer education and psychosocial support approach that integrates women living with HIV into the health delivery team as **Mentor Mothers**.

³ Not real name.

⁴ Not real name.

that these mothers and fathers listened to us when we shared our experiences, followed due procedure and are now celebrating their wise choices”.

The mentor mothers target HIV-positive pregnant women, new mothers and their babies up to 18 months post-partum. They facilitate group health education for all Mother and Child Health (MNCH) clients and pregnant women. They provide one-on-one peer education, psychosocial support, facilitate support groups for PMTCT clients, work with community health workers to conduct defaulter tracing and encourage partner involvement in MCH-services. They also reach out to HIV-positive female Comprehensive Care Clients (CCC) clients, HIV-negative MCH clients, Male partners and Children up to 5 years.

A principle aim of the 2009/10-2013/14 Kenyan National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (KNASP III) is to reduce the number of new HIV infections by using evidence-based approaches to HIV prevention. APHIAplus Nairobi-Coast is equally aligned to the main outcomes are outlined to be achieved in the latest Strategic Plan: (i) reduced risky behavior among the general, infected, most-at-risk and vulnerable populations, (ii) proportion of eligible PLHIV (people living with HIV) on care and treatment increased and sustained, (iii) health systems deliver comprehensive HIV services, (iv) HIV mainstreamed in sector-specific policies and sector strategies, and (v) communities and PLHIV networks respond to HIV within their local context.

As a result of aligning to KNASP III and held accountable for results, APHIAplus Nairobi-Coast supports KMMP in four facilities in Kilifi County reaching over 3,000 pregnant women, 1,000 of whom are HIV positive and 70 couples. The program supports supervision for KMMP sites, integration into the service delivery team, performance evaluation and in-service trainings, monthly stipend to Mentor Mothers and links HIV positive children with child support groups, as well as outreaches at the community where Mentor Mothers are involved in mentorship.



Guest of honour Mrs. Meyu Kibarani cuts graduation cake with mothers and their HIV free children

Behind a Successful Mentor Mothers is...

Prisca Musiswa, Zaina Omar and Luciana Charo are the inspiring team behind realization of HIV free babies in Kilifi. Since 2011, APHIAplus Nairobi-Coast has supported the three and the ANC Nursing In-Charge Juliana Nyevu to coordinate the Mentor Mothers program in the County. *Mtaani* paid them a visit to divulge their magical deeds...

Sandra: Your passion for a HIV free generation, what sparked the light?

Prisca -*“The HIV positive mothers tend to trust and listen to us more because we have had HIV free children yet we are positive. I found out about my status when I went for my first Antenatal Care visit in 2008. From then on I continued with my medication and adhering to instructions from the Mentor Mothers at that time. Eventually I gave birth to beautiful twin*



Mentor Mother Choir sings their heart to 68 HIV free babies to keep the promise with help of parents

girls whom I breastfed exclusively for six months and was overjoyed to have them turn out HIV free at 18 months. To date they are beautiful 5 year olds and watching them grow up motivates me to help other women living positively to get healthy babies.”

Sandra: How do you do it?

Zaina - “We reach out to the mothers through health talks at the Antenatal Care clinic waiting bay. After testing we counsel those who turn out positive as most of them are horrified and feel hopeless, but we console them by sharing our own personal stories. After that we refer them to our clinic where they are counseled and put on Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART). After enrollment into the Prevention from Mother to Child (PMTCT) schedule they are continuously monitored and counseled on disclosure. Some bring their spouses during the next visit and they follow up the program together, which is good for the unborn babies. The babies are given a clean bill of health after 18 months. To date we have enrolled over 400 mothers and their children, 68 of the babies being our first graduates.”



Prisca demonstrates to Mtaani how she conducts her counselling session

Sandra: Did you encounter any challenges?

Luciana – “Our main challenge has been disclosure. Stigma is still high in Kilifi so most mothers do not share their status with their spouses. Most prefer attending the clinic alone and take their medication secretly.”

Sagalla Youth Centre First Anniversary; Community celebrates youth contribution to Sexual and Reproductive health services



Having counseled and tested over 800 on HIV, and reached many more youth with reproductive health messages and empowerment messages in a span of one year, Sagalla Youth Resource Center is a living prove that uptake of sexual and reproductive health services targeting the youth require innovative approaches.

Sagalla youth Resource center was started in May 2013 to introduce youth friendly services at Sagalla Health Center. Owing to its colorful structural outlook and recreational activities, the center attracts an average of 30 youths a day; out of which five are first time visitors.

Celebrating their success at their first anniversary on 2nd May 2014 together with community members, county health officials and partners, the center's health secretary told of how their peer-to peer approach has enabled them reach more youth... *"Youth at the center are trained to share what they learn with their peers. We also organize community events such as football tournaments, school and outreaches where we get more youth testing and taking up reproductive health services"* said Christopher Magambo.

Pledging full support from the county office, the guest of honor Mr. Wilson Mwangombe (representing the Women Representative) encouraged the youth to take advantage of the devolution and fully participate in county activities and fund allocation... *"This is a model center that can be used as a best practice to wean youths in Taita Taveta out of drug abuseⁱ; an emergent health concern. As the county government, we are ready to work with such centers to reach youth in the community with capacity building initiatives,"* he said.

ⁱ A survey carried out by NACADA in 2012 dubbed 'Rapid Assessment on Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Kenya' noted that the drug abuse among youth in Taita Taveta County was on the rise. The study further showed that children aged 14 years were ignorant of the dangers of drug abuse and were likely to fall victim to the vice if not properly educated on the same.

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Kimorigo Hope Support group participated in the Taita Taveta County NACADA choir competition on drug and substance abuse, became third best having presented songs which that are part of the PwPs message they composed.



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