

Do you know Ubuntu?

Annie Mitchell

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hsj press



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With thanks and love to everyone who shared their stories in the making of this book.

Yu, u nobuntu.



ACTS is a community clinic based in Mpumalanga in the north east of South Africa.

This book documents the stories of the people who use, and work at, the clinic.





The 3rd World War

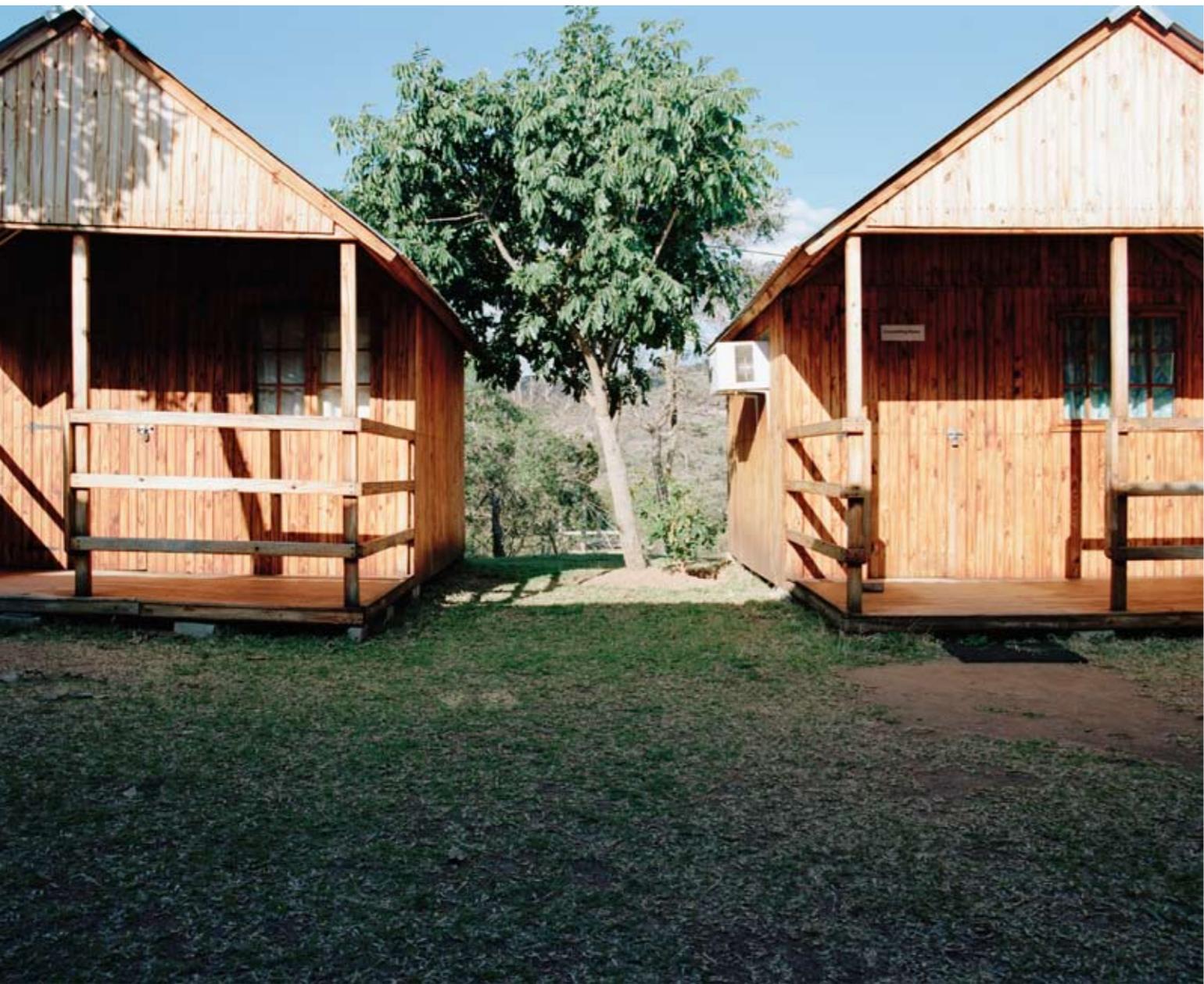
Let us prepare to fight,
Because the war has already begun,
To be speechless it won't help,
Because people are dying

How many orphans in our communities?
How many corpses in our mortuaries?
How many terminally ill in our hospitals?
Because of this war

Let us blast our AK47 to our communities,
And break this policy of isolation.
Today is me tomorrow is you

Let us not be confused but fight,
Let us all use the ABC spear,
ABSTAIN, BE FAITHFUL, CONDOMISE

Jerry Nkosi







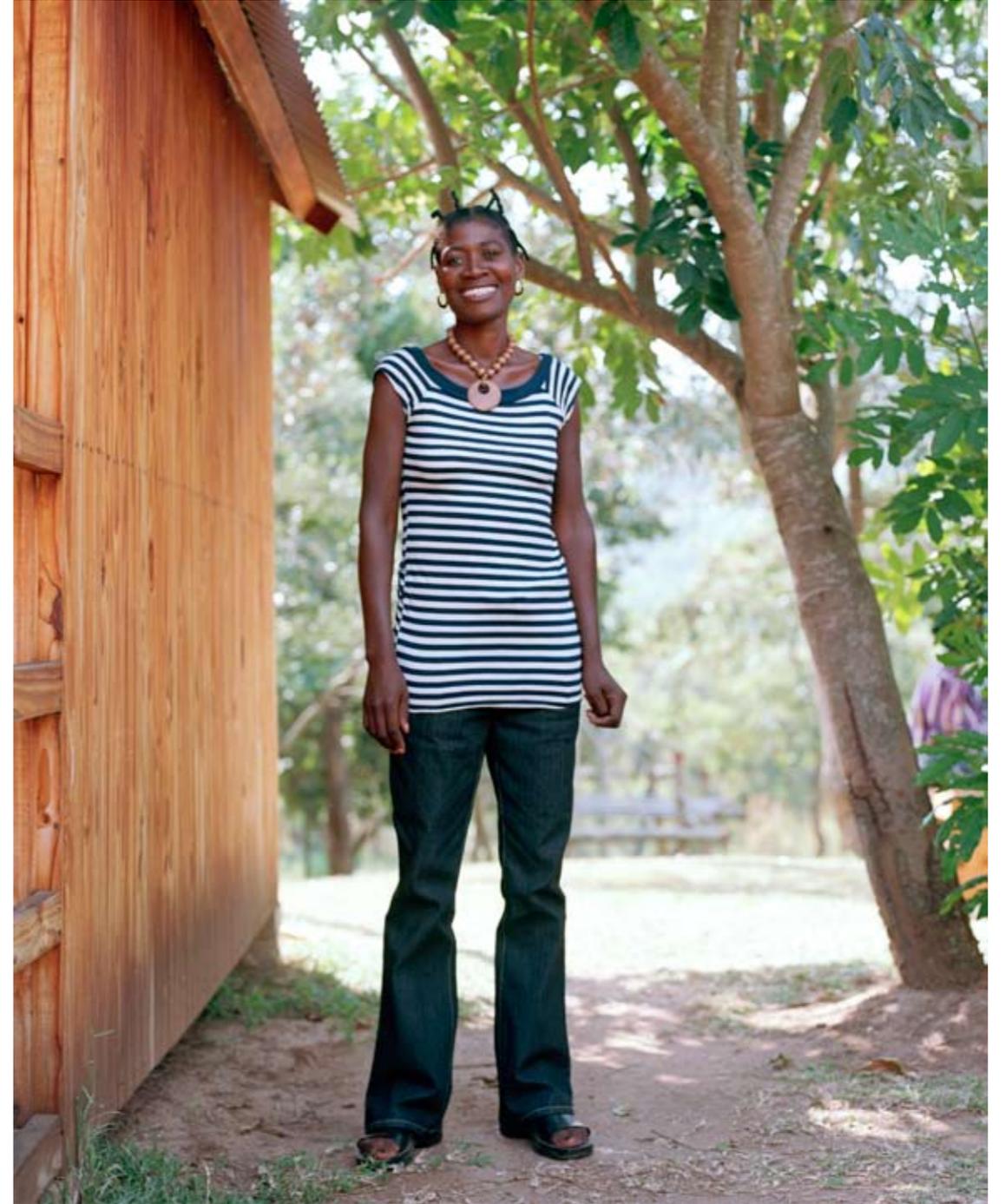
Ground Rules

- * Respect one another
 - ↳ don't break others down.
- * Cell phones off / silent.
- * Keep all information private & confidential
- * Don't laugh at others, unless they tell a joke.
- * Be on time

A CD4 count relates to the testing of the numbers of white lymphocyte blood cells a person has, and hence the effectiveness of their immune system. Normal CD4 counts in adults range from 500 to 1,500 cells per cubic millimeter of blood. In general, a person's CD4 count goes down as the HIV disease progresses, and should increase or stabilize in response to effective combination anti-retroviral treatment (ARV's).

According to public health guidelines, preventive therapy should be started when an HIV-positive person registers a CD4 count under 200. The Centre's for Disease Control and Prevention considers HIV-infected persons who have CD4 counts below 200 to have AIDS, regardless of whether they are sick or well.

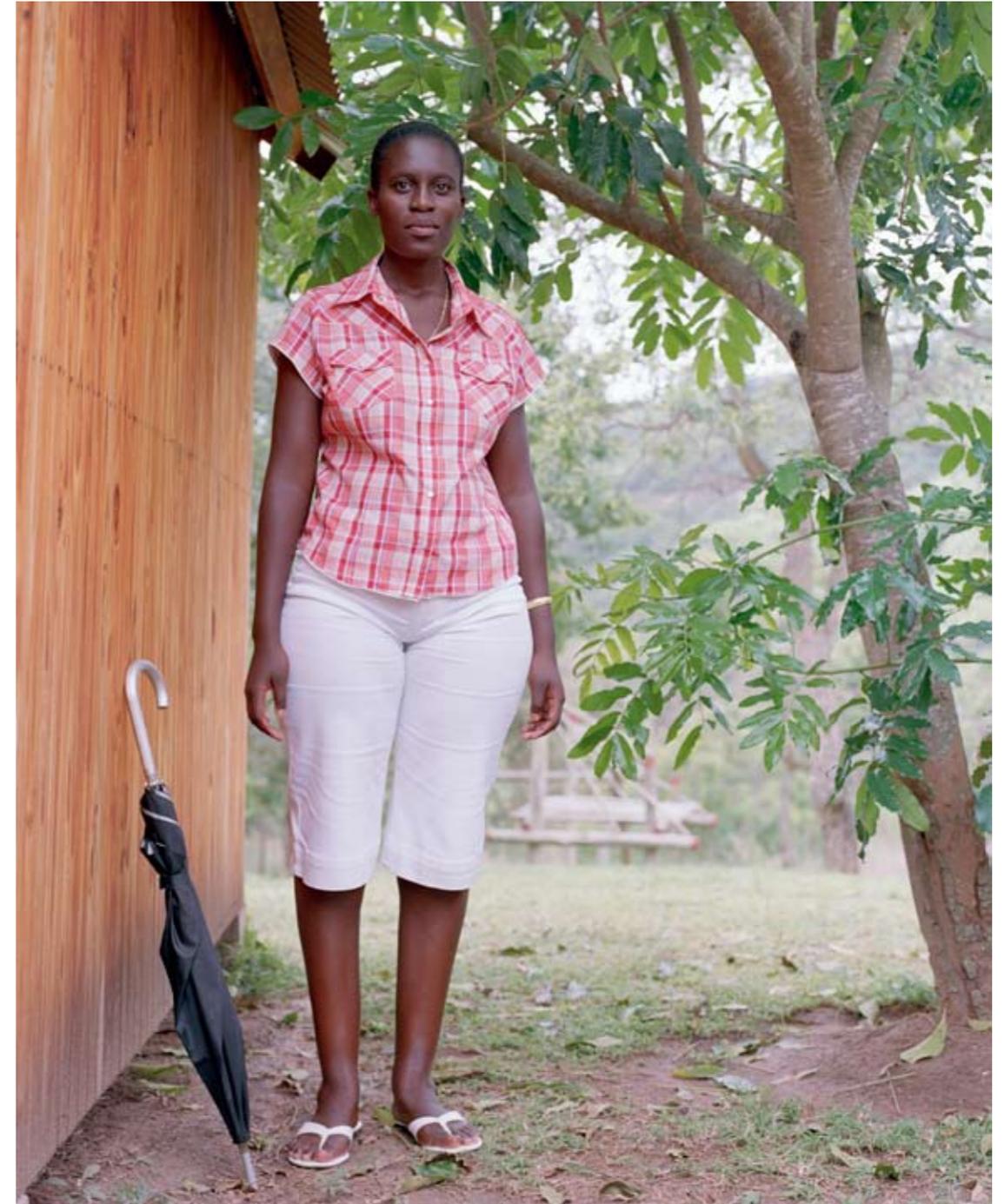
Source: Treatment Action Campaign, South Africa



My name is Precious. I came here in March when I was very sick. I had a child in 2002 but he died. When I was here I did the test for TB and HIV and I was positive in all. I started treated for TB on 30 June, and then after two months I started ARV treatment for HIV. Now I feel so much better. I was not ok before.

Other people who are scared, they need to come and get the medication. It helps. There are too many people who are still saying no and hiding.

Precious Mgambule, November 2006



I'm Prudence, I live near here - Precious is my Aunty. When I was 22 I had a baby and he passed away, then I had another and he passed away too. At the local hospital in Temba the doctor told me I must check for HIV, so the local clinic took the test and told me I was positive. I asked for the medicine but the clinic told me they didn't have any. At that time I was fat – to look at me you would not know I was ill. My CD4 was 200 and something. So I stayed at home and my husband ran away because I was positive. I stayed at home for quite a long time, getting sicker.

Someone told my mother about this clinic and she brought me here. My CD4 count by now was very low; it was 140. I was admitted to the hospice and was given ARV's. When I left the hospice and I've stuck to my treatment and came for my check ups – and now I am very well! My CD4 count is 800 and something.

My family are really supportive. They give me money to come to the clinic when I cannot afford to come for my check ups. They encourage me that having HIV does not mean that I am going to die.

Precious and I take care of each other, and come to the clinic together. My husband ran away when he found out I was positive and Precious's boyfriend did just the same. He ran away.

Prudence Mawleka, November 2006



My name is Amelia, I am 27. I started getting sick in September 2006. I was fit and then I started losing weight. I went to the clinic in White River where they injected me. Then they told me I must bring my boyfriend along with me. I didn't return.

Five months later I had shingles. At home they took me to the traditional healers. After using their medicine my shingles were better, but I kept on losing more and more weight. It came to a time when I couldn't wake up – I was always asleep. I went to another local clinic and they transferred me to the government hospital in Temba. I was advised to go for a test; I did and I was HIV positive. My CD4 count was very low; it was 1.

One of the counsellors advised my mother they should take me to ACTs clinic. The home based carer came and took me to the clinic and they put me on ARV's.

After two months of using ARV's I've seen a difference in my life. I have started to gain weight again. Today my CD4 count is 62. The treatment is very good. Now I wish to be a facilitator or counsellor one day, so that I can help people living with HIV like me – or go to school and do workshops about HIV AIDs – to encourage others when they are ill to go and get tested, because I know. I was ill before and now I am well.

Amelia Montsi, March 2007



I started to get sick in 2004. One day I went to my mothers after work. When I arrived there I slept for a while but the following morning I became sick, I felt dizzy and everything. I didn't do anything for a while, until my mum took me to the government clinic in Temba.

I was told I needed to have a TB sputum test, which came back negative. The sister was very friendly to me so I went to her and asked her for a blood test. I felt ill and I knew I was sick but because the TB test was negative I knew I needed to know what was wrong with me. The sister looked at me and she was amazed, "Oh" and said, "you have asked me a very difficult thing!" In the end she took a test and found that I was positive. After that she gave me a tablet – maybe it was a vitamin tablet – I took it and I felt better.

There is also my son Arthur. He was always sick – sometimes very sick. I took him to the clinic and asked the sister "I don't know what's wrong with him, take his blood and test his blood for him". We found that Arthur is positive too. I also have another son, a younger brother of Arthur. He has also been tested and he is negative. I didn't understand! He is younger but he is negative. Apparently it can sometimes happen. Arthur is disabled, he can't walk but he is going to a normal school and he is doing fine. He is doing his grade five now.

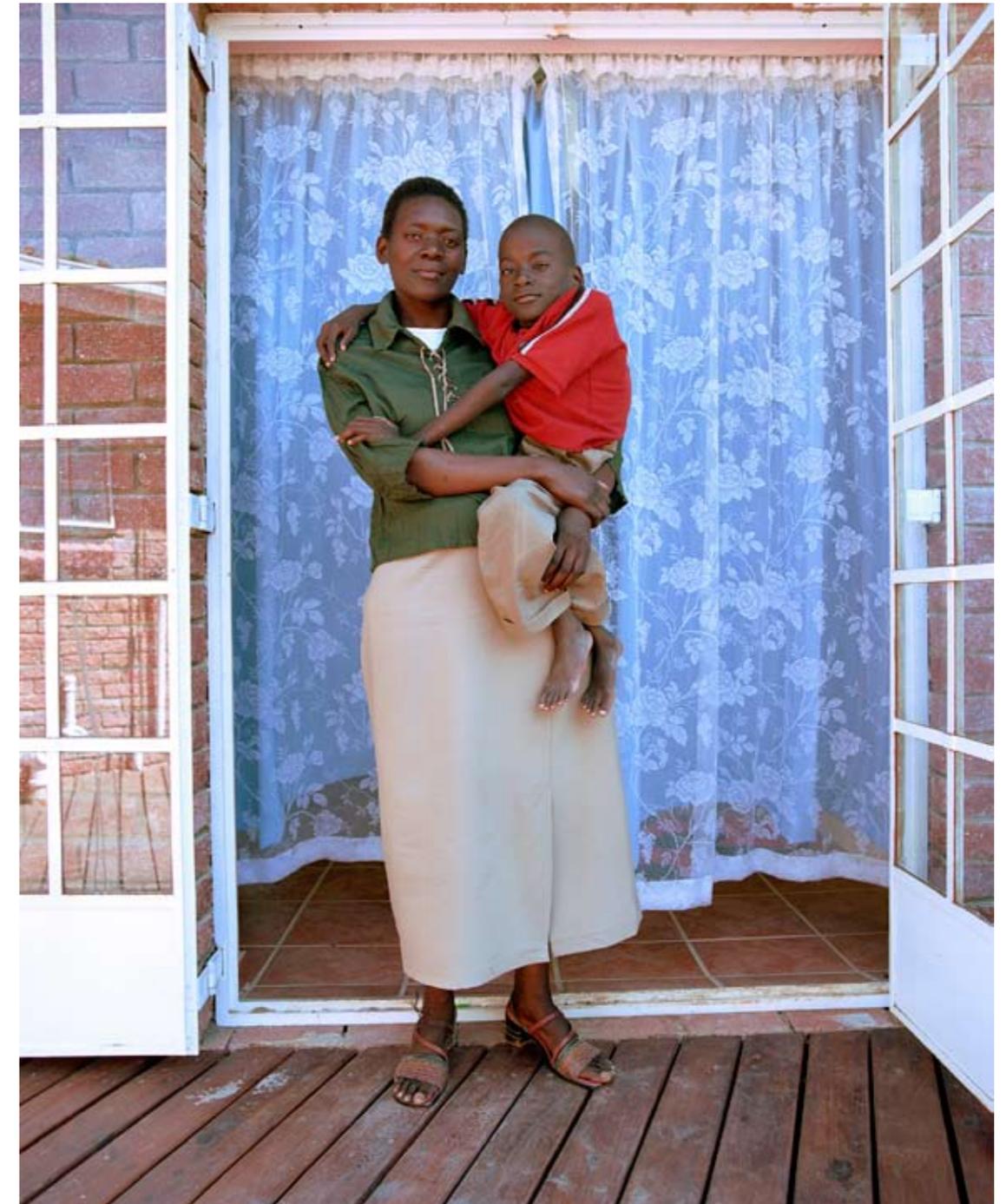
A Sister from Temba saw that Arthur was always sick and was not getting better so she wrote a letter of referral to ACTs clinic for me. The clinic began to treat him and so quickly he began to do much better. That first time I came to the clinic I only opened a file for Arthur, I didn't open one for me. But I had been getting very very sick, so the next visit I registered. My CD4 was 26. They found something in my neck - they took that thing out of my neck and found that I had TB. I had to stop my ARV's for three months while I took the TB treatment. After that I got better again, better and better.

Since 2005 I have been on ARV's now, without them and the support groups - I come every month - I would give up.

I've been volunteering at a place for disabled children in Masoyi for the past three years and recently was elected onto the SGB, the School Governing Body. Through that I went to a workshop on how to help vulnerable children. This is what I would like to do, to work with, and help other people. If I see someone who is sick I recommend that they come to the clinic and test. Many people who are sick do not want to test – it helps that now I am strong, and I am not shy to tell them I was sick and that I came to test; I am not shy to tell them to test before they get as sick as I did.

Ubuntu; People helping people – I am what I am because of others.

Constance Mbujane and Arthur Beyonce, March 2007



When I first came here I was very sick, and very thin. I had very bad sores all over my body; I couldn't go to the toilet or walk or move or do anything. I also had very bad diarrhoea and I was vomiting. I was very ill. My sister brought me here. When they tried to take my blood test, my blood wouldn't come out so they had to take the blood from my hand. It confirmed I had HIV. It was very difficult to accept. It was very hard. My sister takes tablets for diabetes and she encouraged me to take my medication. My sister has to takes tablets for the rest of her life, so her experience helped me. I started to believe again, there is life after death.

Firstly I took immune boosters and vitamins and then I started on my ARV's, but I didn't feel well. I felt bad. So I then tried a different ARV. It is 3 years now and I am ok. My body is okay with the medication now. I have gained weight, I feel well. I feel happy. My sister is doing well too; we encourage each other.

My future is bright. I live alone with my children and I definitely do not want a man in my life – I am doing just fine by myself! I feel like I have a second chance in life because I can do everything I want. When I was so sick I didn't have any hope. And right now I can see far into the future.

Jabu Jansta, March 2007



I want to encourage everybody who is sick to not hide their illness, they must come out so they can get help. They mustn't stay home because their parents, sisters or brothers are ashamed of them. They must go to the doctor and get help so they can get the treatment they need.

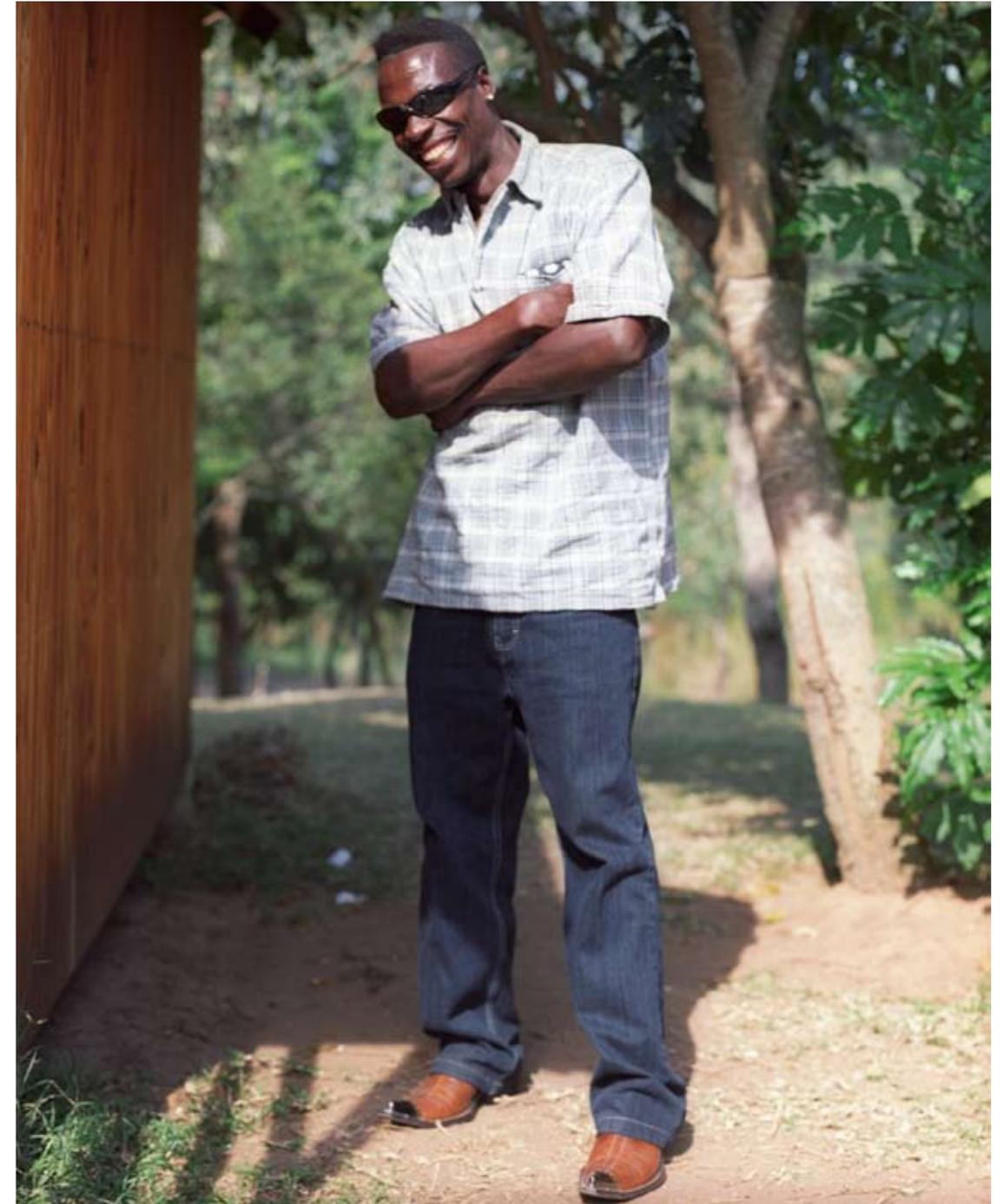
People must talk. The people especially suffering are our children. If we do not talk we will die and our children will be orphaned. When I was sick I couldn't walk, move or eat for 10 days. I put nothing in my mouth for 10 days. I ended up have to use pampas because I could not control myself. The diarrhoea was so strong and I got very weak. By coming out and talking to the doctors and asking what is wrong it has helped me a lot. Today, I am a better person. I am not afraid to tell everyone now; even the whole world! Because HIV, it won't attack a tree or a stone; it attacks people. We are the ones who get sick. We are the ones who need to get help, so we are not supposed to hide ourselves.

Everyone has their own sickness, some which can kill them. I got strong after I found out I had HIV. I'd like everybody to come out. Everybody no matter what there skin colour is. This virus is not just for black. It is for blacks, whites, coloureds. I just want everyone to come out, get tested and talk; and live.

People used to laugh at me and point at me saying "he has AIDs, he has AIDs". Those people who were laughing, today they are all dead, all of them. But I am still alive and well. The reason people are afraid to get tested is because after they get their results, they are scared that if they are positive they have the idea that this is the end of the world, they think "I am going to die, there is nothing for me, there is no hope". I want people to know that there is life after AIDs.

Anyway, AID's is not the only thing that can kill you – I have lived with AIDs for 5 years now and how do I know it will be the thing that will kill me? I could get run over by a bus on my way home today, eh!

Louis Lekhuleni, March 2007



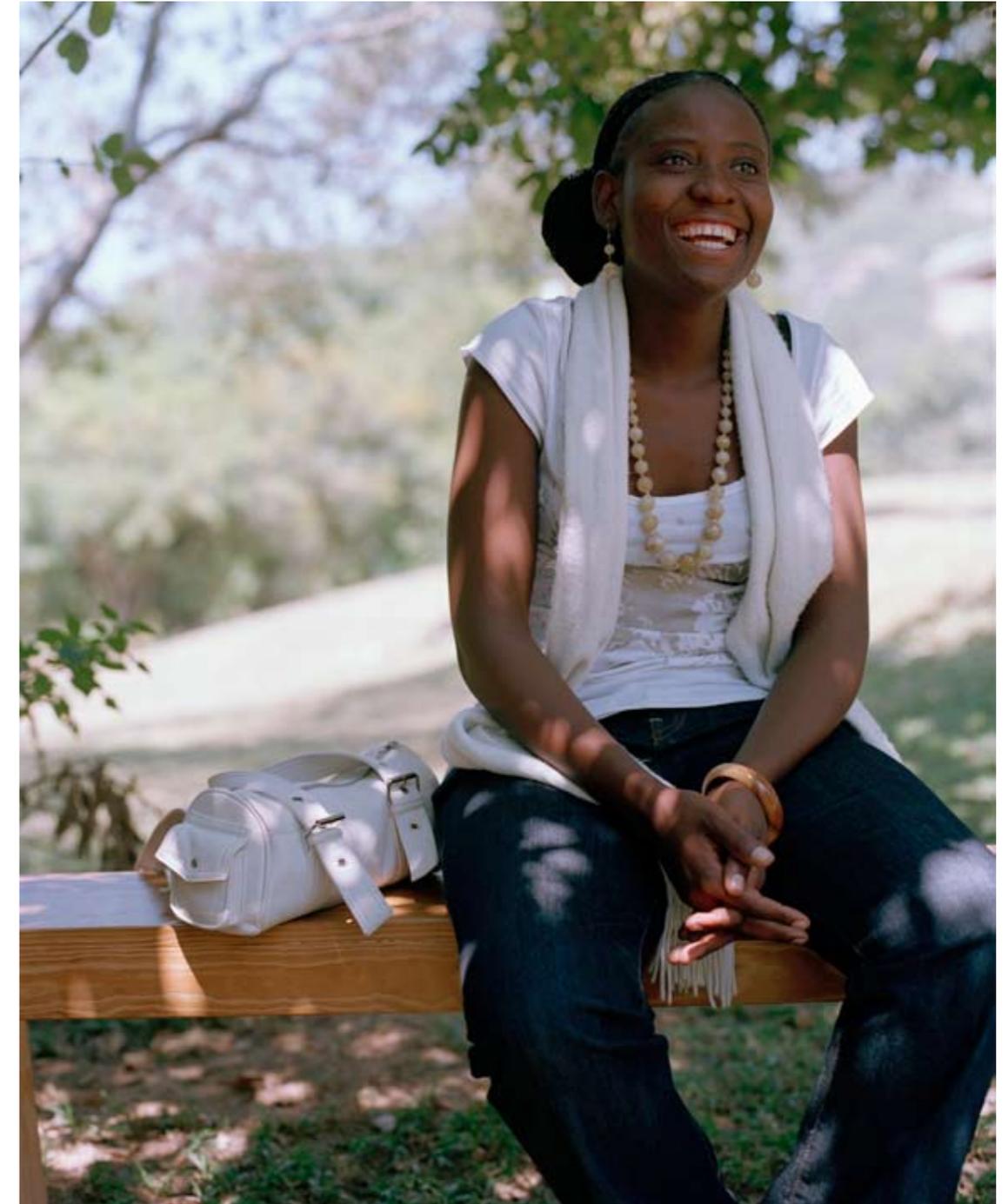
My name is Grace Stihole, I am 23 years old. The first time I came here I was very sick and weak and slender. I couldn't eat or walk by myself, and came with my parents in the car. Dr Hardman checked me all over and I told her everything that is hurting. She gave me some treatment and now I am all right. I have pain, but not like last time. Just sometimes, I do have pain but it is not too much.

After I started taking the treatment I started eating more, gaining weight. Even talking too much – everything went back to normal! When I was first here a year ago I weighed only 32 kg – now I weigh 65 kg.

When I am sick I am scared sometimes. When I am sick by brain, sometimes it goes. At home I stay alone until my mum comes back from work, and my mind, it just used to go sometimes. The support groups help because we are all the same. Sometimes if you have some secrets you can share them, or sometimes if my pills are hurting me I can ask for help – it is a group where we support each other! It's a nice place because I can talk about whatever I like. Outside if I talk to someone who is not like me, who does not understand me, they might look at me and judge me, and whisper to others "she has the AIDs". Here, no one can judge me like that. Here I've found friends who are the same as me. I can talk, we can talk.

Some people from my community I can help now and they have also come to the clinic. In the future, maybe some other people will see me, and my story. I agreed to tell you my story because here today this is me you see. Just me. I do not judge myself. I choose to speak.

Grace Sithole, March 2007



My soul is not sick

Benjamin, August 2007











Group's Expectations

To help people to understand more about HIV & AIDS
To help people to do the correct things
To help people to do the correct things
To help people to do the correct things

→ How to counsel

→ How to take the treatment, when & how.

→ Advise patients they are not dying, to follow rules + live with the problem

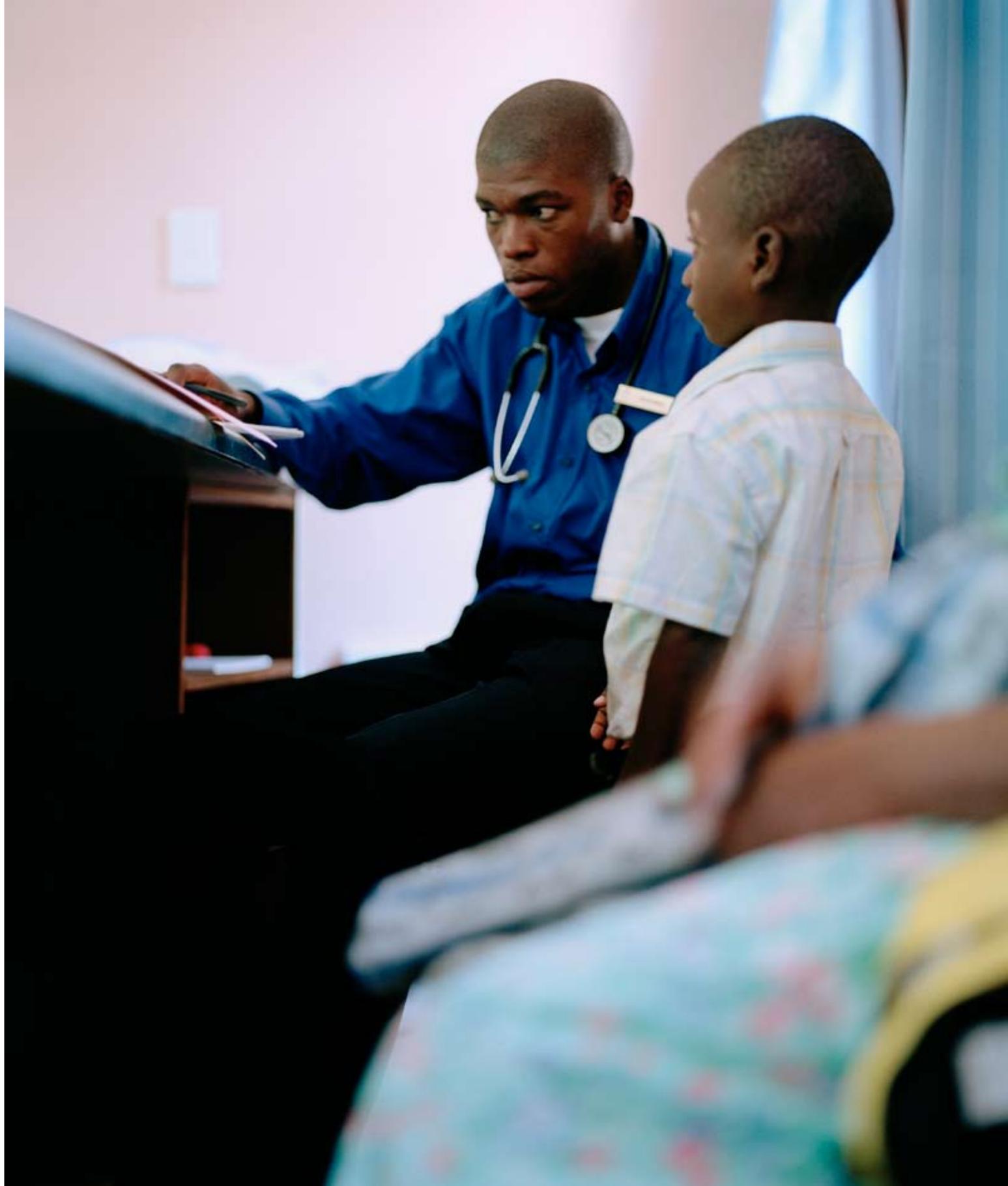
To give more information
To help people to understand more about HIV & AIDS
To help people to do the correct things
To help people to do the correct things
To help people to do the correct things

To help people to do the correct things
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It works much better if you have people treating those with HIV who have HIV themselves. They understand much better. Even when you are giving advice, you can say “look at me, I got this disease in 1983 but with the ARV’s I’m still living. I’m still taking them each and every day each, every hour, I’m still taking them seven in the morning and seven late you understand?” So, the person will understand much better.

So this is also why support groups are so good. From all the people that are there, no-one needs to be afraid of saying things because we are all the same. You are infected I am also infected, you cannot laugh at me.

Jeremiah Nkosi, August 2006

My name is Agnes. I'm 43 years old and married and have been working at ACTs Community Clinic since 2001. By working here I learned a lot. As an Adherence Counsellor I prepare patients who are starting on ARV's - I give them information about the journey they are going to take on the treatment. I also co-ordinate support groups.

My husband is 52 years old and works in temporary jobs. I'm a mother of four children, and one adopted child. My first daughter is 21, next I have twins who are 19, then a nine year old son and my adopted daughter is two. Fortunately I am also a gogo - a grandmother.

My eldest daughter gave up school at grade 11 but what I like about her is that she is a Christian. Both of my twins passed their metric, and one had a baby two months ago. My other twin is not at tertiary because of financial problems. My last born is doing grade three and is doing very well. My adopted daughter is at home with her sisters.

I also have pets; a cat, a dog and a chicken. Our family church is a Roman Catholic Church.

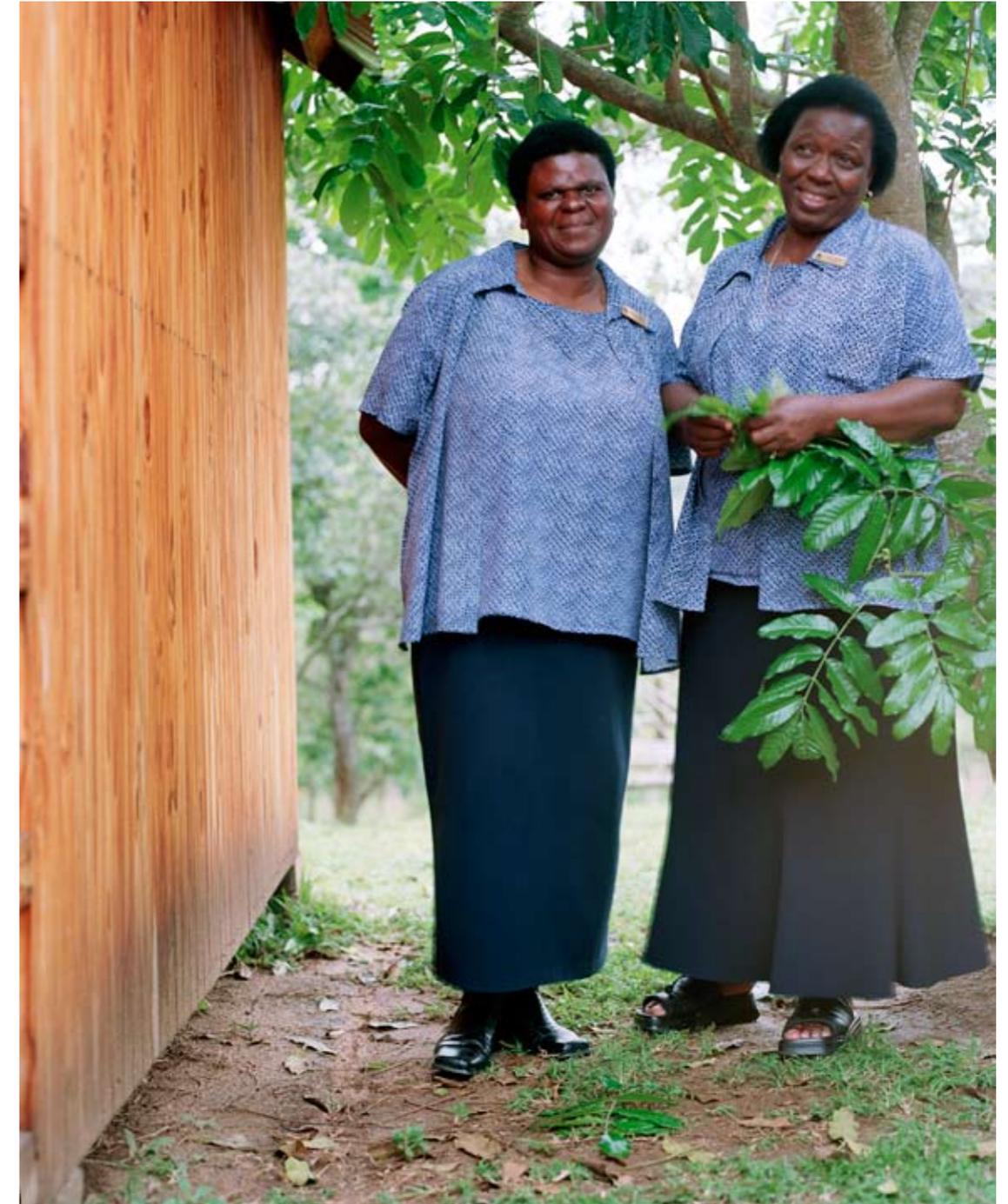
We are a happy family.

My name is Dinah Likhuleni. I am 48, married and the mother of five children. I've been working at ACTs Clinic since 2002. I am working as a counsellor dealing with adherence counselling where we find out about the readiness of the patient for ARV treatment.

There are many people suffering with HIV AIDs and TB but we are running short of medicine - we believe that God will touch funders to help our clinic. My dream is to see ACTs Clinic become bigger and bigger for it to help our nation.

I pray that God helps Dr Margie Hardman to live long. I wish she were 16 today so that she would be able to help our great-grandchildren. Today our friends, cousins, parents, brothers and sisters are healthy because of her. Others were passing away before she opened this clinic.

Agnes Phahlane (left) and Dinah Likhuleni, November 2006





I am Sheila. I am a married lady with five children. In the year 2000 my husband got sick. He'd been working at Whitbank as a bricklayer and used come home two or three times a month, it was during that time that he came home sick. He had shingles. I didn't know what they were, or why he had them. We went to the doctor and got some medicine. Then, he started to drink. I don't drink anything, I just look after him.

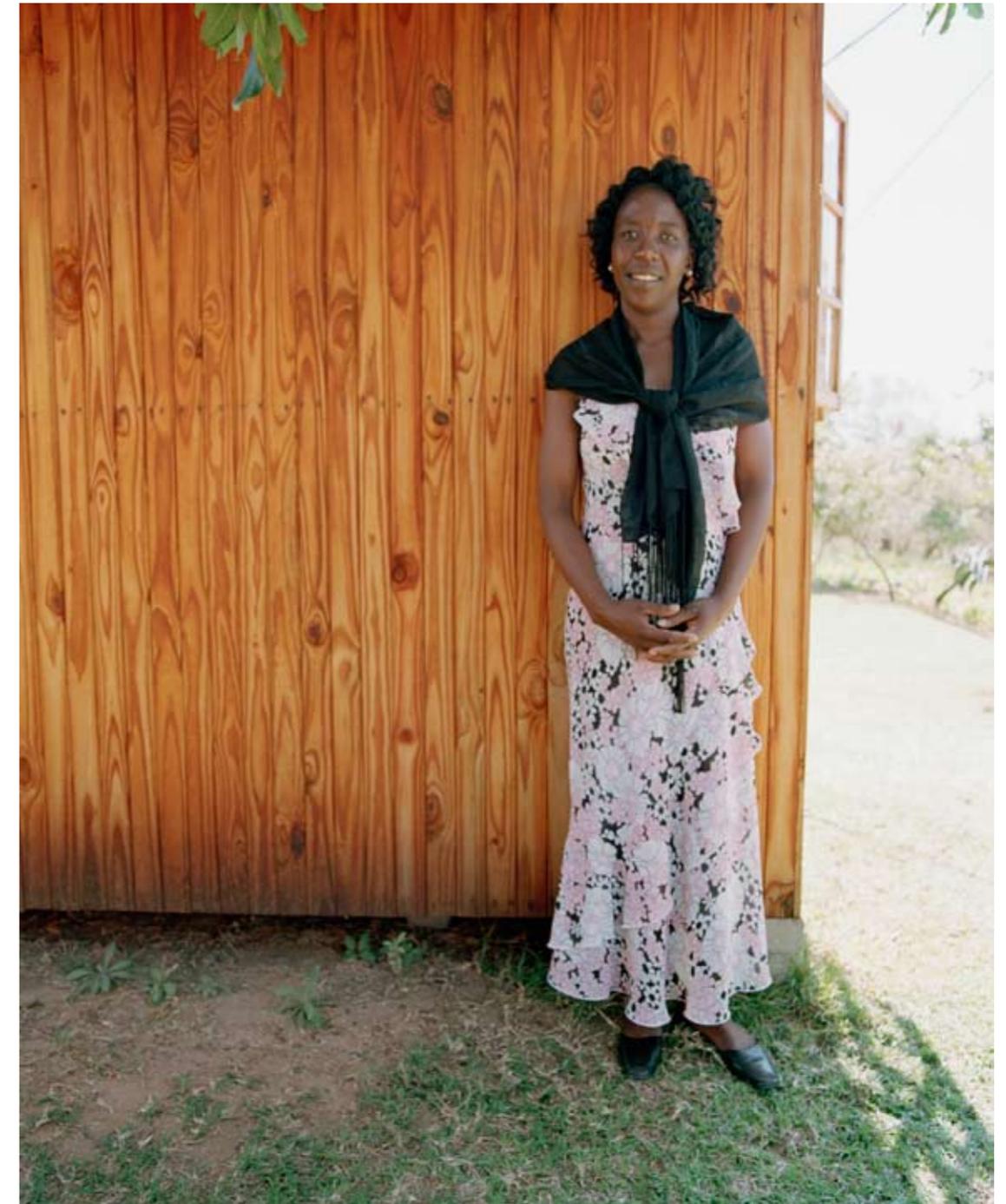
Then in 2003 I got shingles, I couldn't believe I had the same thing as him. I went to the local clinic but unfortunately there was a lady working there who is my neighbour. She came and whispered to me "Sheila, I didn't like to tell you that your husband has the symptoms of HIV". I said, "no, you are lying, it is impossible". I was at the government clinic and it's not so good, so my neighbour suggested I go to ACTs. At ACTs I met Sister Agnes who counselled me and told me many stories, and all the symptoms of HIV. I said "Gee whiz"; they had told me, but I didn't take it so serious before. I went home and asked my love, I said, "please let's go and test". Y'know how men are – no, no, no, I'll go tomorrow, go on your own, I don't want all this bother blah blah. I said, "please, otherwise this disease will continue all through us". So eventually he did come. It was useless for me to come on my own.

We took the blood test together, and went for counselling together. It helped us to not look to each other for blame. We were both positive and we both started ARV treatment. That was 2005 and up until now you can really see the difference, a lot of difference to us. You've heard of what the Sangoma's say about condoms? Causing disease and stuff. Well our first born is now 22 years old and now we do try to give him advice, to talk to him; to tell him you must condomise.

My sister-in-law had the same symptoms as us, but she was only going to the Sangoma's. I'm not saying Sangoma's can't heal – they can heal some things, but not this disease, this is a terrible disease. She listened eventually and when she was very very sick she came to ACTs. She's had such a hard life as a single mother. She tested and she was positive. Firstly they treated the TB in her chest and her shingles, and then she started ARV's. She is so much better now – you cannot believe she was the same woman! She looked so terrible.

Now since I have been treated, my life is good. I was wasting so much money before trying to get better. I try to advise a lot of people, a lot of my friends to come here and tell the doctor everything. Otherwise if they do not they will loose their life, and leave their kids alone. Even the babies, if you are not treated you are going to infect your babies and then you're going to loose your children – you'll just bear kids and they will die; bear kids and die. That is why I want to guide each and every one who is sick to this treatment.

Shelia Maswego, August 2006



My name is Cynthia Ndubazi, I am 25 yrs old. I want you to know that the Cynthia that you are looking at now is HIV positive and now I have a story to tell you, about how I got tested.

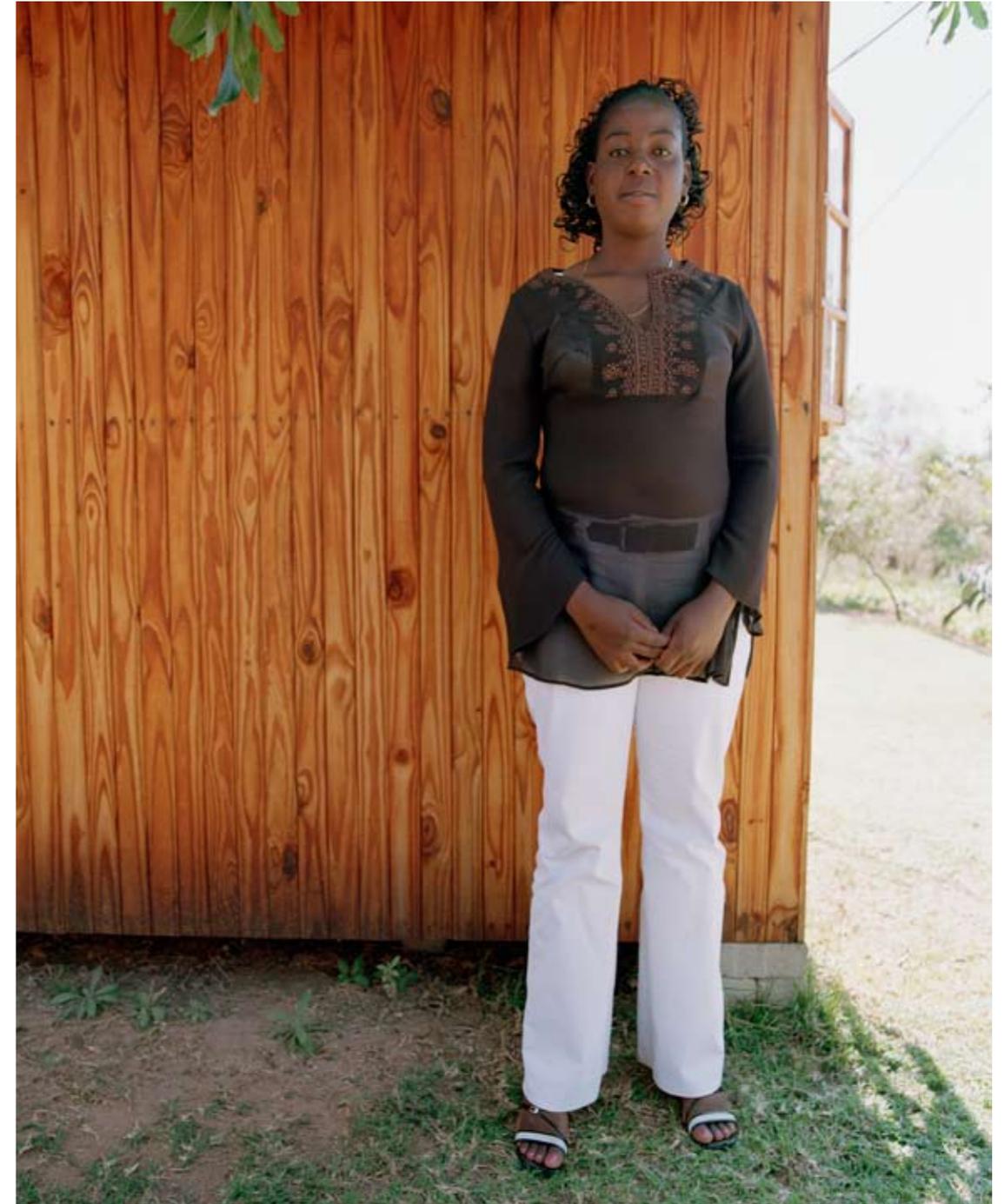
Before I was tested I went for counselling – it helps you decide whether to follow your heart in making your decision to test – you don't just go and test. So, when the doctor at the local hospital in Temba first suggested that I test I went for counselling, tested and I was HIV positive. But I was young, I was only a teenager then, and I was too young to understand what it was to be positive. I decided to keep quiet and to not do anything about it. So, I just carried on with my life, but I wasn't so well. I was fluctuating a lot – one day ok, one day not.

Sometime later I overheard a neighbour talking about ACTs clinic; she was saying she got her ARV's there and that now she is fine. So I came here with my mum. I went into the doctor by myself though; it helped me to feel free, to speak up and tell the doctor everything. They tested me again and checked my CD4 count. Unfortunately it had dropped to 38 by that time. I was weak! I couldn't even walk a distance, but to look at me you couldn't tell I was sick, even though I was feeling it inside.

I started my ARV's on 19 November 2005. In June this year my CD4 count was tested again – I've been doing well. It's straight up from that 38 to 310. When they told me that I felt like I'm going up, like I'm flying! Like maybe they have taken something big from my shoulders. I felt so proud of myself.

HIV is really there, and it kills.

Cynthia Ndubazi, August 2006



My name is Grace Makhabela. I have three kids; the firstborn is 13, this is Ayanda, the second born she is 4, and the last born is 1 years old. I started coming to ACTs in 2001 when I was pregnant. I had sores all over my body, and I couldn't walk because it was so painful. They suggested I get tested and I found I was HIV positive. Although the support groups gave me some really good counselling when I went home I felt very depressed. My mother asked me how I got on, I told her that I was HIV positive and she supported me. She told me it was like all the other diseases and I must accept it.

In 2002 I was only getting vitamins and creams. And then in May 2002 we got access to ARV's and I started my treatment. When I went into labour with my baby the clinic gave me Nivaquine. My child is now 4 years old, and she is big! She doesn't have HIV.

I started taking the ARV's again after I'd given birth - seven in the morning, and seven in the evening. The first time they took my CD4 count it was 175; then 275; then 375 and now it is 514! I want to live with the ARV tablets because they help me a lot. I even advised others outside the community to come and get tested so they also can get help. So, I will take the ARV's until I am dead!

Grace Makhabela and Ayanda Mshwane, August 2006



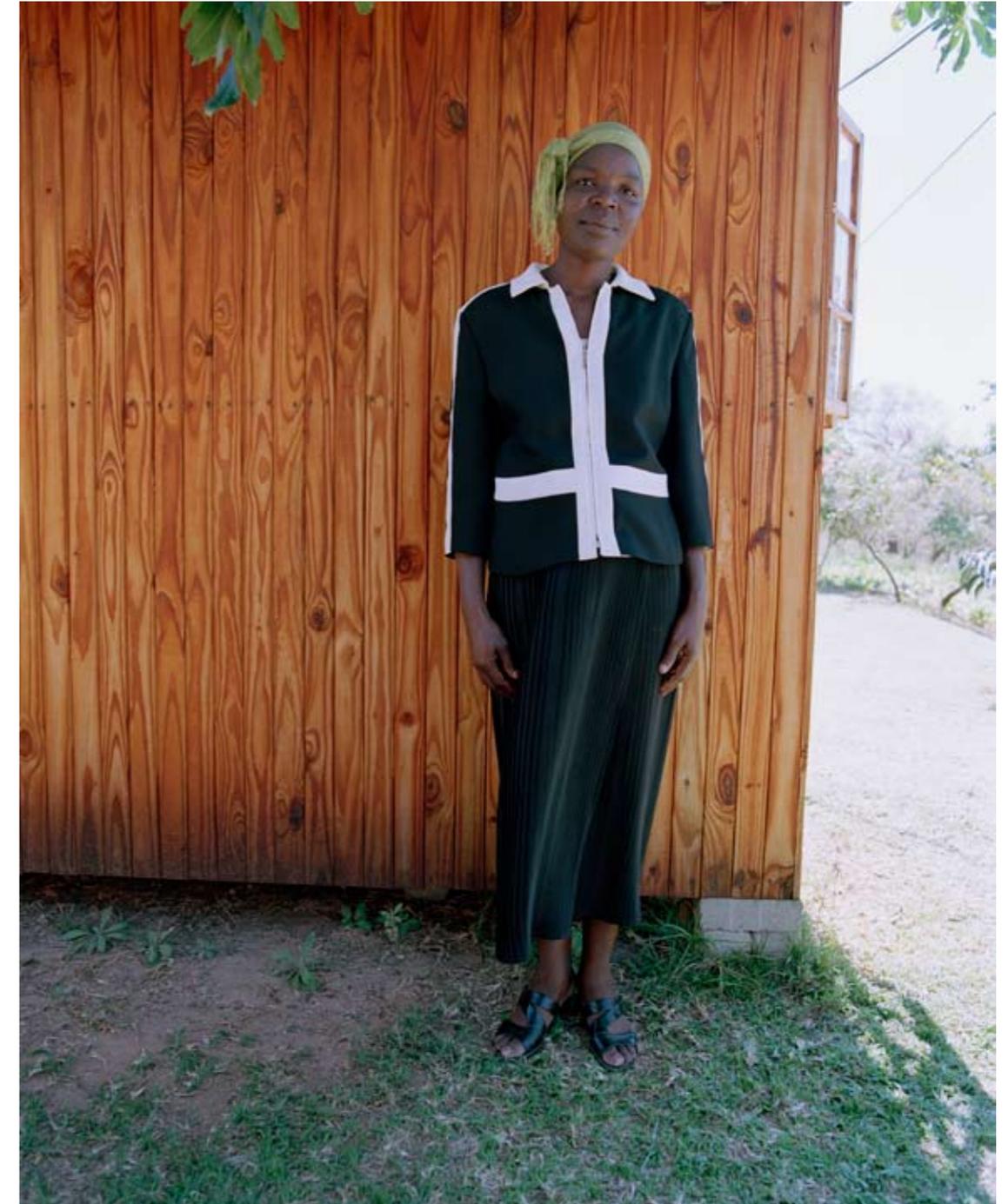
My name is Sibongile. I am married and have four children; 14, 10, 8 and 3 years old. When I fell sick for the first time I thought I was bewitched. I had sores all over my body and when I saw them, I thought really I am bewitched – I thought there was nothing left for me to live for. My family took me to a Sangoma, a traditional healer, who made me pay 250R. He said he could cure my disease. He didn't give me any help, but took a razor and cut me all over my body. And he gave me black medicine to drink and then medicine to clean inside my body. I took the medicine but still my sickness was getting worse. So, I went to another Sangoma. They gave me more medicine to empty out my stomach; I was vomiting and had diarrhoea, I was very sick.

In October 2005 I decided to come to ACTs and got my blood tested. I went home before I could get the results. I was too scared to wait and then I was too scared to come back. In January 2006 my husband suggested that I come back to the doctor; I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep; I couldn't even walk. The doctor checked my results and yes, I was positive. I cried a lot. I went to one of the support groups at the clinic to talk, to try to help me accept the sickness that I have inside of me. Accept it, so I can try to live longer. Then when I went back home. My family asked me what happened. I was crying. When they put food on the table, I was crying. I couldn't even tell them. A few days later, after I had been back to the clinic again, I told my family I was HIV positive. They encouraged me to accept it, and so I did, I decided to accept it.

When I came to the clinic to collect my tablets, I couldn't even swallow them. I kept vomiting. I went back to the doctor and tried some other tablets, and these did stay down. My CD4 count was 14. On the ARV's I have got so much better. I am using a condom every time I have sex. This year in August they tested my CD4 count again and I'm still waiting for the results.

I thank the doctor and God for saving my life. I'd like to tell my friends and brothers outside that the clinic can help them. It is not good to hide yourself if you know your status; it's easier to come out, so you can get help.

Sibongile Mnisis, August 2006



My name is Monica. Last year, in October 2005, my mother-in-law was very sick with TB. I was taking care of her and then I got TB. I just didn't notice, I was getting thinner and thinner and I just didn't think about having an HIV test or anything. My mother works at the hospital and she suggested I should have a test because that could be the cause. I didn't want to get the test; I was putting it off. Then I started to get bad bad cramps in my stomach. I thought it was ulcers and the doctor confirmed that though it was ulcers, they didn't know what was causing the cramps. Then my mother-in-law passed away; I thought again then that I should test. The cramps were getting worse – it felt like there was some big thing right inside my stomach.

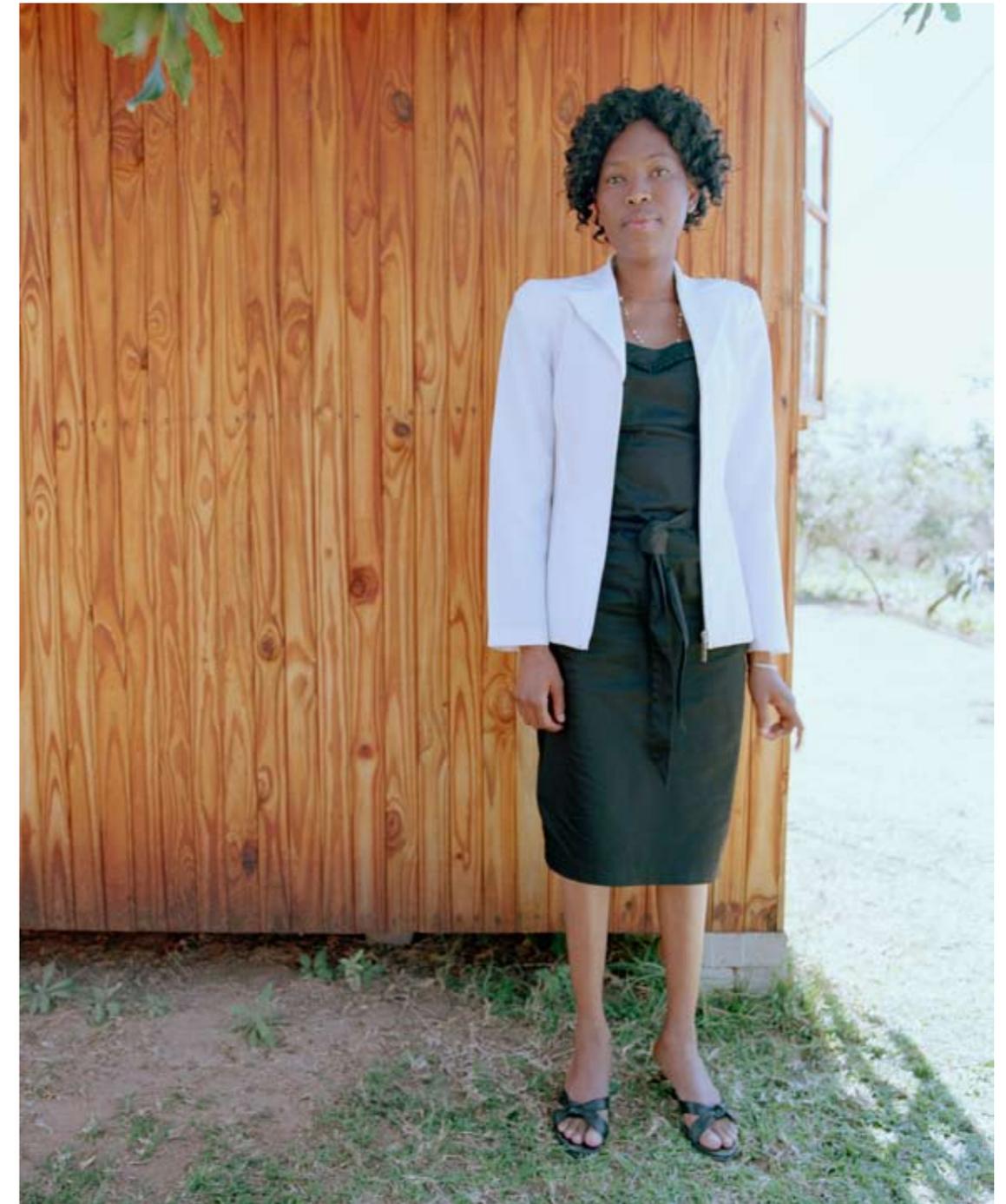
I am from a very supportive family, so my mother counselled me and I came here to the clinic. I just tried to tell myself that even if I am HIV positive, I'll just get on my life and live a positive life. It helps a lot that we talk about HIV openly in my family and within my church. I came to the clinic with my brother. I tested positive. My CD4 count was 178. I also went for a TB diagnoses – I went for four TB x-rays and they were all negative, but I was getting thinner and thinner and sicker. The ARV's did help me feel a little better, but my stomach was still very sore. Eventually on the fifth x-ray they found the TB in my stomach. It was suggested that I didn't take my ARV's for one month whilst I take my TB medicine, the two do not combine well together. But I didn't want to stop taking the ARV's – I was looking forward to getting life too much! I didn't want to die. So, I did take them together. And I was ok; I didn't have any side effects.

Later I got chickenpox all over my body – they were very severe ones. I read pamphlets and books about HIV so I knew that these could be a symptom of HIV. So, I continued with my ARV's properly.

I never had a problem with talking to my husband about being positive. We used to talk about it before, about how we would cope if one of us had HIV. When my husband came here for his first HIV test he was negative and I was surprised. I felt quite angry! But then he tested again and he was negative. We have a daughter who is four years old. She is negative and she is beautiful. She is a good girl! My family are such a good emotional support

I wish there was a way we could reach other people, to let them know. The only thing I've learnt that is necessary to know in life is that life doesn't come easy – everything that you have to face up to is just a challenge in life. You can live if you have a sickness. My father has diabetes and he takes his medicine and he is still strong. So me, I chose to live a positive live. I have a child to look after for a long time so I am happy to have my ARV's. My CD4 count goes up and up - I am healthy and strong, and can live.

Monica Nkosi, August 2006



My husband and I used to talk about HIV and AIDs but he didn't think that we could be positive or anything. He used to say "no, there is no need for us to go and test, maybe some day". But I didn't know, which day was it?

In February 2005 I started to get ill. I had this thing that is so painful like fire, day and night. I went to the clinic and they told me they didn't know what it was! They only gave me ibuprofen, within 4 days this thing was so big and so painful. I didn't know what it was. My husband's aunt took me to the doctor, who diagnosed shingles and gave me medication, but that doctor, he didn't tell me what caused the shingles.

In July that year I went to see my son. He asked "what's going on - you are so thin". He took me aside and told me about HIV and AIDs". He was 13 at the time. I told him "what do you know about HIV and AIDs Salani, more than me?" He said he didn't know more but that at school they had put together an HIV AIDs drama. He'd learned a lot. He told me "mum, I went and got tested and I am negative". "Please" he said "you must go and test because I love you! Even if you are positive, there is life after that. You can live a happy life mum. They will counsel you and give you advice, can you please please do this for me?"

A couple of weeks later I came back here to Mpumalanga. On August 5th I went to the local clinic to get tested. I was positive. Tears came down my cheeks; my heart was so broken. I thought I wasn't going to see my son complete his metric, or see him grow up. I felt so worried. I went back home and to release my anger I wrote my story.

I returned to the clinic to get my CD4 count. Luckily a lady I knew was also there and she asked me what was wrong. I told her about the earache and shingles. And then, can you imagine, she asked me if I had tested! I said "who are you to ask me that!" She said "no, I know, I am HIV positive. I also had shingles once". So I told her, yes I have tested and I am positive. She told me to go to ACTs instead of the local clinic.

My CD4 count was 39. I was so shocked, I thought I was going to die. The counsellors told me I wasn't going to die because they were putting me on ARV's. On the 8th December I started my treatment. A year later I told my son I was HIV positive. He gave me a hug and said "mum I'm proud of you, have taken a stand against AIDs and I'm very proud. You're going to live a healthy normal life. And you must always know mum that I love you".

Now I work at ACTs as a Support Group Facilitator. I am so happy to work here and to be able to help other people who also have the same illness as me, who I understand. They are positive and I am positive. We give courage. Outside we have problems; people are still calling us names. But if we can adhere, hold on and keep taking our tablets, we will live long. Today I am very strong because of the courage I am given. God knows me, and he is on my side.

Nomsa Mambena, March 2007



My name is Nonhlanhla, I work at ACTs clinic as a facilitator. In 2005 I was living with my now ex-husband when he got sick with shingles. I didn't know anything about HIV AIDs but my auntie, who is a Sister at a local clinic, told me that shingles could be one of the symptoms of HIV. She asked me if we'd go with her for an HIV test. My husband and I agreed but told me he was too sick right now, that he would go when he had got better. So, I went to the clinic by myself, without telling him.

My auntie did my test and I was HIV positive. I wasn't sick, but had tested because my ex was sick. Oh I cried. I thought it was the end of the world. I lost hope. The first thing that came to my mind was that I would not be able to have children, and I'm a person who loves children so much! My aunt tried hard to comfort me but it took a long time to get it into my mind, to accept it. The first person I went to see when I got home was my mother. I told her I was positive. And she was so positive about it! She didn't scream or shout or blame me or anything, she just told me "my child, don't cry because everybody has this virus, you are not alone". Because she accepted my situation it helped me calm down.

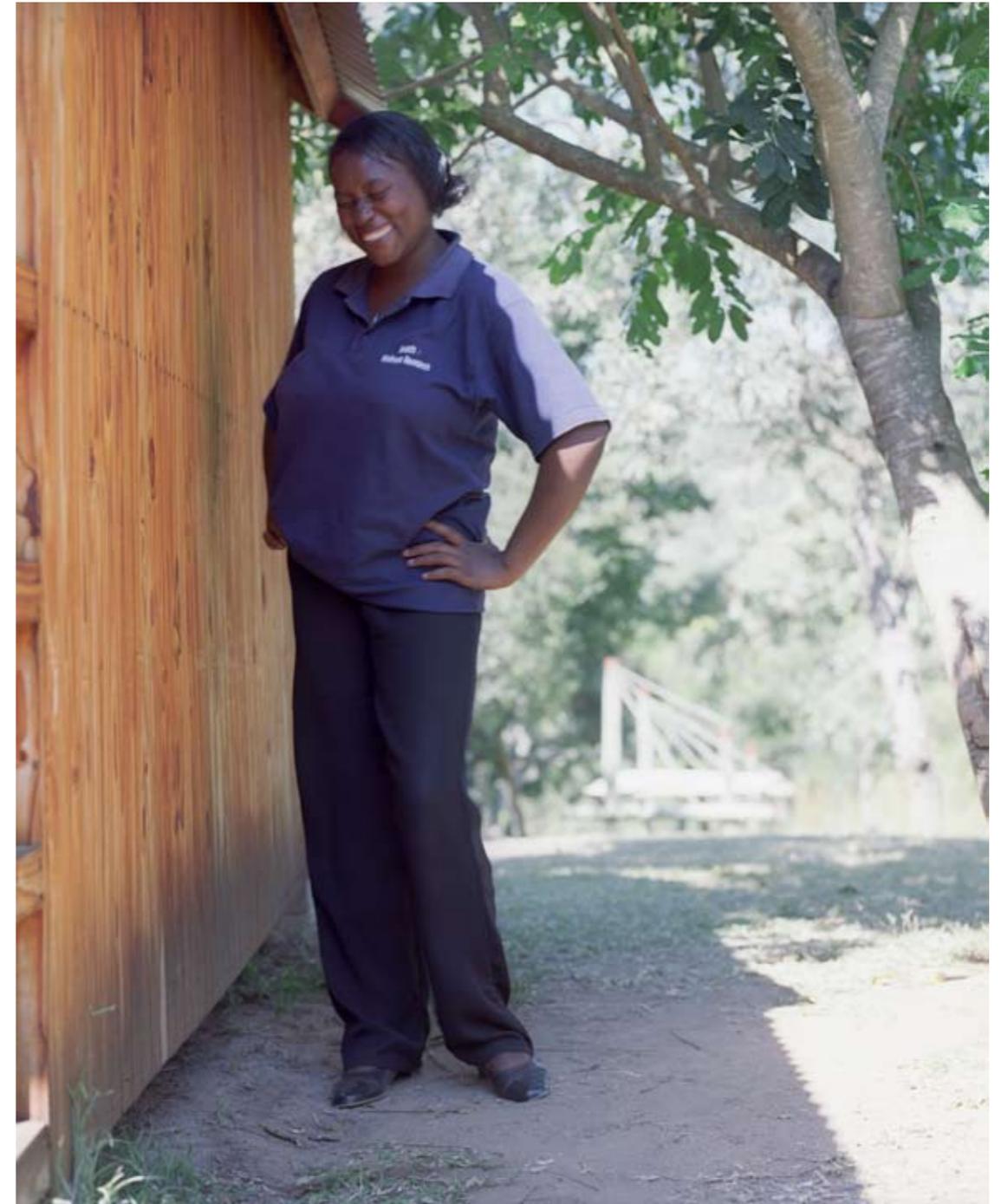
I went home to tell my husband. But when I saw him, just tears came out. I had so many things in my mind, and I had blame. I thought he is the one who gave me this, because, I used to be a good girl actually. Finally I told him what happened. Two days later I went back to get my CD4 count, it was quite high - 339. I came to ACTs and they gave me vitamins and boosters.

I began to think about having a child; that thought was always on my mind, I didn't want to die before having a child. So, in two minds I got pregnant. I was so happy! I didn't have to worry now because I knew how to protect my child from being infected during birth. I started going to the PMTC, the Prevention of Mother to Child support group, and started taking the ARV's that stopped me passing the virus to my child. I got really involved in the clinic and the support groups and asked for lots of help. I came every month and then gave birth to a very beautiful little girl! She is so beautiful; a little fat! She will be turning one on 9 April. After I gave birth they changed me to different ARV's so that I could breast-feed her. While you are pregnant you have to take Nivaquine and for a month after giving birth. Then you change onto different medication.

Right now I am happy. I almost thank God I am HIV positive. I'd completed metric at school in 1997 and since then I'd been unemployed. In 2006 I got a job here as a Facilitator, and I know that I'm going far! I hope someday that I can open a centre for counselling, because in this area people need it. They do not get all the support they are supposed to get and need. I just hope that one day, with Gods love, I will get the money and support from other people so that I can open my own centre.

I decided to leave my husband because we were not getting on well, it was not good. The baby I was carrying was the most important thing in my life, and I decided that my happiness came first! That is the story of my life.

Nonhlanhla Fakude, March 2007



My name is Dorries Lekigau. I became ill and felt weak so I went to Manzini Clinic, the local clinic to me. I was scared at first, but they gave me advice and counselling and then they tested me – my results came and I was HIV positive. It was 2004.

Sometime later the Masoyi home based care discovered me very ill at home and bought me to ACTs where I was admitted into the hospice for two weeks. I started my ARV's in the hospice on the 2nd February 2004. I began to have many painful sores on my body and in my mouth, but they told me that those were expected the side effects. I continued on my ARV's and the sores did eventually go. Another side effect I had was diarrhoea. I came back to the clinic and they could give me something to stop the diarrhoea. It took four months of using the ARV's for my reactions to settle, then I could see a difference in myself and I began to feel very happy.

At home my mother was always criticising me. She was telling me "this AIDs person this and this...". Even my mother. But, I trusted that God would help me. Now my mother has seen that I have fully recovered and she is back to normal – she loves me again as her daughter.

I would like to work here at ACTs clinic, so that I can help others who are ill.

Dorries Lekigau, March 2007



QUALITIES OF A GOOD COUNSELLOR

* LISTENING SKILLS

- * Friendly person
- * Give right information
- * Someone who is confidentiality
- * Comfort feelings
- * Respect
- * Someone who don't give advice
- * Reliable
- * Professional

Counsellor should have

- FRIENDLY
- GOOD LISTENING
- TO KEEP THE PROMISES
- TO BE CONFIDENTIAL
- ~~TO~~ ~~THE~~ good talk not
Argue
- TO GIVE TIME TO TALK
- TO CORRECT THE INFORMATION
- DO NOT TAKE DECISION
- RESPECT.

One in five adults in South Africa is infected with HIV.

HIV is widespread in a sense that can be difficult to imagine for those living in less affected countries.

AIDS deaths are alarmingly common throughout the country, they accounted for a staggering 71% of deaths among those aged between 15 and 49 in 2006. There are 1,500 new cases of HIV every day.

HIV/AIDS not only impacts on the lives of those who are positive, but also on the lives of their families, friends and within the wider communities. One in five people are infected, many more people are affected.

The impact of anti-retroviral drug treatment is astounding.

With ARV's, HIV-positive people can maintain their health and often lead relatively normal lives.

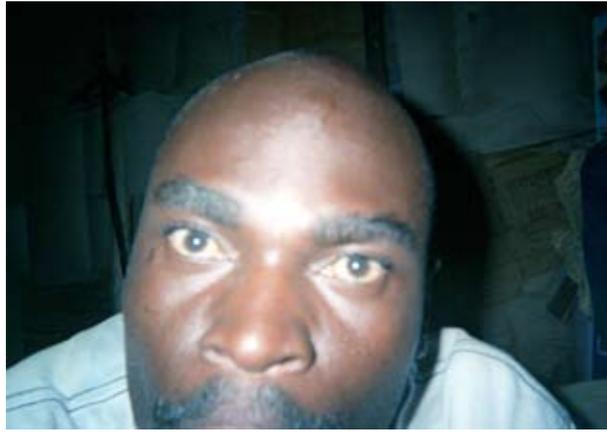
Few people in South Africa have access to this treatment.

Source: Treatment Action Campaign, South Africa









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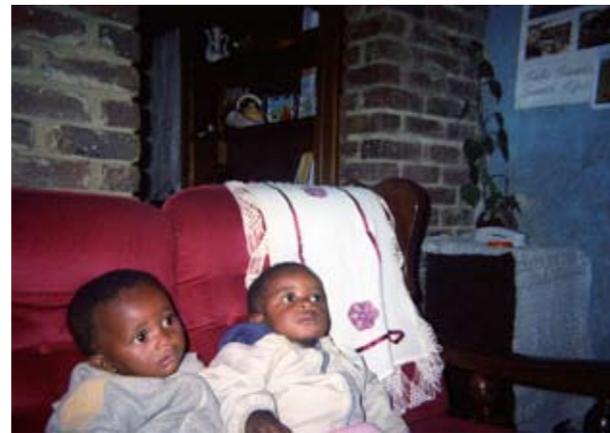
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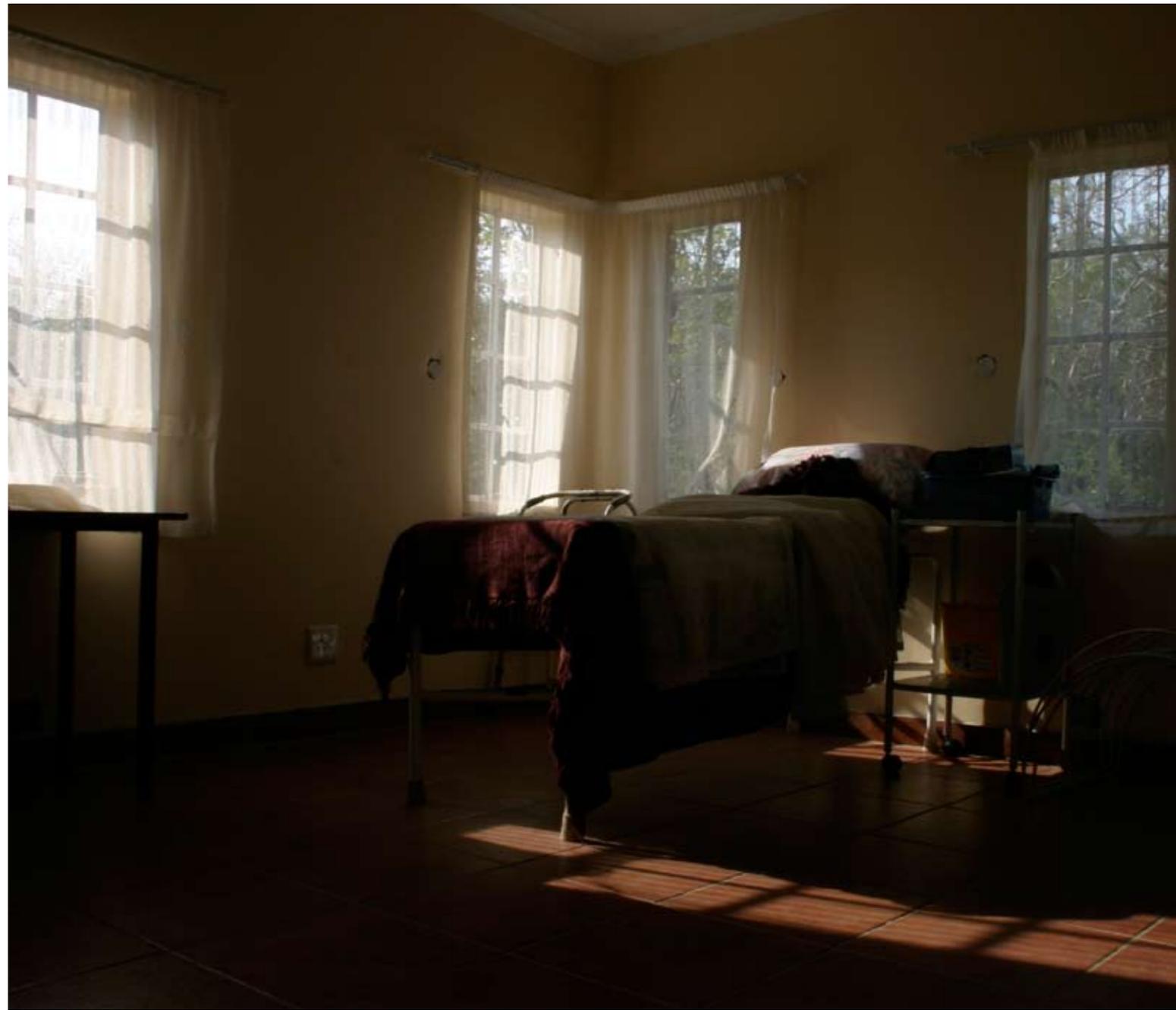


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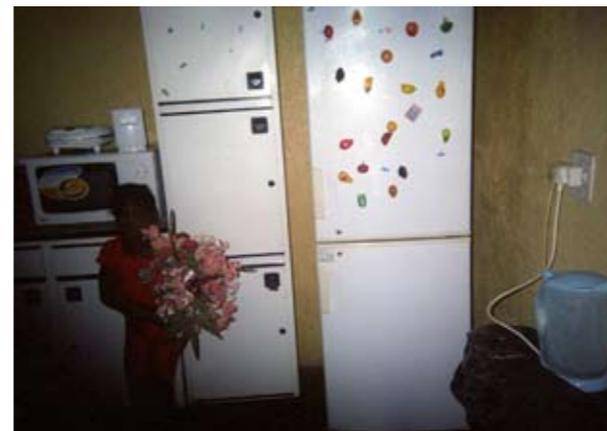




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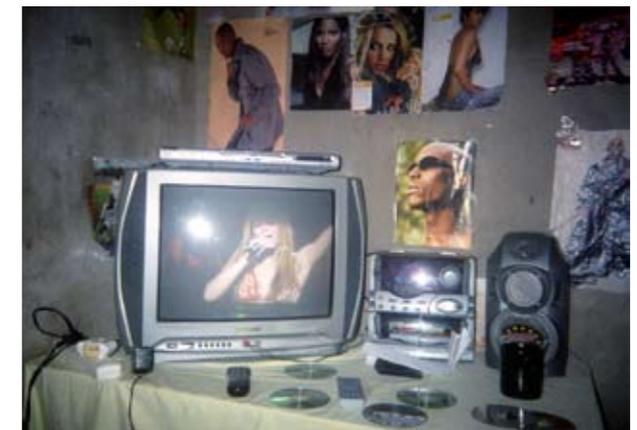
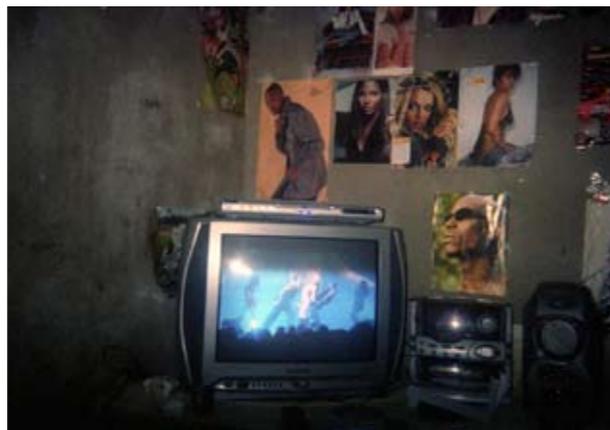




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"A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 1999



ACIS Clinic

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LIBERTY



In 2001 I'd been feeling a little better; I was working as a security guard, in White River. But I became weak again, I lost my job. On February 8th and 20th 2002 I came here, to ACTs clinic. I ended up in another TB hospital and was there for two months, having injections in my side. Then they discharged me and told me to go to a local clinic for the full eight month treatment, which I took.

So by 2003 I was better again and I went to search for a job again. I found one at a security guard at Barberton and I worked there for four months. It was cold there, up in the mountains and I got sick again. I lost my job again. The Masoyi Home Care team found me. I was very weak by then and I was no longer walking by then. The home care team bought me back to the clinic here and I was taken straight to the clinic hospice. I went in and out, in and out of that hospice until Dr Margie decided to start me on ARV's. I hadn't had them before then because my CD4 count was high, but I was still unable to do anything, I was very sick. I took the ARV's for four months and they also started to visit me at home and give me some physio exercises because I still couldn't even stand up from a chair. But with the exercises and the ARV's my muscles started to strengthen and I started to be able to get up a bit. I started the exercises in December 2003 and it was April 2004 that I started to be able to walk again.

Soon after that I started to do some outreach work for the clinic – going to visit people to tell them my story. And then I started to work here in the pharmacy, preparing medicine. I started part-time in March 2006 and I've been employed full-time since August now, I would like to train further.

I met my wife here at the support group. We were staying at my parents but now we have moved and have our own shack. On 15th October last year I had a baby! Elsa was taking the correct medication and our baby is well, she is negative! I am 32.

Jefrey, March 2007



I came to know my status in 2000 in the Government hospital. I was diagnosed with TB so they gave me treatment, which they told me to take for six months. But, I didn't take it for six months; I only took it for one month. I defaulted after feeling a little bit better. It was also a lack of money that caused me to default because when I go there they need money, and I don't have any money, so I ended up not going there anymore.

Anon, March 2007



It was very difficult and uncomfortable to come to the clinic. I was very sick; I couldn't walk and was in a wheelchair. I was in denial; I thought it could maybe be witchcraft or something. But when I came here, I began to feel a little bit of comfort – there were so many people who were infected, and support groups, and everything was so open; I thought I must go on. I felt safe, y'know.

After two years on ARV's I decided to come and train here, and today I am an interpreter. I love to care for people and today, I don't feel sorry for myself for being here. I love working here. It's a good challenge to work here because you hear stories and you know you can counsel those people and encourage them to keep going. ARV's are really working for us. Without them we couldn't do it. It's been a long time.

Edna, March 2007



It began when I lost my child. My child died. And the mother of my child died.

My grandmother is a Sangoma, a traditional healer, and she took me to her friend that she had graduated with when she was training to be a Sangoma. I was getting worse and worse. It got to the point that I did not pass urine, I was constipated and I could not move. I felt great pain, especially in my stomach.

I lived alone in a rural area near Nelspruit so I don't know who told the home care team that I was there, but someone did. I tested, and they told me I was positive. It was so difficult to accept. My grandmother was still with me, at me all the time telling me to not take the drugs they gave me. But I took the drug, and I got a little bit better. I was becoming healthy. My mother came to pay a visit to me – she was the only one who stressed that I should take the ARV's. When she left she said she was going to prepare my funeral, an expensive funeral for me. She assumed I was dying. I felt so much pain, so much pain that my parents had given up on me, had rejected me. My father expelled me because of my circumstance.

I cope today with the help of people around me. I am getting better, but I am so scared to live without my mother; without my mother next to me. Every child is crying for their mother. I am still alone, but I am supported a lot by the clinic and by my church. My story encourages other people, because they see me recovering on my own. I can cope with taking the drugs and try to eat well and exercise. I do the exercises that were given to me by my physiotherapist. I am trying to walk, and I can a little. But it is difficult, it is very painful because my spine is somehow damaged, but I am trying. We are trying to raise the money to get to Johannesburg to get the scan that I need to find out what is wrong with my back.

I dedicated my life to Christ in order to be out of all of this. That is why I am happy. Some of us, we tend to be a joke to other people. Most people do not understand. They do not know the difference between HIV and AIDs. They don't know what you must do if someone has HIV. Some they don't want even to shake hands with them, or hug – they think they will be infected. They just lack information, that is why they die.

I'm so glad I can be a different example. What I say comes from my heart always. I'm glad my testimony may help people to choose to force themselves to go and test. People die because they don't know. Some believe they are bewitched. Some, they believe it is stress that has become a physical trauma. But it isn't. It is HIV.

Some just run away. They deny it. So when we talk the truth, the truth will let them live free.

Anon, March 2006



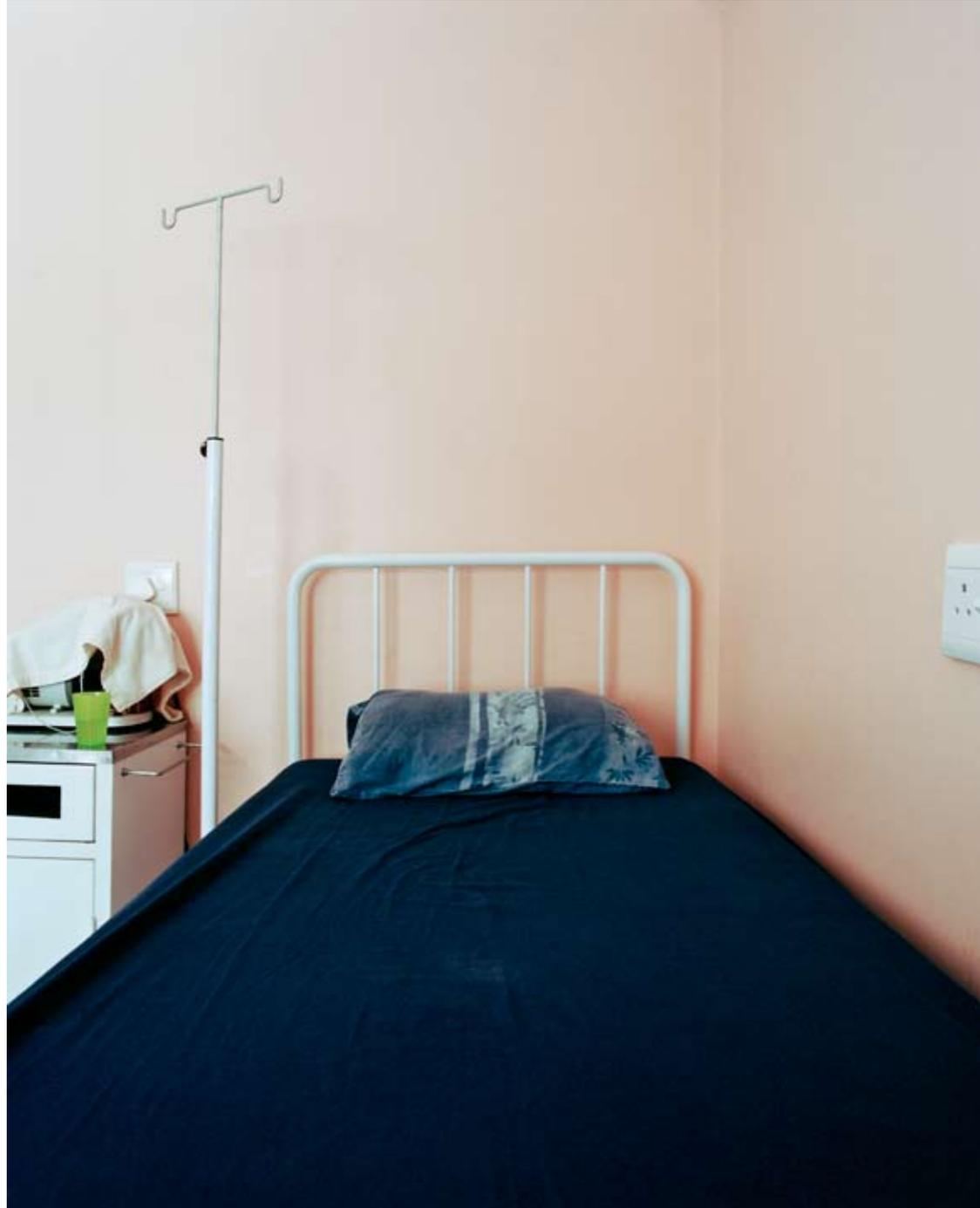
The problem is our people have a problem - if they know your status they will discriminate against you, even though it is illegal, it is a crime. It is changing a little – people now bring their children and friends. People used to come by themselves and ask please do not tell so and so, or so and so. There are still some people who are scared to come to the clinic because they know members of the staff and they are ashamed. People who I tell I am positive they often do not believe me – they think that those with HIV cannot talk because they are too sick.

Edna Hlatshwayo, March 2007



Sometimes you sit in a room alone saying 'I am infected and I am going to die, and when you think of dying you think of a coffin, and when you think of a coffin you think of yourself, you imagine yourself being inside the coffin and the coffin is closed, and you think while you are still breathing, you imagine how am I going to breathe inside the coffin?'

Anon, September 2006



I started getting ill in 2004; I was not aware what was wrong with me. I went to the hospital because I was coughing a lot. They gave me an x-ray and the results told me my left lung was full of water. My lung was drained the same day and I was admitted for 5 days. They suspected TB so they took a sputum test but the results were negative, so they discharged me.

I stayed at home for ten days but I was not getting any better. I went back to the hospital and the doctor decided to give me TB treatment for 8 months anyway, even though my results had been negative. After completing the treatment I stayed well for two months, but then I started getting ill again so I went back to the hospital. They said I had pneumonia and I stayed in the hospital for ten days without any treatment. Then I was sent to the Pretoria Academic hospital where they told me I had a heart problem and they transferred me back to Robs, the local hospital. Dr Fentra, my doctor at Robs sent me to ACTs Clinic.

I had my CD4 count tested and was sent to the hospice for seven days. After a month I was given a blood test, I was positive. I was told I must begin my treatment immediately; straight away I started to gain weight and I started to get better. Now I am focusing on the future – if it were not for this clinic I was going to die.

Anon, March 2006



Maybe God one day will just come down and help us.

Jerry, August 2006















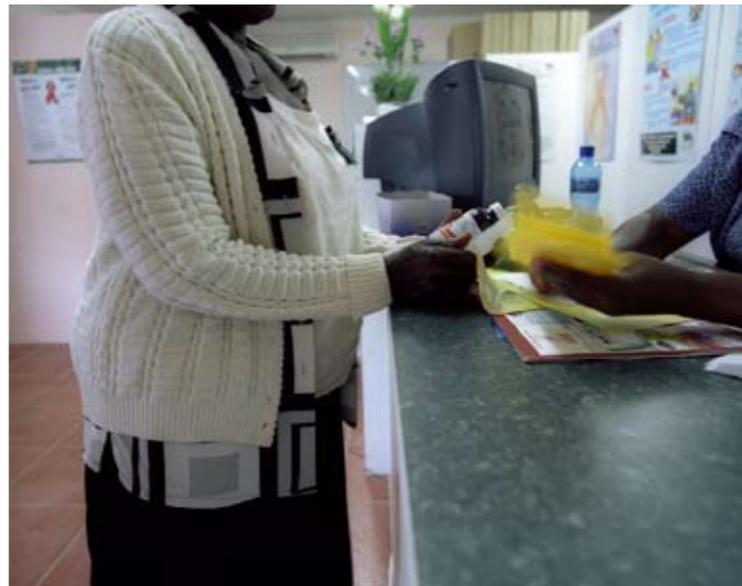
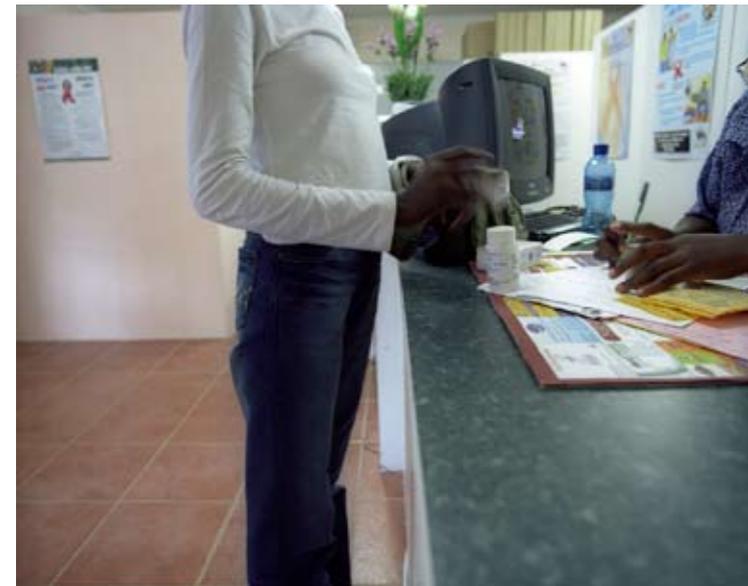
Opportunistic infections included in the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention's definition of AIDS:-

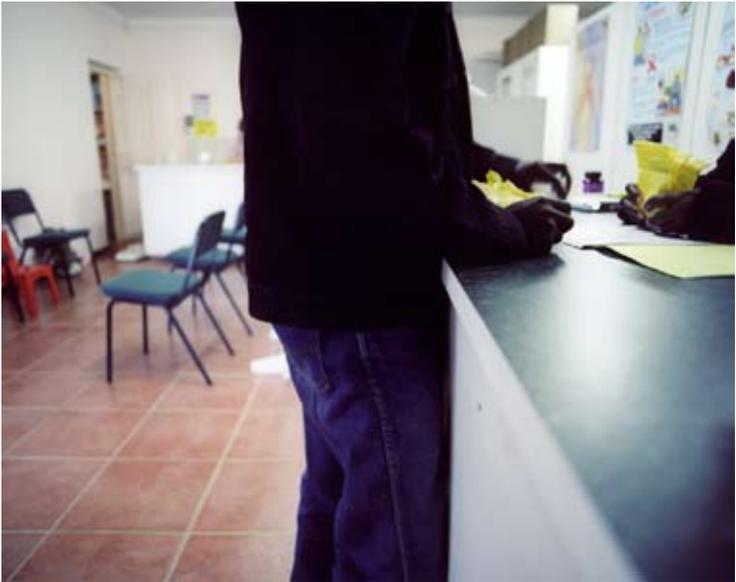
- Bacterial infections
- Candidiasis of the esophagus, trachea, bronchi, or lungs
- Coccidioidomycosis
- Cryptococcosis
- Cryptosporidiosis
- Cytomegalovirus disease
- Herpes simplex virus infection
- Histoplasmosis
- HIV encephalopathy (AIDS Dementia)
- HIV wasting syndrome
- Invasive cervical cancer
- Isoporiasis
- Kaposi's Sarcoma
- Lymphoid interstitial pneumonia/pulmonary lymphoid hyperplasia
- Mycobacterium Avium Intracellulare
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia
- Primary lymphoma of the brain
- Progressive Multifocal Leukoencephalopathy
- Pulmonary tuberculosis
- Recurrent bacterial pneumonia
- Salmonella septicemia
- Toxoplasmosis of the brain
- Tuberculosis

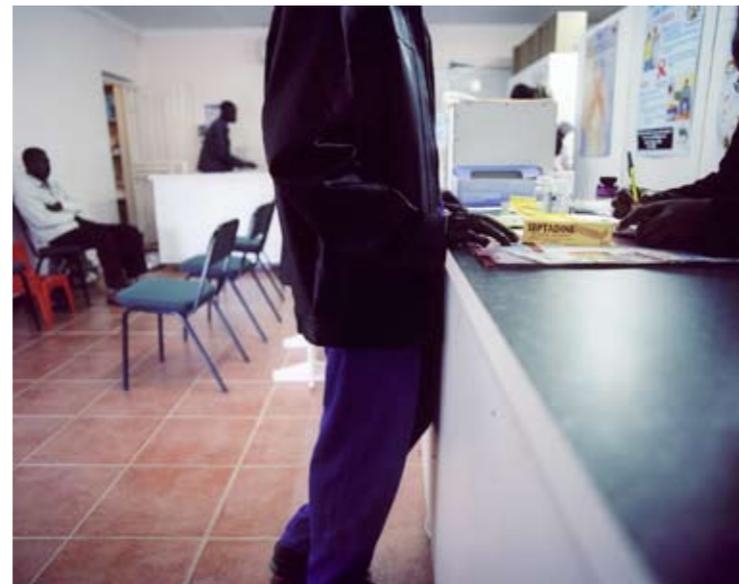
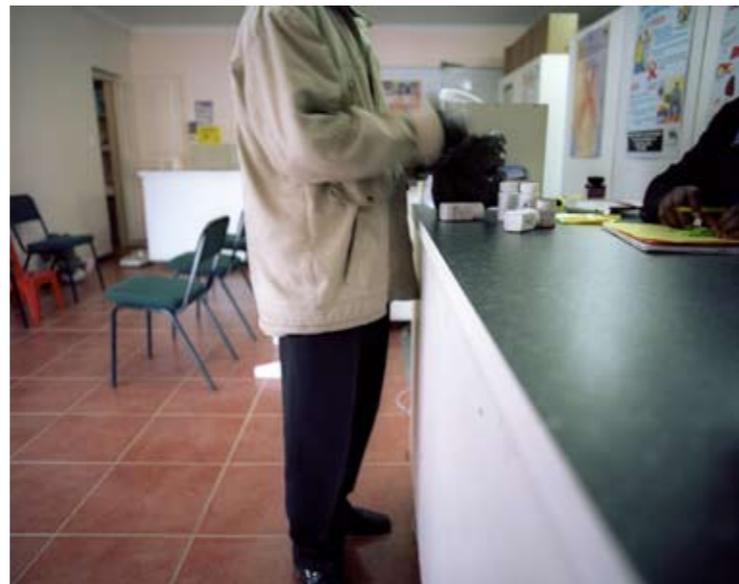
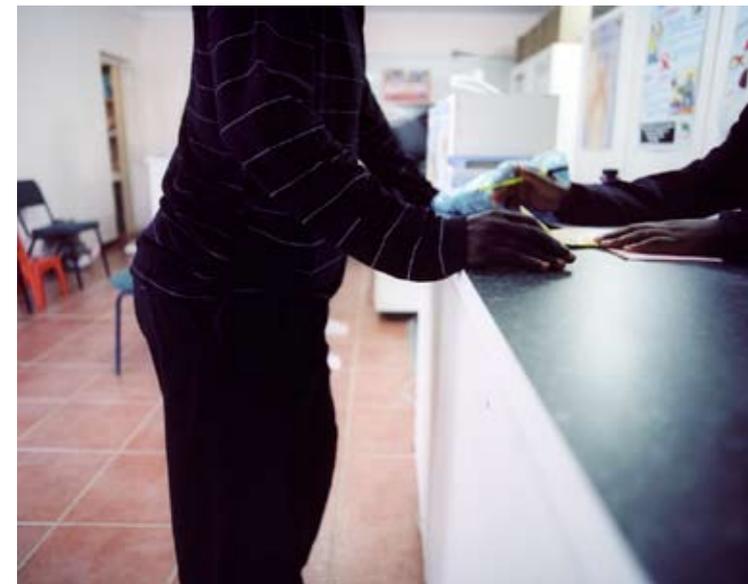
Source: Treatment Action Campaign, South Africa























Martha Khoza Alanda Emmerencia Mashego Victoria Pretty Mkosi



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Alfred Agnes Phahlane Precious Senlaw Phumzile Mrui-Mbeia

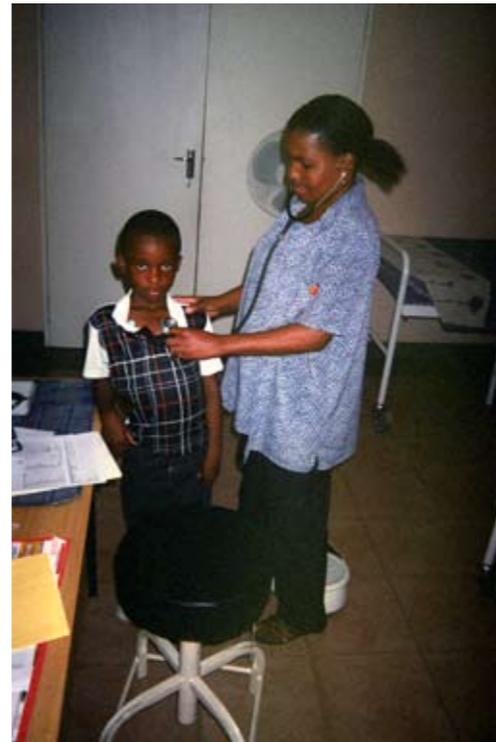
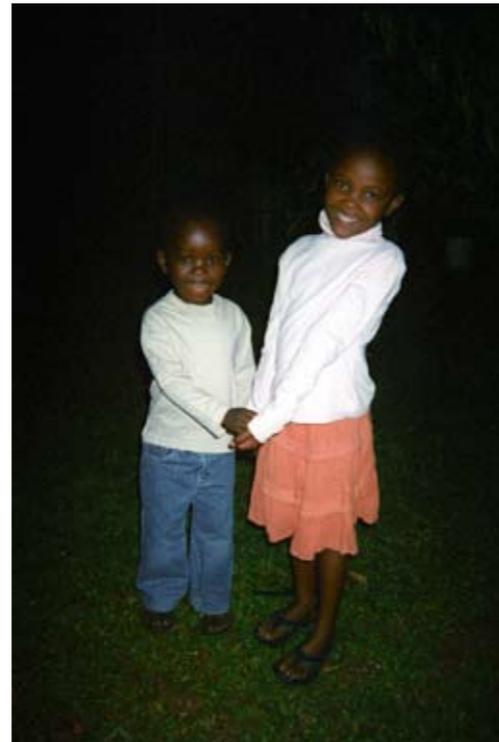
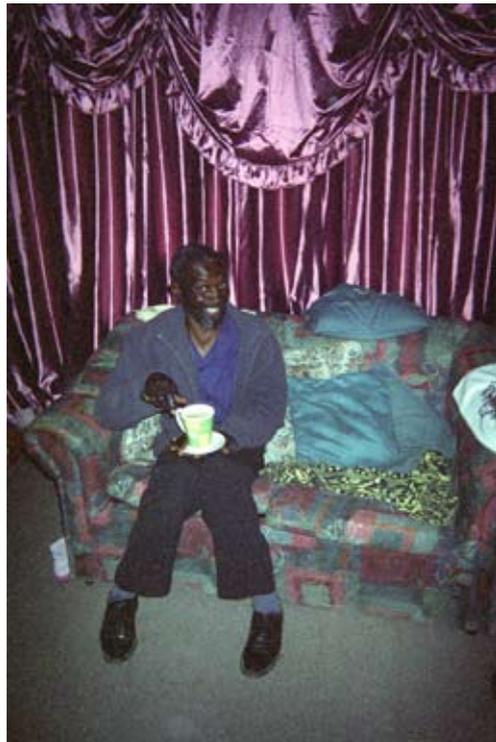


Mercia Ngobeni Poppy Sithole Wisdom Mpikheleli Tshabalala Promise

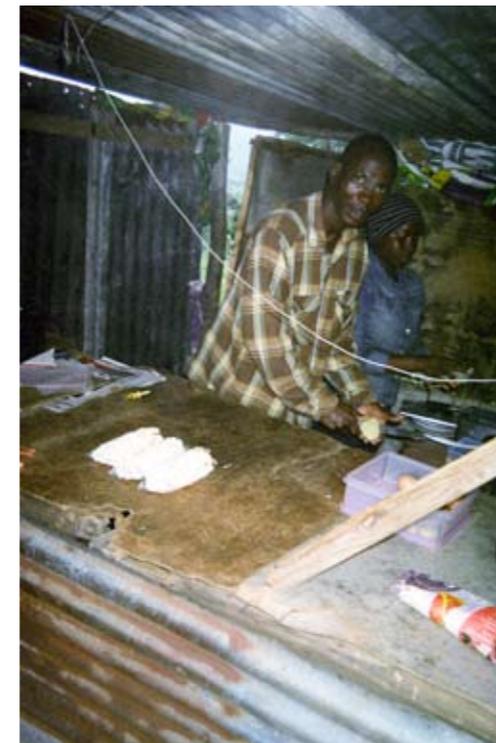


Monica Nkosi Poppy Sithole Alanda Victoria Pretty Mkosi





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Martha Khoza Alanda Emmerencia Mashego Victoria Pretty Mkosi



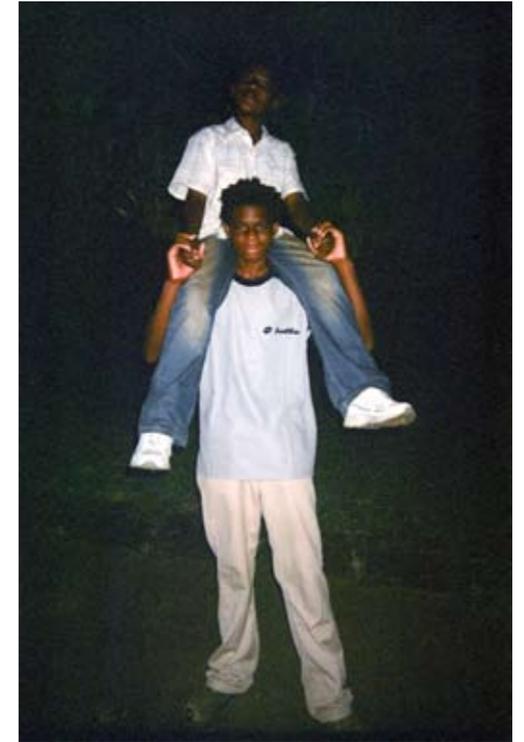
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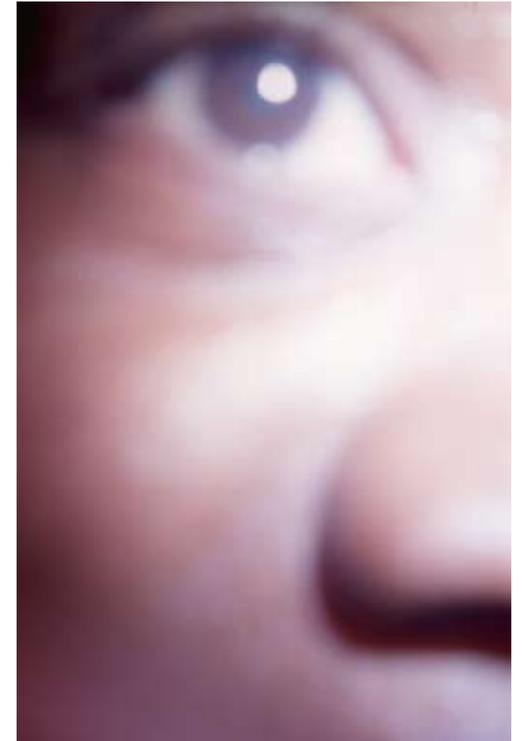
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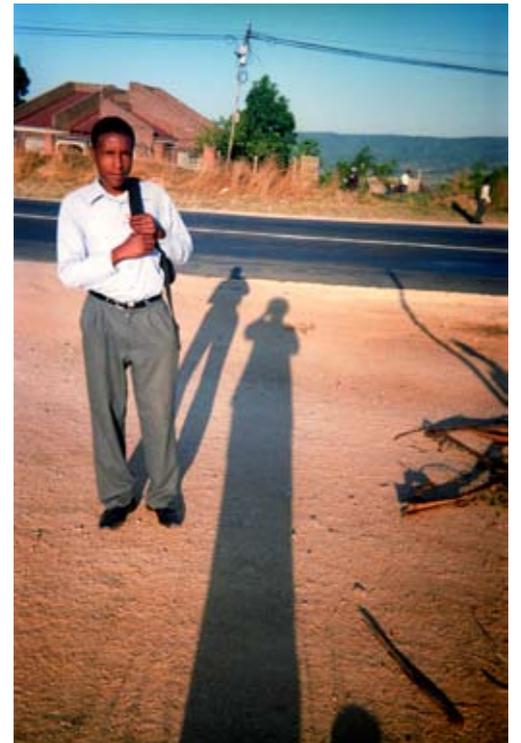
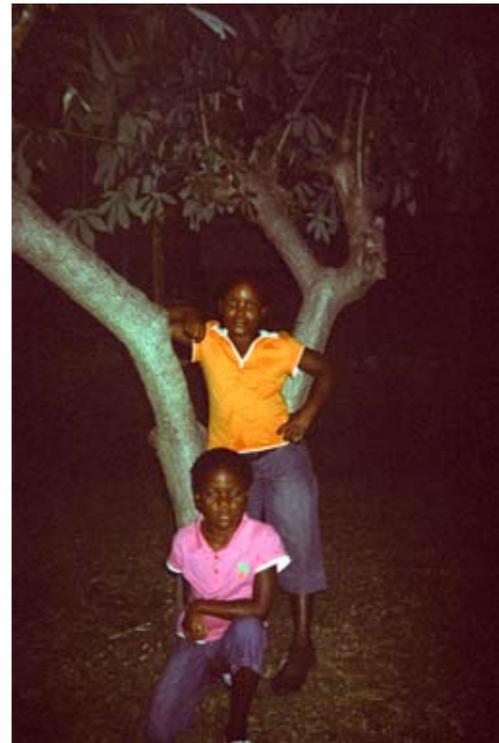


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A traveller through our country would stop at a village, and he didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu but it'll have various aspects. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not enrich themselves. The question therefore is: Are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to improve?

Nelson Mandela, date unknown









Ubuntu, pronounced /ùbùntù/, is a sub-Saharan African ethic, or humanist ideology, focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other. The word has its origin in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa. Ubuntu is seen as a traditional African concept. The single word - ubuntu - has no direct english equivalent.

One definition in english can be taken from the longer Zulu and Xhosa descriptions of ubuntu - 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' in Zulu; 'Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu' in Xhosa. These description were translated by Van der Merwe in 1996 as 'to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form'.

Or put simply 'a person is a person through other persons'.

"You know when ubuntu is there, and it is obvious when it is absent. It has to do with what it means to be truly human, to know that you are bound up with others in the bundle of life."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 2004



ACTs (AIDs Care and Treatment), a Christian-based organisation, is a community clinic in Mpumalanga in the north east of South Africa, established by Dr Margie Hardman and Rev Harry Munnings in 2001. The clinic developed out of the already existent Masoyi Home-Based Carers, a group of local volunteers who were caring for people from within their own community in the Masoyi Tribal Area.

At the time that ACTs Clinic was set up access to anti-retroviral treatments (ARV's) was either non-existent or unaffordable, so the clinic could only offer people palliative care, support and pain relief. It was a small local clinic with five staff that became very effective at what it did and began to build a trusted reputation within the community.

In 2003 ACTs gained access to ARV's. This saw a new dawn in the treatment of people who came to the clinic. The number of death certificates being signed reduced from about two a day to two a month. The effect of ARV treatment is astounding – it can enable a person with HIV to maintain, and often improve, their health and to return to a relatively normal, healthy life for many years. ACTs Clinic now has almost 1,000 patients on ARV treatment and a staff of 100, the majority of whom are recruited from within the clinics peer support groups. These groups are one of the clinics huge strengths, providing an environment of self-help, encouragement, acceptance and strength within a self-sufficient setting.

ARV's are only one part of a holistic programme for effectively treating HIV AIDs, but they are a miraculous and utterly essential part. With ARV's people live when without they would die. With ARV's the numbers of children orphaned is reduced. With ARV's HIV-positive mothers can give birth to babies who are not infected.

Many of the most effective ARV treatments that are available in the world are either not yet registered in South Africa, or are being sold at an unaffordable cost. The waiting list for treatment for many people is over a year. ACTs clinic proves that this need not be the case.

Photography by Annie Mitchell and staff at ACTs Clinic
Text edited by Annie Mitchell
Designed by Annie Mitchell

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Printed and bound by Screaming Colour, London

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