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SOUTH AFRICA

FIRST PERSON “Changing Stars” for Himself and Others

Determination sustains peer educator as he supports his family



Photo: USAID/South Africa/Revenie Zurba

Amid tragic losses, Nkonzo is proud of his family and encourages others to be positive role models in their families.

“They say a man can change his stars through the help of God. I will be a star for Mzwakhe,” said Nkonzo, a peer educator in South Africa.

Nkonzo is a young South African man who understands what it truly takes to support and love his family.

He once lived in a happy home with his parents, sisters and brothers. His father would come home smiling with gifts for everyone, and would spend time with the family. Sadly, now ruled by alcohol, he is no longer the father he once was.

When Nkonzo was 16, his mother passed away after giving birth to his youngest brother, Mzwakhe. His oldest stepbrother was the family’s breadwinner until he was fatally shot at the bakery where he worked.

Nkonzo then became the family’s source of income. He earned money by doing ‘izikorobho’, the Xhosa term for painting and tiling. He was determined to be there for Mzwakhe. Today, Nkonzo supports his entire family by planning ahead to pay for their rent, food and services, and helps his older sister adjust to being HIV positive.

Five years ago, Nkonzo attended a workshop called “Men As Partners” supported by USAID and funded by the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Through the program, he became a peer educator focusing on gender roles. The workshop helps men trust others enough to open up. Nkonzo knows that men have the choice of stopping and preventing domestic violence. He believes that all people should be given an equal chance, and helps fellow South Africans learn why it is important to treat women with respect. At his church, he has started a youth group to discuss AIDS. Although not everyone is willing to listen, he does not give up.

Nkonzo speaks out to all fathers to be positive role models for their children, and especially their sons. Fathers are their spirit, hope and aspiration, he said. Today, Mzwakhe looks up to Nkonzo as a father figure. Nkonzo said, “They say a man can change his stars through the help of God. I will be a star for Mzwakhe.”