



U.S. Agency for
International
Development

Bureau for
Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

New Hope with New Start

NEW START BEGAN AS AN experiment in marketing of voluntary counseling and testing services in Zimbabwe and has grown in three years to be the second-largest effort of its kind on the African continent. In Zimbabwe between one-fourth and one-third of all sexually active people are HIV positive, and more than 1,500 people die every week from AIDS-related causes. New Start was initiated in 1999 as a response to this crisis by the Zimbabwean Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, Population Services International (PSI), and Family Health International, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Since launching the first center, New Start has expanded into a network of 14 centers throughout Zimbabwe. The average number of people visiting these centers to learn their HIV status and receive counseling increased from 230 a month in 1999 to more than 5,000 a month in 2002.

Most New Start voluntary counseling and testing centers are integrated into existing health service-delivery institutions, such as public clinics and hospitals, nongovernmental organizations, and private health facilities. Services are marketed to specific high-risk groups—young couples, adolescents, commercial sex workers, transport industry workers, and other mobile populations.

The New Start network places strong emphasis on the quality of counseling and testing services. All counselors are trained in nationally established protocols and procedures to provide on-site, state-of-the-art rapid HIV testing. The testing is combined with pre- and post-test counseling sessions that motivate behavior change to prevent the spread of HIV infection. Referrals are also provided to community support groups. Importantly, client services are both confidential and anonymous. By establishing the centers in high-traffic areas or at institutions that already provide health-related services, the New Start network helps reduce the uneasiness many voluntary counseling and testing clients feel because of the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS.

At the heart of the success of the New Start program lies the implementation of strategic and culturally sensitive multimedia communication campaigns. These campaigns both educate and persuade, and are based on an in-depth understanding of the barriers and potential 'triggers' associated with sensitive AIDS issues. Great care is taken to understand the target consumers and to design messages that are empowering and not based on scare tactics. Messages reach target groups via radio, television, newspapers, and other print materials, including a postage stamp.

The success of New Start shows that more and more Zimbabweans are choosing to know their HIV status. The success of the New Start model of voluntary counseling and testing in Zimbabwe has inspired similar activities in other countries.

Zimbabwe, May 2003



The postal service of Zimbabwe has celebrated the New Start project by issuing a postage stamp in its honor. This stamp reflects the success and value of the voluntary HIV testing and counseling services to Zimbabwean society.

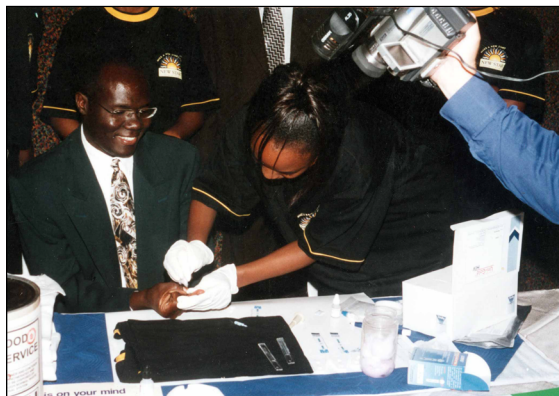


Photo courtesy of PSI

Dr. Patrick Osewe of USAID/Zimbabwe has blood drawn to help demonstrate new technology for rapid HIV-testing services used at the New Start voluntary counseling and testing centers.

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