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**SOUTH AFRICA**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Zama Goes to School Positively

**A mentoring program helps a shy schoolgirl live with HIV/AIDS**

A 10-year-old South African schoolgirl, Zama confronts her tough life with a shy smile. The child faces education and health challenges courageously, thanks to loving care and constant support from her mentor, Thoko Goba.



Photo: USAID/Reverie Zurba

Zama, right, and her mentor Thoko meet each day after school in Gauteng Province.

***“Thoko is like my mother, my sister. She helps me a lot and I learn from her,” says 10-year-old Zama, who is living positively with HIV/AIDS. In collaboration with the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, USAID helps children like Zama live a happy, fulfilling life.***

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USAID makes the mentorship possible for Zama and nearly 1,500 South African girls. The mentoring program is making a big difference in the lives of girls like Zama.

Zama and Thoko both live with HIV, but they’re doing it with a positive attitude. Zama is learning how to take her anti-retroviral medication twice a day with Thoko’s help. Thoko models the importance of taking the right amount of medicine on time as she completes her own treatment for TB.

Like all mentors in the program, Thoko went through intensive training to become an effective counselor, role model, and big sister. Zama’s face lights up when she sees

Thoko every day after school. She eagerly shows Thoko her homework, and then begins her academic coaching and tutoring sessions. Math is especially hard, because Zama got a late start at school since she was frequently sick. Patient coaching from Thoko is paying off as Zama progresses through her lessons. “English is my favorite subject,” explains Zama, “because the language is used throughout the world.”

The little girl chooses her words carefully and says in English, “I want to be a doctor when I grow up, because I have been sick often and know many people who are sick. I want to help them.” Then in her native language, Zulu, she says, “Thoko is like my mother, my sister. She helps me a lot and I learn from her.”

Thoko’s mentoring goes beyond schoolbooks, medical discipline, and HIV/AIDS education. She also teaches Zama other activities that are useful every day, like gardening, sewing, and cooking. “I especially like preparing spaghetti,” she smiles.