

## **A Beacon of Hope: Sandzisile's Journey Against HIV/AIDS**

In the heart of Eswatini, where the sun dipped into the horizon and painted the sky with hues of crimson and gold, Sandzisile Vilakati's story unfolded like a testament to the human spirit. A mother of a 2-year-old boy, Sandzisile embodied the essence of resilience in the face of adversity. When she enrolled in the Bosco Skills Centre to study Motor Mechanics, she felt a spark of determination ignite within her. The rumble of engines, the smell of grease, and the thrill of fixing something broken resonated deeply with her.

The Stepping Stones sessions at the Halt Project, supported by World Vision Eswatini, became her sanctuary. With every session, Sandzisile's confidence grew, and she began to see herself in a new light. She learned about HIV prevention, family planning, and self-worth, and discovered the importance of safe sex practices, regular testing, and destigmatizing HIV/AIDS in her community. The words of her facilitator, "Knowledge is power, but it's the application that brings change," became her mantra. As Sandzisile progressed in her studies, she felt an overwhelming sense of purpose. She began to share her newfound knowledge with others, becoming a source of support and guidance for her community. Her colleagues at the Bosco Skills Centre looked up to her, and the vendors in the market sought her advice. With each conversation, Sandzisile felt her voice growing stronger, her message clearer.

The Halt Project and World Vision Eswatini played a vital role in Sandzisile's journey, providing her with the tools and support she needed to succeed. Their community-based services catered to her specific needs, and their proximity to the community enabled them to deliver targeted interventions and support. Sandzisile felt seen, heard, and valued.

Today, Sandzisile is a shining example of determination and perseverance. Her story serves as a testament to the impact of proper HIV education and the ripple effect it can have in breaking myths, encouraging early diagnosis, and reducing HIV transmission. As she looks to the future, Sandzisile knows that she is not just building a better life for herself and her son but also paving the way for others to follow.

### ***A Brighter Future***

According to UNAIDS, Eswatini has made significant progress in reducing new HIV infections, with a decline of 72% since 2010 (UNAIDS, 2022a). The country has also achieved the 95-95-95 treatment targets, with a high percentage of people living with HIV on treatment (UNAIDS, 2022b). World Vision Eswatini's efforts, including the Stepping Stones program, have played a vital role in this progress. As Sandzisile continues her journey, she is a beacon of hope for a brighter future, where HIV/AIDS is no longer a barrier to living a healthy and fulfilling life.

### **References:**

- UNAIDS. (2022a). Eswatini: HIV/AIDS Fact Sheet.
- UNAIDS. (2022b). Global Report: UNAIDS Data 2022.