

Local networking in action

by Isabel Carter

1



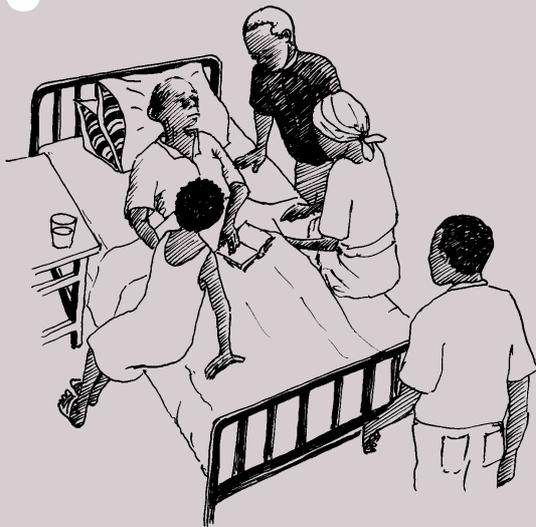
When Joseph received the results of an HIV test and was told it was positive, he was very shocked. It was so unfair. He'd tried to be faithful to his wife, but just once or twice he'd been led astray by his friends. What would his family think? What would his friends say? How would his parents cope with their disappointment? He felt very alone. There seemed no point in living. He might as well die now...

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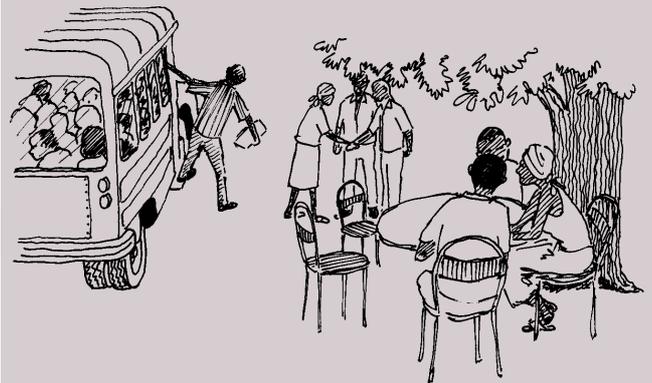
The health worker who had given him the results visited him a week later and encouraged him to start by telling his family. How could he cope with their anger? Had he already infected his wife? Finally he realised his silence, ill-health and unhappiness had to be explained and he told them the truth.

8



Several years later, Joseph became too ill to leave their home. His church and friends supported him and Sabina, bringing food, visiting and helping with caring for him. Because of the network of family, church and groups, he died peacefully, knowing that others would try to help his family through the difficult years ahead.

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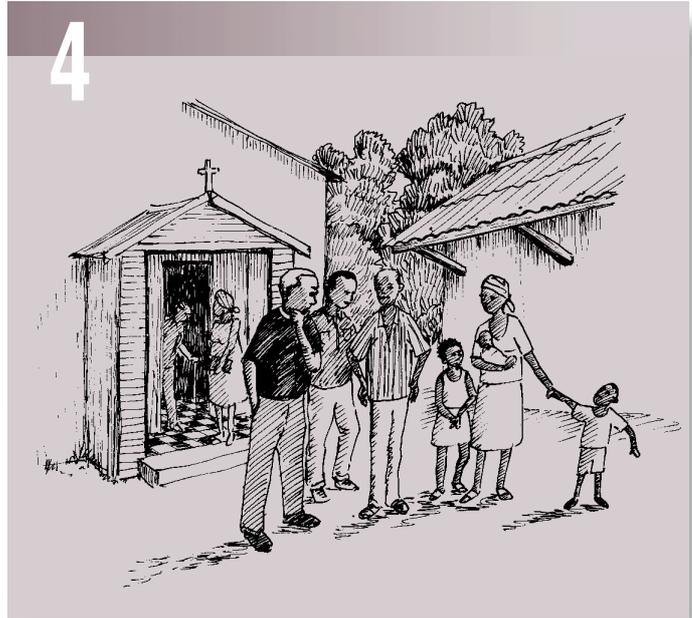
Group members supported each other through the difficult times. Despite increasing tiredness and ill-health, Joseph found his life was useful and busy and that he had gained friends who really cared about him and Sabina. They visited other community groups in the district to share their ideas and experiences, and a network of similar organisations developed.

3



His wife Sabina was initially angry and disappointed. But she had long suspected the truth. His children had learned about HIV/AIDS at school and in church and knew other people with HIV or AIDS in the community. 'We can't change things now, we must rely on God to help us through this' said Sabina. Their acceptance helped to give Joseph back some purpose in life. He began eating properly and showing interest in the children's activities.

4



Sabina encouraged Joseph to talk with their pastor. When he found the courage to do this, the pastor was able to put him in touch with others in the congregation who were also HIV-infected. Joseph found that many others were in a similar situation.

6



A year later, Joseph was elected Vice Chairman of the group. Together with the secretary, they visited organisations in the nearby town to find support for a craft-producing enterprise the group hoped to establish to support members and their families.

5



He joined a support group in the community. Some members were HIV-infected; others were people who wanted to support those with HIV and AIDS. They met weekly and shared problems and together worked out solutions. Joseph made new friends and gained good advice on coping with HIV, how to keep healthy, how to fight infections and other ways of making money when he could no longer continue his work as a builder.