



## SUCCESS STORY

# Giving Birth to New Hope

**Through education and empowerment, mothers-2-mothers prevents infant HIV infection**



*A nurse takes dried blood spot samples from an infant to test for HIV in a maternal and child health ward in a Malawi clinic.*

USAID

Each year, with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) support, mothers-2-mothers (m2m) helps more than 150,000 HIV-positive women in seven countries protect their own health and ensure HIV-free survival for their infants.

In South Africa, HIV is often thought of as a death sentence. Nozandulela “Nozi” recalls how she felt when she tested positive for HIV: “It was like someone put a stop to my life.” She was six months pregnant with her first baby.

In clinics and hospitals across South Africa, one quarter of pregnant women test positive. Often they get a short consultation by medical staff and leave with instructions to return at the end of pregnancy for a single dose of antiretroviral drugs. Overwhelmed and overworked, doctors and nurses lack the resources or capacity to provide further information that can offer hope to the women, keep them healthy, and prevent transmission of the virus to their babies. Many women lose hope and do not return for care.

Fortunately, Nozi, had somewhere to turn. On her day of diagnosis, her counselor told her about m2m, an organization supported by USAID through the New Partners’ Initiative, a program of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. m2m provides emotional and social aid to HIV-infected pregnant and postpartum women. Staffed by HIV-positive women who were once in Nozi’s situation, m2m uses education and empowerment to prevent mother-to-child transmission, combat stigma, support adherence to medical treatment, and reduce the likelihood of orphanhood. Nozi joined m2m’s support group, listened to other women tell their stories, and realized that she did not have to live in fear or hide her HIV status. She could make positive decisions to improve her life and protect her baby.

After giving birth to a healthy HIV-negative baby, Nozi told her own story to new women in the support group and began counseling others. Soon, she became a Mentor Mother, a paid m2m employee who provides guidance and support to newly tested HIV-positive women and new mothers. She now manages a team of Mentor Mothers and oversees day-to-day operation of her site.