



SUCCESS STORY

HIV-Positive Mother Helps Her Family Stay Healthy

A woman links her family to coordinated HIV/AIDS services.



Grace Abalo and her two children with Dr. Alex Muhereza, NUMAT District Medical Officer (right), Sub county Chairman and member of the People Living with AIDS group (left), and Otira Godfrey (second from left) from a community-based NUMAT partner organization

“I learned why and how to adhere to cotrimoxazole prophylaxis, what antiretroviral therapy is, and which breastfeeding options would not put my children at risk of being infected.”

– Grace Abalo

When 34-year-old Grace Abalo tested positive for HIV, she was extremely upset. She couldn't bear the news alone, yet she was afraid to tell her husband. So, Grace sought counsel from a network support agent (NSA), who helped her prepare to tell her spouse. Despite some initial feelings of anger, Grace's husband accepted her status and eventually was tested himself. He, too, was HIV positive.

The NSA who helped the Abalos had received training from the Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS & TB (NUMAT) program, which is supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through the U.S. Agency for International Development. Along with the training programs it provides, NUMAT assists people through HIV testing, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care. Implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., the program supports a health center near Grace's home, where she and her husband were tested for HIV and now receive clinical services, such as CD4 count tests.

When Grace learned she was pregnant with her second child, she became a member of a family support group (FSG) at the health center. Group members learn how to access prevention of mother-to-child transmission programs and other services that support their health in the long term, as well as strategies for positive living, safe infant feeding, and proper child care. Grace reports, “I learned why and how to adhere to cotrimoxazole prophylaxis, what antiretroviral therapy is, and which breastfeeding options would not put my children at risk of being infected.” With this knowledge and with support from other FSG members, Grace was able to keep her child HIV negative. Additionally, she says that participating in the FSG reduces isolation, stress, and fear associated with HIV/AIDS.

As a result of an FSG home-visit strategy, Grace and her husband receive ongoing support through the sub county network for people living with HIV/AIDS. Grace also helps other HIV-positive mothers take their children for testing before the age of 18 months and educates them on breastfeeding options.