



DREAMS: DETERMINED, RESILIENT, EMPOWERED, AIDS-FREE, MENTORED, SAFE

SEEING LIGHT IN THE ARMS OF HIV/AIDS: A story of hope and restoration

Anna is a 37-year-old single mother and sole bread winner for her five children who live in Layibi Division, Patuda Parish in Gulu, Uganda.

Anna was aware of her HIV status and was on ART when she joined the BETTER OUTCOMES program in January 2016, but she did not know the HIV status of her children. The family did not have access to stable income and was experiencing economic challenges that were affecting the household's access to basic needs. As a result, Flavia, the eldest daughter at age 16, was forced to drop out of her Senior 3 class at school in January 2016.

The hard economic situation was negatively impacting Anna's health and ability to parent her children, who she felt disrespected her. She was also concerned about the fate of her three daughters given their elevated risk to HIV infection.

When Anna learned about the DREAMS Initiative from the BETTER OUTCOMES team, she joined a VSLA+ group and the SINOVUYO parenting skills program through WEI/B's DREAMS partner, SOS, in Gulu. Flavia also joined WEI/B's Peer Educator Club (PEC), which had recently formed in her neighborhood. The SOS team and Anna discussed the importance of knowing their HIV status, and they linked Anna and her children to HIV counseling and testing through SOS. Flavia tested HIV-positive; her other four children tested negative.

At first, it was difficult for Flavia to accept her HIV+ status. The SOS team counseled her and her family through additional home visits. Flavia was referred for ART service to Gulu Regional Referral Hospital where she now receives treatment.

Through the social support she has gained through the PEC, Flavia gained confidence to share her story with her sisters and girls and boys in the PEC and emphasized the importance of staying HIV-free. She is appreciative that she now knows her HIV status, and support from the PEC helps her to adhere to her medication regimen and remain healthy. She now feels that joining the PEC is the best thing that has happened in her life.

Flavia is committed to working with her mother and ensuring that her siblings remain HIV-free. "I now talk to them. I guide them. I will give what I can so that my sister will remain in school and HIV-free and avoid mistakes that I could have made," Flavia says.



Flavia and her siblings tend the garden supported in part by their mother's VSLA+ savings.

Flavia's commitment includes participation in family planning outreach with DREAMS partner, TASO, to talk with youth about sexual and reproductive health and how to stay HIV-free.

Through the DREAMS VSLA+ group, Anna, has begun saving money. She also borrowed a small loan that helped her start a business selling food and vegetables at her homestead. Anna says that savings and loans from the VSLA+ group help her provide for the basics that her daughters need, such as school fees, pocket money, and sanitary pads. This will help to reduce her daughter's risk of HIV infection from young men offering financial support in exchange for sex.

Anna is planning to support Flavia to take up income generating skills training through the PEC so that she will have a safe way to support herself. She hopes to also expand her own business by the end of the annual saving cycle.

Anna says that the SINOVUYO parenting skills training has helped her to talk more freely about difficult, sensitive topics like sex and HIV with her daughters. The additional sensitization on family planning has encouraged her and her daughters to openly discuss how to plan for families, too.

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