

## A right to a future through education

OneVoice South Africa (OVSA) is a national organisation that actively involves young people (19 years) in HIV and TB prevention, in a way that is appealing and meaningful to them. OVSA was launched in July 2009 and today over 4500 young South Africans are benefiting from this prevention programme.



The programme aims to support young people through a school-based, HIV and TB workshop curriculum, which helps them understand what places them at risk. Great emphasis is placed on 'meaningful participation' and the ability of learners to positively influence their futures and those of their loved ones. Many in fact, already lead by example in their own communities; thereby investing in the next generation, who in turn, will be skilled and able to support sustainable change over time.

The future course of the world's TB and HIV epidemics hinges, in many respects, on whether or not young people adopt and/or maintain healthy behaviours, as well as the contextual factors that affect those choices. In South Africa, some 5.6 million people, including 330 000 children (0-14 years) are living with HIV (UNAIDS HIV and AIDS Estimates, 2009) - and there are some 1.9 million children (0-17 years) orphaned due to AIDS. This leaves South Africa as one of the most heavily affected countries in the world. OVSA's aim is clear; to reach out and mobilise young people on prevention, by enhancing life skills tools and facilitating their active participation in the struggle against HIV and TB.

### Giving young people life skills

Rolled out in 44 schools in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, the Schools Programme presents young people with a valuable and comprehensive set of life skills. The programme is context-specific, age-appropriate and culturally sensitive, and works on the principle that certain core life skills and knowledge are essential to making healthy lifestyle decisions. In effect, OVSA harnesses the inherent abilities of young people through a series of 12 in-depth workshops, which are specifically developed to bring about a greater and more realistic awareness of HIV and TB, Sexual Reproductive Health, Gender and Human Rights issues.

OVSA's vision is to support a safe and creative environment where young people are part of the collective voice to develop positive lifestyles in the HIV and TB response. Our mission is to promote meaningful participation of young people in making informed decisions about health and lifestyle, including sexual reproductive health, within our communities; as well as expand target audience knowledge on TB and TB/HIV co-infection, and promote early detection.

### The aims

According to Ntonto Vezi, OVSA Schools Programme manager, "The OVSA initiative aims to address the needs of those young people who form the group that are highest at risk of contracting HIV and the most ideal venue to partner with young people, is in school.

"Ultimately, it is our hope that we can engage with young people on HIV and TB education and skills training that will support them in making the best and most realistic sexual reproductive health choices for their lives and their futures."

The Schools Programme includes workshops on the basics of HIV and TB, recognising symptoms, the importance of treatment adherence, and addresses human rights, values, assertiveness, self awareness, communication, negotiation, goal setting, problem solving and planning. At the end of the workshops, learners present peers and teachers with their advocacy projects; which are drawn from a sexual reproductive health, HIV or TB issue, pertinent to them and their community. This project provides them with a means to showcase what they have learnt, and therefore move this information from the classroom - into the wider community.

For more information on OVSA, go to [www.onevoice.org.za](http://www.onevoice.org.za).

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