

## Interviewing Makoti Edwin

*“Being positive hasn’t affected anything. I can say I have used the opportunity of being positive to do good things in my community and I can see the impact that I have made and am continuing to make by living positively and openly with the status,” says 22 year-old Makoti Edwin from Tanzania.*

**How I got infected** – I was sexually abused when I was a kid and was forced to sodomize a male adult. I was diagnosed with HIV in 2003 after I went for voluntary counseling and testing at the hospital. I was not very shocked as I knew that I had been in a risky situation before. My family, especially my mother, supported me and we have been very close since.

**Living With HIV** – The most important thing is eating well and the way one lives with the disease. I know that I have HIV, but that doesn’t change the fact that I am a human being and can still do anything and live a normal life. I respect myself and others. I do not feel ashamed by openly living with the disease because I want other people to learn and take measures to protect themselves from acquiring the disease.

My life is very normal, but very busy. I coach street children to play football, work everyday from morning to afternoon helping Canadian volunteers working in Tanzania, and attend high school studies in the evening. I also go out and party hard on weekends, and sometimes during the week. I enjoy watching movies (comedy) and football. I go out on dates, I rap, and I dance. House/techno is my favorite music. I am currently not on ARVs as my immune system is still strong. My CD4 count is high.

**Goals and Aspirations** – I am very talented at football and was dreaming of playing for London-based Chelsea football club some day. However, I can’t reach this goal now due to my status. I now dream of becoming a professional HIV/AIDS journalist so as to talk, see, and report different issues from around the globe concerning HIV/AIDS and PLWHA’s. I don’t think my current status can stop me from realizing this dream.

In order to halt the disease, I believe that we need to provide HIV/AIDS education to different groups, especially young people, as they are the ones who are most affected and infected with the disease. Political leaders, religious leaders and celebrities (musicians, actors and actresses, football and basketball players etc) around the world also should play a big role in the fight against the disease by openly talking about it and even disclosing their status. This will show that anybody can get HIV no matter who you are or what you do. We now need more actions than words!

**Facing Stigma** – I haven’t faced any kind of stigma or discrimination, although many PLWHAs in my country and around the globe say stigma and discrimination are the biggest challenges that they face in their lives. I have been open with my status almost everywhere: at home, school, work. I have been raising awareness on television, newspapers and magazines, radio stations, etc. Everyone I know is aware of my status and has been very supportive. They encourage me to get more information on the disease, about living positively and how they can avoid HIV. I also reach out to youth who are positive and are afraid to disclose their status because of stigma and discrimination from the community. They are afraid that their partners will leave them once they find out their status as they want to have sex. I still date very beautiful girls who know my status and I am proud of this.

Stakeholders need to recognize us and stop pretending like we don’t exist. They should build our capacity so we can be confident and more effective in what we do in our daily lives. My friends and family all know my status, as I mentioned earlier, and they are all still best friends. It’s not necessary to disclose your status, but doing so is very crucial as it helps reduce stigma and silence.

**Role Models** – My role model is a musician from Ireland called Bono, who uses his talent to fight for the poor and the poorest.

**Advice for Other Young People** – We have to believe in ourselves. The best way of achieving something is to come out and say that we need change and rights. People won't hear you if you stay silent. We also can't fight social stigma and discrimination if we hide and keep quiet. We have to voice our concerns. I don't wish to be remembered, but I do want to see a world free of HIV/AIDS.