



ALIVE
MEDICAL SERVICES

Plot 5, UN Rise First Close | Kisugu - Namuwongo | P.O. Box 37374
+256 774 704 646 +256 772 490 823 +256 414 258 580
admin@amsuganda.org | www.amsuganda.org



ALIVE
MEDICAL SERVICES



STORIES FROM OUR CLIENTS
the impact of Alive Medical Services

ALIVE MEDICAL SERVICES

is a non-profit medical centre that provides free HIV testing, care, treatment, counselling, and support for over 13,000 HIV-positive patients every year. Strategically located in Namuwongo, one of Kampala's most densely populated and impoverished neighbourhoods, AMS' doors are always open. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, our staff serve clients with love and dignity, operating under the belief that every person deserves to live a healthy life.

Our model is centred on comprehensive care. At AMS, we don't just give out medicine – we look at each client with a wide lens, understanding that HIV touches many aspects of a person's life.

In this booklet, you will meet some of those clients. Thank you for your interest in Alive Medical Services.

ESTHER'S STORY

Twice a month, food is laid outside the doors of AMS. As the clinic swells with patients, doctors walk from left to right, spreading nutrition information. One by one, AMS' community health workers call out clients' names, all of whom have been previously measured for severe food insecurity. After nurses assess their health status, each client receives rice, beans, sugar, and a bag of fresh vegetables.

One of those clients is Esther, a 35-year-old HIV-positive mother and client at AMS. Esther's partner left her a year ago, making it nearly impossible to juggle her job – selling roasted meat alongside the roads of Kampala – with the care of her one-month-old baby, Sharidah, and two other children.

Esther's income dwindled; she could no longer afford to eat properly. Her breastmilk began to run out, causing Sharidah to lose weight drastically and rapidly.

"At one point, my children would wake up every morning with no food on the table," Esther said. "Sharidah was so weak, and so was I. I didn't know what to do."



On her next visit, AMS staff took note of Sharidah's weight loss. AMS enrolled the family in AMS' food program and started the baby on food aid. At the same time, AMS educated Esther on proper infant feeding practices. In the four months since then, Sharidah's health has greatly improved: she's gained nearly four kilograms and smiles and laughs easily. She's even built up enough strength to stand and walk on her own.

Once Sharidah's weight stabilizes, AMS will phase the family out of the food program. Regardless, we will continue to support them through other initiatives. AMS engages more than 300 HIV positive clients in our gardening program, for example, which is made up of 18 different clubs. By teaching clients how to plant, grow, and sell their crops, we raise clients' incomes in a sustainable way.

"Because of AMS, I have high hopes for the future," Esther said. "HIV – and my other challenges – cannot bring me down."

CAROL'S STORY

Across the world, young girls struggle to balance their menstruation cycles and daily lives. Without the proper resources, a week-long period can mean a week out of school – and because in rural areas, sanitary pads can be expensive and nearly impossible to find, 30 percent of Ugandan girls miss class during their periods.

“I was an orphan. When I was young, it was so hard for me to get sanitary pads,” said Carol, a client at AMS. “I had to rip my regular clothes and use those as pads.”

Remembering such experiences, Carol joined AMS' Kisakye Group as soon as it was launched in February of 2015. AMS established the Kisakye Group for two reasons: the first, to help HIV-positive individuals earn a sustainable income; the second, to support girls and women with menstruation management. AMS trained six clients to cut, sew and create reusable sanitary pads – or “super kits” – for donation.



Each super kit contains four cotton pads, two “shields,” and a cloth drawstring bag. These super kits help women use their sanitary pads discretely and with dignity.

Since then, the women have continued coming to the clinic nearly every day to sew. The Kisakye Group produces approximately 200 super kits per quarter, each of which can last up to three years. AMS pays women for each super kit they produce, all of which are donated to vulnerable populations and other AMS clients.

“These pads are so important,” Carol said. “You can wash them easily, which prevents disease and infection.”

The sale of these pads has helped women like Carol change their lives. Because of her income from the Kisakye Group – and because of her treatment at AMS for the last nine years – Carol's viral load has remained suppressed. Her two children are HIV-negative, happy, and healthy.

Carol's husband left her last year. But instead of falling apart, the small family picked themselves up, built a new home, and started their lives on a healthier foot, all because of Carol's savings from the Kisakye Group.

“I love being here,” Carol said. “Kisakye helped me build a one-bedroom house. It helps me budget for my children. Because I know how to make these pads, my daughter won't have to deal with her period in the same ways I did.”

NADIA'S STORY

When Nadia was 10 years old, she was hospitalized for an entire month. She had no idea she was HIV positive until months later – and she didn't realize the weight HIV carried until she returned to primary school.

“My teachers would always say you can't do this, you can't do that,” Nadia said. “They acted like I was so fragile. Like I could faint or break at any moment.”

For months, Nadia felt isolated. The kids at school didn't understand why the teachers treated her the way that they did, and she didn't have answers to their repeated questions. Tired of all the special treatment, Nadia stopped taking her medication, hoping that everyone would treat her like a normal person again.

Once Nadia's mother realized what her daughter was doing, she brought Nadia to Alive Medical Services (AMS) for counselling. Day after day, Nadia sat with the counsellors. They spoke to her about good adherence and living positively. Soon after, Nadia began engaging with the Victor's Club, AMS' youth program for adolescents living with HIV.

“When I got to secondary level, I started to let it go,” Nadia said. “I thought to myself: I have HIV. That can't be changed. And I can live with that.”

In time, Nadia began singing, dancing, and making friends at Victor's Club, AMS' support group for youth living with HIV. This past summer, AMS staff trained Nadia to become a youth peer educator, giving her the skills to counsel other youth living with HIV, and refer them to the clinic for treatment.

Now 18, Nadia hopes to attend university next year. Eventually, she hopes to become a counsellor for HIV-positive children herself.

“I want HIV-positive children to know that living a positive life is not that hard,” Nadia said. “You can live beyond other people's expectations. You can achieve what others can achieve and more. It's important not to be afraid.”

When school lets out, Nadia has spent her days volunteering at AMS. She helps measure the weight, height, and health status of children at triage, working alongside the nurses and helping whenever she can.

“I want to work with children because they are the future of tomorrow,” Nadia said. “They should know that HIV can't stop them.”



CATHERINE'S STORY

A few months ago, Catherine's second-born child was confirmed HIV negative.

A clinician smiled as she brought Catherine into the treatment room, embracing her to celebrate the good news. Ever since she realized she was pregnant, Catherine had worked hard to ensure the baby, Charity, wouldn't contract HIV. She received continuous support from AMS staff to prevent mother-to-child-transmission of the virus and faithfully adhered to her medication.

"I'm so relieved," Catherine said. Charity smiled in her arms, almost as if she was relieved, too.



The joy in the room was tangible. But it hadn't always been this way for Catherine and her family.

When Catherine gave birth to her first-born daughter, she went to live with her mother and extended family in the village. As Catherine recovered from the delivery, her family helped her with the baby. Her husband stayed in Kampala to work – and during that time, he contracted HIV from another woman.

Catherine returned to Kampala after three months in the village, unaware of her husband's infidelity or illness. She put all her time and energy into caring for her daughter. And when the two of them fell sick, she was tested

For HIV at a health facility near her home. Her neighbour urged her to get another test at Alive Medical Services, and after her diagnosis was confirmed, the doctors tested Catherine's daughter, who was also diagnosed HIV positive.

"I was shocked, but there was nothing to be done except to begin treating myself and my daughter," Catherine said. "The only option was to stay strong for my child."

By continuing to visit AMS for check-ups, Catherine's viral load is suppressed and her first-born daughter – now three years old – is stable and healthy. Catherine is now a farmer in her village, and she grows fresh produce and sells whatever is left.

"My advice to other HIV-positive single mothers is to do as much as possible to support your children," Catherine said.

HASSAN'S STORY

Hassan found out he was HIV positive in 2010. He and his wife had long split up, but when he found out she had passed away, Hassan had a feeling he knew why.

Hassan visited Alive Medical Services to be tested and treated for HIV. At first, the medication made him dizzy, weak, and drowsy – but after speaking with the doctors, he switched to the same antiretrovirals he has been on ever since.

"When I first found out I had HIV, I was heartbroken," Hassan said. "I was in denial until I went through intensive counselling at AMS. They helped me work through what I was feeling."

Because he hadn't felt symptoms until a few months before his diagnosis, Hassan had no idea the virus had also touched his daughter. She was just 12 years old at the time she was tested, and at such a young age, Hassan was unsure how to tell her the truth.

But understanding the value of proper disclosure, Hassan sought support from the AMS counselling department. He sat his daughter down to tell her the truth.

"Will we die?" Hassan's daughter asked.

"No," Hassan answered. "If we keep taking our medication, we will live long, healthy lives."

Today, Hassan's daughter is an activist in her community. She takes after her father, who is outspoken about HIV, stigma, and the availability of free HIV resources both in person and online.

By speaking out about HIV at school, Hassan's daughter has mentored several HIV-positive children, helping them adhere to their medication and stay optimistic about their futures.

"She's strong and vigilant," Hassan said. "I couldn't be prouder of who she has become."

