

SA commemorates World Aids Day in Welkom

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Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa handed out pamphlets and engaged with residents of Welkom in the Free State during the national commemoration of World Aids Day...



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Deputy President Ramaphosa was accompanied by Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi and the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Pravin Gordhan as he engaged with the residents of Welkom at a taxi rank and a local clinic.

World Aids Day is commemorated each year on 1 December and is an opportunity for every community to unite in the fight against HIV, show support for people living with HIV and remember those who have died.

The UNAIDS World Aids Day theme for 2011 to 2015 is "Getting to Zero". The theme for South Africa this year is "Zero Stigma, Zero Discrimination".

The aim of this campaign is to ensure that the rights of people living with HIV and Aids are not violated and that discrimination on the basis of HIV, Aids and TB is reduced and ultimately eliminated.

Stigma remains

Tshepo Ngoata, a youth ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund, said the theme for this year's World Aids Day was a good idea because people were still stigmatising those living with HIV.

He said people who are HIV positive were still afraid to take treatment as it meant collecting it at a public clinic.

Ngoata was born with HIV but only found out about his status in 2003 when he was diagnosed with TB.

"Having HIV has not affected my life that much. The only thing I have to do is live a healthy lifestyle," he said.

The 23-year-old man started taking treatment in 2004.

"All my friends know that I am HIV positive. They are cool with it and support me. I am dating a person that is HIV negative," Ngoata said.

He said he has been dating his girlfriend for about a year as she understood HIV to be like any other illness.

Understanding came when she was just 13

Koketso Moknetoa found out she was HIV positive in 2000. The 23-year-old woman said as a child, she was in and out of hospital.

Doctors only discovered she was HIV positive when she was nine years old.

At that time, she didn't understand what it meant to be HIV positive. She only came to understand what her status meant when she was 13.

Moknetoa started taking treatment for HIV in 2002 but stopped taking her medication when she was 18-years-old because it was making her sick.

"I stopped taking treatment because it was too much for me, I didn't want to accept my status," Moknetoa said.

At this point in her life, Moknetoa was more concerned with going out and drinking with her friends.

She said she was raped when she out with friends.

"I hated myself, I felt dirty. I was suicidal," she said.

Moknetoa reached a turning point in her life when she met her boyfriend and started to take treatment again.

She said when she told her boyfriend her status, he was shocked and could not believe her, but he has since accepted her status.

Moknetoa helped her boyfriend to accept her status by taking him to support groups and bringing him reading material about HIV and Aids.

The Deputy President also held a community engagement with residents at the community hall.