

Learning by Ear

"Everyone's Different – Respect for Minorities"

Episode 03

Title: Young Zimbabweans Fighting the Stigma of HIV

Author: Columbus Mavhunga

Editor: Katrin Ogunsade, Friederike Müller

Proofreading: Charlotte Collins

Characters (O-Töne, Clips) / Narrators

<i>Narrator</i>	male	about 35	english
<i>Brian (clip)</i>	male	23	english
<i>Alex (clip)</i>	male	21	english
<i>Chengetai Dziwa</i>	male	unimportant	english
<i>Dr Nyika Mahachi</i>	male	unimportant	english
<i>Johannes</i>	male	29	english/shona
<i>Rue</i> Pronunciation: Roo = "ru" in "Rude"	female	22	english

Pronunciation:

Brian (Brian)

Alex (Alex)

Nyika Mahachi (Nyi (as in "new" on "nyi," while "i" sounds as in "e")- ka
[Mah-har-chi])

Johannes (as written)

Rue (Roo, as in "ru" in "Rude")

Chengetai Dziwa (Che-nge-ta-yi [Dzi (-ds) -wa])

Intro:

Hello and welcome to our Learning-by-Ear-series, “Everyone’s Different – Respect for Minorities”. In our third episode we'll meet some young Africans who'll tell us about how the stigma of being HIV positive is still an issue on the continent, and will take us through their experiences. Join us as we travel to Zimbabwe, a country with one of the highest rates of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa.

1. SFX HIV positive youths talking

2. Narrator

These young people are living with HIV. They meet every Saturday afternoon in the centre of Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city, to share their experiences. Among them is a 23-year-old man we'll call Brian. He says he was born HIV positive. Both his parents succumbed to the pandemic. He says it was difficult to deal with the stigma after he tested HIV positive when he was just 10 years old.

KW begin

3. Soundbite Brian (English)

"When I found out that I was HIV positive I suffered a lot from self-stigmatisation. Though there was also stigmatisation from outside. Even at school. The type of words. The way they used to play was not kind to me. They did not call me names. But the things they said to me: 'Why are your lips red, and why are you always sick? This week you're at school, this week at home...'

KW end

4. Narrator

Today, Brian has found a way to live with stigma and discrimination: They mean nothing to him any more.

5. Soudbite Brian (English)

I first accepted my status. It will never change. Acceptance was the first medicine I took... Secondly, I do stick to the drugs prescribed by doctors. Adhering to the drug regime is the most important thing for us people with HIV."

6. Narrator

Brian now speaks like a doctor or a counsellor. And he's right: proper medical treatment is very important. HIV is the virus that causes the disease AIDS. But a person can be infected with HIV for many years before AIDS develops. Proper medication helps to control the virus and slow the progression of HIV infection. Just across town is "Zvandiri House," the home of Afric Aid.

7. SFX: HIV discussion/arrival at the offices

8. Narrator

It's an organisation that deals with youths who are living with HIV. Zvandiri is a Shona term which means "As I Am." The HIV positive youths came up with the name, as a way of saying, "Accept us as we are." Alex tested HIV positive in 2007 when he was 16. He's now a voluntary peer counsellor. Alex says he wants all Zimbabwean youths to get tested and know their status. When asked why, he smiles, and then answers:

9. Soundbite Alex

"I feel relieved to know my status. You end up having questions: Why am I sick all the time, why am I not at school. But when you know the reason, it helps you to become the person you always wanted to become. And I'm happy about who I am. I have learnt to live with it... and I'm happy."

10. Narrator

Alex wants to be a nurse one day and help more Zimbabwean youths to fight HIV. But this is not his only wish for the future.

11. Soundbite Alex

"I want to marry and have children. Negative children. Maybe five years down the line..."

KW begin

Now, I have a girlfriend. I love her very much. But of course we have problems like everyone else. But we are managing."

KW end

12. Narrator

Alex and Brian are not the only young people who've managed to find a positive way of living with HIV. But for many, it was a long journey.

13. Soundbite Rue

"When I got tested, my mother could not tell me. She told me five years later. It was not fair. Maybe she had her own reasons. After that I encountered a lot of stigmatisation, even in the family."

14. Narrator :

We'll call this 22 year-old-lady Rue. She's now a voluntary peer counsellor for Afric Aid, just like Alex. She says her brother would not allow her to choose subjects she wanted to study at school. Furthermore, after she tested HIV positive, her brother would decide what she could and couldn't do, including choosing her friends and telling her what time she should go to bed.

KW begin

15. Soundbite Rue

These are some of the challenges that even affected my career - until at a certain age I chose to get into nursing. But even getting into nursing is not easy as they consider our status. So there are lots of challenges on the way."

KW end

16. Narrator

Today, she says her brother was acting out of ignorance.

17. Soundbite Rue:

"Now, I no longer feel discriminated against. Probably my brother didn't understand my situation. He thought what he was doing was good for me when it was not. With my sickness, probably it was getting boring, he felt like I was getting all the attention of the house. Now I understand why it was happening. We had quarrels and were fighting all the time."

18. Narrator:

Rue's dream is of a Zimbabwe where everyone lives in harmony, and she wants that peace to extend to her family. She's now looking forward to her wedding in April. Her fiancé has already paid *lobola* – the traditional bride price - to Rue's family to pave the way for the wedding. In Zimbabwe, this includes money and about ten cattle. Her fiancé - of three years now - is HIV negative. Rue explains her family's reaction when they heard about the planned wedding.

19. Soundbite Rue

"They were surprised because most people did not expect it. But they were happy for me, that I chose the right thing."

20. Narrator

Rue's fiancé is a 29-year old businessman in Harare. It is not easy for him to talk about this subject. But he agrees to meet us after work.

KW begin

When we arrive at his house it's completely dark: There's no electricity, just the sound of generators for the few who want to light their homes.

21. SFX generator

22. Narrator

We drive to a nearby bar where people are watching football and listening to music, but we decide to stay in the car to hear the story of Johannes, Rue's fiancé.

23. SFX: Car

24. Narrator

To begin with, Johannes is tense. We open the windows and start listening to music from the nearby bar. Eventually, Johannes opens up.
KW end

25. Soundbite Johannes: (He mixes English and Shona)

"I don't want a hard life. I want to take it easy. That's what it is. What I thought about is that if I might leave Rue: where would I go? The only thing I was worried about, and I am still, is how to get a child. But we will wed and stay together for the rest of our lives."

26. Narrator

Johannes says he has not told his parents yet that his fiancée is living with HIV. He fears that they won't accept her as his future wife. One of the common prejudices against HIV-infected people is that they can't have HIV-negative children. A fear that is understandable, but not justified. In many cases, it is possible for a couple in which one partner is HIV-positive to give birth to an HIV-negative child. The precondition is that they have a proper medical treatment. Nyika Mahachi, a medical doctor who works for an NGO that fights discrimination in the workplace, explains.

27. Soundbite Mahachi

"At this stage we have sufficient evidence that anti-retroviral therapy is important intervention in preventing HIV transmission from an infected partner to an uninfected partner.

Hence, if the partner is HIV positive and is on treatment and the treatment is sufficiently suppressing the virus, this is usually detected via viral load and CD4 count. Then they have an opportunity to have a child together.

KW begin

Currently, the evidence that is there shows that if the partner has been on treatment and the treatment is working effectively the risk of transmission is reduced to near zero and also subsequently the risk of passing on transmission to the child is reduced to near zero. That is how effective the current regimens are."

KW end

28. Narrator

This medical expert might be able to put Johannes' fears to rest. It remains to be seen if and how Johannes will eventually tell his parents that his fiancée Rue – soon to be their daughter-in-law - is living with HIV. Back at Zvandiri House, young people living with HIV come by for counselling, while others try out their skills in handicrafts.

29. SFX Metal cutter clips.

30. Narrator

This 20-year-old is making ashtrays and picture frames from old drinks cans. Officials at Afric Aid tell us he needs money because since his parents died of AIDS he's the head of the family. Zimbabwe's HIV prevalence rate has been dropping, but the country is still experiencing one of the highest HIV mortality rates in sub-Saharan Africa, with nearly 2,000 HIV-related deaths each week. As a result there are many families headed by a child - most of them HIV positive.

31. SFX: Youths talking

32. Narrator:

Afric Aid says it's introduced community adolescent treatment support which involves young people like Alex and Rue visiting their peers who are HIV positive, and encouraging them to think positively and stick to their medical treatment. Here's Chengetai Dziwa, an official from Afric Aid.

33. Soundbite Dziwa

"All the programmes... are led by children themselves. Their views and opinions are included. In an effort to ensure there is meaningful youth participation, HIV positive adolescents are trained in how they can go out in the community and teach other children on issues around treatment, and give support. They work as a bridge between the community and clinic."

34. Narrator

It becomes apparent that young HIV-positive people in Zimbabwe need more than just medical treatment. Social support, such as information and counselling on how to live with HIV infection, is also very important. This will empower African youths to fight the stigma of HIV and educate their peers about not spreading the virus. The young people you've just met in this episode are proof that you can learn to live with the virus. They've accepted their status, and although there's still a long way to go before they're fully accepted by their communities, they look forward to the future with hope.

Outro

And that's all from our Learning by Ear episode about fighting the stigma of HIV in Africa. Our reporter from Zimbabwe was Columbus Mavhunga. What do you think about those HIV positive young people in Zimbabwe? Could other young Africans living with the HIV virus learn from their experiences? As always, we'd like to hear your feedback – send us your comments on our Facebook page. And if you want to listen to the programme again, or tell your friends about it, you'll also find our Learning by Ear series at www.dw.de/lbe.

Goodbye for now - see you soon for the next episode of Learning by Ear!