

## **Mateus Kambuli** **Shanamutango, North Central Namibia**

*“Joining the group was a great relief”*



In March 2003, I tested HIV positive in Lüderitz where I was working. I went for voluntary testing. I was not sick. When I discovered that I was positive, I did not tell anyone in Luderitz. I kept it to myself. As a result, it started working on me. My second visit to the hospital revealed that my CD4 count had gone down to 109. I was then advised to start treatment immediately.

They told me the AIDS drugs can lead to complications for people starting treatment. I lost hope, and I decided to leave my job. I was thinking that I was about to die. I told the hospital people to write my prescriptions on my medical passport so that I could return home to get treatment there.

When I arrived back in the North from Lüderitz, I just stayed at home. I didn't do anything. It was difficult because I carried a heavy burden in my heart. Most of the time, I thought about what to do about my condition. That was very difficult.

It was then that I first heard about the people who were meeting regularly at the local school. I wondered what they were doing. I read from their t-shirts that they were dealing with HIV. Later, I learnt that they too were living with the virus like me. One day I decided to

join them, to listen in. I knew the people because they were from my village. However, there were no men, they were all women.

Joining the group was a great relief. These were people who accepted my problems unconditionally because they were in the same situation. I also learned a lot of things in the group, such as the dangers of re-infection when having unprotected sex.

One of the trainings we received in the support group was Positive Speaking, a workshop run by Yelula/U-khâi. Positive Speaking changed me a lot. I gained plenty of information on how to approach people to talk about my HIV status without fear. Had it not been for that programme, I don't think I would have overcome my fear. It taught me how to go public about my HIV status and I am now able to speak freely in the community. I feel good because I have the community's interest at heart. I want to provide information so that some of them will get tested and get treatment before it is too late.

I think the future looks promising; we work together very well in our support group.