

# From HIV-Positive Mother to Mentor Mother

Salome Christianah's Inspiring Story

By Dr. Yewande Akinro & Emerald Awa-Agwu

*APIN Public Health Initiatives' Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) program is helping HIV-positive women lead full, rich lives in spite of the virus*

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For a long time, Nigeria was the country with the highest number of babies born HIV-positive. So much work has been done and the country is finally seeing some progress. Still, the results of the 2018 Nigeria HIV/AIDS Indicator and Impact Survey (NAIIS) show that only two out of five pregnant women in Nigeria know their HIV status.

Mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV happens when an HIV-positive woman spreads the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) to her child during pregnancy, childbirth/labour, or breastfeeding. Even though it is not the only or the most common means of HIV transmission in Nigeria, it is one that can spiral quickly out of control if left unchecked.

Knowing this, international organizations like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local non-governmental organizations like APIN Public Health Initiative (APIN) partner with the Government of Nigeria at all levels to identify and treat this relatively small group, and prevent more babies from being born with the virus.

Salome Christianah\* is a beneficiary of APIN's Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) intervention. She works as a peer educator and mentor mother in Adeoyo Maternity Teaching Hospital, one of the APIN-supported facilities in Oyo State.

In 2006, during her first pregnancy, Christianah visited the hospital to receive antenatal care (ANC) and got tested for HIV as part of the routine ANC services for all pregnant women. The result came back positive leaving her shocked and distraught.

**“ I tested HIV-positive in 2006 when I went for antenatal care at a mission home. It was like an end had come to my life. I couldn't go back home.**

Her husband was immediately invited to the hospital to get tested and his results came back negative, she says.

She and her husband received counselling on PMTCT and started Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) immediately so that their baby could be free of the virus.

**“ I was initiated on ART the very next day and when my baby was born, she was given antiretroviral prophylaxis. I was the happiest woman on earth when she tested negative at 6 weeks old.**

Being an HIV-positive mother was not without its challenges. She faced resistance from her family for not breastfeeding her baby in accordance with PMTCT protocols but with the support of her husband and the health workers, she was able to cope.

**“ At that time, HIV-positive women were advised not to breastfeed. APIN gave us infant formula at every clinic visit to ensure that they were well fed. My baby was monitored till she was 18 months old and the final outcome was negative.”, she says**

Christianah has come a long way since then.

She now supports other HIV-positive mothers by counselling and monitoring them from pregnancy, through delivery and up until their babies' final HIV statuses are determined at 18 months.

**“ Through the APIN PMTCT intervention, many things have changed for good in my life. I am healthy and virally suppressed. I have three children and a husband who are all HIV-negative. I was helped greatly by the PMTCT support group and today, I also support other women to live positively and lead better lives.**

**Fifteen years after she tested positive, Christianah has two more children who are free of the virus and her husband remains HIV-negative.**

Getting tested is the first step towards achieving an HIV-free Nigeria. Through the PMTCT program at supported health facilities, APIN Public Health Initiatives helps to halt the spread of the disease and ensure that new cases of HIV remain on the decline.

For more information about APIN, our PMTCT program or any of our projects, visit our website [www.apin.org.ng](http://www.apin.org.ng)

