

Missionaries Shelter South African Girls in Peril

Editor's note: Holly, originally from the United States, is currently serving with OM partner organisation AIDSLink International in South Africa with her husband, Nigel.

It's said that women born in South Africa have a higher chance of being raped than learning how to read. When statistics show that one in four people in South Africa is HIV-positive, the two facts do not look good for the future of girls and women in this country.*

A teacher by profession, I received the Churches Channels Of Hope (CCOH) training in South Africa in 2010, along with the tools to help women and children at risk of contracting HIV.

From August 2010 to August 2011, I worked with AIDS Hope at their after-school program for vulnerable children, in schools teaching life skills, making home visits to children orphaned by AIDS and conducting HIV and AIDS workshops around the country. In August 2011, I joined AIDSLink International, an OM partner organization, as the director's personal assistant to help her be more effective in ministering to those at risk of HIV and AIDS, as well as continuing to work with AIDS Hope every Wednesday.

One of the girls at the AIDS Hope after-school program is a 12-year-old named Jewel**. She was orphaned by AIDS and is living with her siblings and cared for by her grandmother. Jewel's older brother, Tebogo**, who is 15 years old, just went away to initiation school so that, culturally, he can be considered a man and make decisions for the whole family.

Jewel has been taught about HIV and how it is transmitted and worries that her brother will become infected when he has to go through the circumcision ritual, in which one knife is used

on all the boys. Furthermore, Tebogo will be expected to sleep with as many girls as he can to “prove” his manhood.

Jewel, wise for her years, prays for her brother, that the knife used to circumcise many boys will not pass on the virus. While Tebogo is away, Jewel said, “Now, there’s no one to protect me.”

At the after-school center, Jewel is fed a hearty meal, has a safe place to play, gets help with her homework and learns about Jesus. Weekly, she receives a food parcel to take home to share with her family. Through her relationship with the staff at AIDS Hope, Jewel gets the emotional, social, physical, spiritual and academic support she needs to stay HIV free.

A woman in South Africa is raped every 17 seconds. One of the biggest lessons I learnt from my training is that it takes the whole community—the whole church—to care for those most vulnerable to contracting HIV. Jewel can do her part, but so must we.

Yesterday, I asked Jewel if a male teacher, a boy or any strange man has ever tried to do anything sexual to her. Her answer—praise God—was a vehement “No”.

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**names changed