The starting point for all interventions must be HIV counselling and testing. Subsequent interventions for both HIV-negative and HIV-positive youth must be ‘adolescent-centred’.

LINDA-GAIL BEKKER, INTERNATIONAL AIDS SOCIETY PRESIDENT ELECT, 2015

In 2015 nearly 7,500 young women aged 15–24 years acquired HIV every week.

Sentebale provides adolescent-friendly HIV Testing & Counselling Services (HTS) and HIV prevention services in Lesotho, with young people (18 to 24 year olds) at the heart of delivering this work.

These young people are called our peer educators. The programme has supported 26 Ministry of Health facilities, with over 48,000 people having been educated on health and HIV, and one third of them testing for HIV. Of all those tested, only 2% were found to be HIV-positive. Of those who tested positive by Sentebale between the ages of 10-19 years, 100% now attend our monthly Saturday clubs.

If any of them stop taking their medication or attending clinic, they are identified and the team ensures they stay on treatment; all of those children Sentebale identified as defaulting from their medication were tracked back onto their treatment this year.

Peer educators also focus specifically on educating children and young people in schools and through youth clubs. Topics range from regular life skills sessions, to HTS, to HIV knowledge competitions between different schools, with the main focus of all activities being the importance of HIV prevention.

Sentebale has also supported local Community Based Organisations (CBOs) to deliver quality services to vulnerable children and adolescents and their families within Maseru. In this project, over 8,000 children and their caregivers were reached, with over 1,500 having been referred onto HTS as part of the project.

Monaheng – a 21-year-old Sentebale peer educator, tells us his thoughts:

“I am no longer ashamed of being called an HIV-positive person, because I feel I have survived all the storms. I am no longer blaming my mum – I think she lacked knowledge and understanding and maybe the environment was not conducive to let her talk and even access treatment that could have saved me from getting HIV.

"I no longer feel discriminated in the society after knowing that HIV is not a death sentence but the beginning of a more positive life."