

Margaret Sanger Center International and Women'sNet collaborated on training and development of Digital Stories as a resource for local community-based organizations in Geuteng Province, South Africa, to create greater awareness of gender-based violence and other human rights abuses, and their link to the spread of HIV.

Going Digital with Personal Storytelling

Margaret Sanger Center International (MSCI) in collaboration with Women'sNet conducted a five-day training workshop on the development of digital stories for nine representatives of community-based organization (CBO) partners from Soweto and Orange Farm. The workshop facilitated the production of nine, short digital stories that were written, narrated, and illustrated by participants (eight women and one man) from MSCI's partner organizations who have experienced gender-based violence or are living with HIV/AIDS. The nine digital stories cover a wide range of sexual and reproductive health and rights issues including gender-based violence, rape, sexual abuse, HIV, AIDS, teen pregnancy, and violence.



Trainer, Sally-Jean Shackleton assisting participant with development of digital story

Storytelling has long been a tool for learning lessons, preserving memory and history, transmitting culture and tradition, and for entertaining others. Tales of healing and caution have been told for centuries – valued by both the teller and the listener. For those relating a story, it has value in expression and healing, and for the listener, in learning and sharing. Everyone has stories to tell; it is in the telling that we discover how much of our experiences and learning we have in common with others. Stories validate our connection with others and with the world. They weave together our individual experiences to reveal a picture of a community, a group, an organization, and a country. The ‘digital’ in digital storytelling refers to the medium used to transmit stories. Digital stories, simply, are stories produced, stored, and disseminated using digital media.

According to Mama Rose, the director and founder of Let Us Grow, a CBO in Orange Farm that provides home-based care and support to people living with HIV:

“I care for others, as I care for myself. I became HIV positive as a result of a gang rape. I know, in the most painful way possible, the link between HIV and AIDS and gender violence. I tell my story over and over again, to get the government to provide Post Exposure Prophylaxis to survivors of gender violence in the hope others will avoid the fate that befell me. I tell my story to heal the pain of a life punctuated at every turn by violence, yet redeemed by the power of turning anger into activism. This is not only my story: but the story of three generations: of me, my daughter Mpho, and my grand daughter Kgomotso.”

A DVD containing these stories is being distributed to the participants, MSCI partner organizations, donors, and other interested collaborating groups.



Trainer, Sally-Jean Shackleton of Women'sNet, Errol Alexis of MSCI, and participants viewing their digital stories

Groups may use the digital stories as a resource to assist them in their advocacy, awareness, and prevention work around gender-based violence, other human rights abuses, HIV/AIDS prevention, and the link between human rights abuses and the spread of HIV. Specifically, the digital stories will be used at community educational workshops, community Imbizos (informal gatherings), and during campaigns including “Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence,” World AIDS Day, and International Women’s Day.

“Sharing my story with other participants helped me a lot. I got to talk about things that are not good inside me and it gave me power. I feel strong and healed. My participation was good and I learned a lot. I hope my story helps others and saves many lives.”

- Participant



Errol Alexis of MSCI and Sally-Jean Shackleton of Women'sNet with participants after the training