



The Women Speak:

A team member recalls the life experiences of a woman living with HIV

Mary * had a rough life while growing. She had to start working at an early age and she also had an early pregnancy. She worked numerous jobs to maintain her child and herself.

Later in life she met her knight in shining armour and they got married in 1998. She thought she would have the perfect life. They lived together for many years, she was comfortable taking care of the children and going to church.

At one point he worked on a ship but after his second trip his contract was not renewed.

She realized that her husband would get sick constantly. He would go to the doctor but he would never share much of what the doctor said. She would see him taking tablets / medication and when she asked he told her he was taking pressure tablets.

In 2000 he got really sick and had to be admitted in the hospital. People were saying that her husband had "AIDS". During their marriage they never used condoms. She believed that because she was married she did not need to use it. In September 2002 her husband died of HIV related illnesses. After his death she was totally confused, she did not know what to do or think. She was encouraged to do an HIV test.

Her result came back positive. She never thought that this could have happened to her. She was devastated. She was the perfect wife; took care of her children, her man and the home. From the day she got her result her world turned upside down. A few years passed and she returned to the doctor, he told her she was cursed with AIDS and she was going to hell. He gave her two pills to be taken eight days apart and everything started going downhill after that.

She went into a state of depression, even to the point of being suicidal, because all her friends stayed away from her, and worst of all the church did not give her any support. The community members called her names.

She was close to dying when someone mentioned JASL to her. In 2006 she walked through the doors of JASL with her CD4 count in single digits. With continuous counseling sessions and clinic visits she now boasts a CD4 close to 800 and Viral Load that is undetectable. She now has a new lease on life and speaks highly of JASL and the service we provide because, as she would say:

"A JASL bring mi back to life".