



Through dance and mime, the Mother tongue Project in McGregor ensured young people attending the World Aids Day event in Robertson last week left with a strong message about the importance of precaution and safe sex.

PHOTO: HILDERINE SCHRÖDER

HIV often a catalyst for living life to the fullest

HILDERINE SCHRÖDER

Living with HIV is a tough road, but not a death sentence.

Vuyo* (19), from Nkqubela outside Robertson, knows this better than many people. She has been HIV-positive for two years after contracting the virus from her former boyfriend. He was the only partner she had ever had, but, she adds with a sad smile, he was not honest about his own status. "I've forgiven him now, though. It's in the past. What's done is done. It's important for myself to forgive."

Vuyo was one of many people who attended World Aids Day celebrations at the Callie de Wet Sports Grounds in Robertson last Tuesday. On the theme "Count me In", the event was a joint effort of the Western Cape Department of Health and the Cape Winelands District Municipality (CWDM), the latter its key funder.

Speaking to the *Breederivier Gazette* on the day, Claude Schroeder, Executive Director for Community and Developmental Services at the CWDM, stressed that local government has a vital role to play in creating greater

awareness regarding HIV/Aids and TB. "These diseases not only affect individuals but whole communities as well," he pointed out.

The Aids Day celebrations had a double purpose: to honour those living with HIV/Aids and to create awareness among young people to put up a united front against the disease by taking precaution.

Precaution and safe sex are something Vuyo is passionate about. "It's very important to use protection," she said. Something she, unfortunately, didn't do. "I trusted him," she said of her boyfriend.

She started to worry when she lost weight and felt sick. When tests revealed she was HIV positive she was devastated. "I cried for weeks," she said. Luckily, she had the support of her family. "They still give me immense support."

What the future holds is not yet clear, but Vuyo is determined to live life to the full. "Yes, I have to take my medicine every day, but it is still possible to live a full, fulfilling life. I am not ashamed. I am open about my status. I like who I am now: a stronger person."