MÂ·AÂ·C Attack

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She's only 26, but UNICEF media assistant Jabulisile Tugwana has it all figured out. "I've decided what I'm going to be doing for the rest of my life," Tugwana told *POZ*. "I'm going to be doing HIV/AIDS work."

She's one of 12 South Africans picked for the M A C AIDS Fund Leadership Initiative, a social prevention response to the AIDS epidemic in their home country. Tugwana spent two months training at New York City's Columbia University to bring AIDS education back to Johannesburg with her. She has since established a program for imprisoned juvenile offenders there, using peer-based education and services to teach them how to protect themselves and their families from HIV. "When you talk about gender and AIDS, people expect you to talk about women empowerment," she says. "But it's important to remember that empowerment can't happen if men's perceptions haven't changed." Tugwana was drawn to work with prisoners because few in her home country were willing to.

"Even educated and affluent people don't understand the severity of AIDS in South Africa," she says. "Prisoners are marginalized and ostracized from society. But if they don't have the tools and education to prevent AIDS, they will spread it."

The fund's executive director, Nancy Mahon, hopes that the graduates will create a prevention ripple effect. "It's not about one AIDS educator talking to a group of people," Mahon says. "It's about enough people in the community believing in the message and really looking at their sexual behavior."

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