

SUCCESS STORY

Restoring Hope Through Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT): A TASO Jinja Community Drug Distribution Point Care Group Supports Vulnerable Triplets Remain HIV Negative

USAID'S REGIONAL HEALTH INTEGRATION TO ENHANCE SERVICES IN EAST CENTRAL UGANDA (USAID RHITES-EC)

Nathan, Hudson, and Christopher are triplets born to Christine (39 years), a subsistence farmer living in Nkombe Village, Mawoota Parish, Mayuge District in East Central Uganda. Christine is one of 7,343 clients that receive care and treatment at The AIDS Support Organization (TASO)—Jinja, a non-governmental organization supported by USAID's Regional Health Integration for Enhanced Services in East Central Uganda (USAID RHITES-EC). Christine also belongs to Bukatube Community Drug Distribution Point (CDDP), a community HIV care group that provides HIV drug refills and care, including six-monthly clinical reviews to clients at a designated point in her home parish. It is this same support group that saved the lives of Christine's unborn triplets.

During a routine clinical review in the community, Christine's blood sample was obtained for a viral load test. When the test results were obtained, Christine's had a high viral load of 90,121 copies/ml. Christine's pregnancy test also revealed that she was three months pregnant. As part of routine care, six monthly reviews are conducted for patients in CDDPs'. During these reviews, a team comprising a counselor, expert client, laboratory personnel and clinician monitor treatment adherence and viral load suppression. The team also conducts pregnancy tests for all sexually active women to confirm pregnancy in a timely manner and support pregnant women to prevent HIV transmission to their unborn babies.



The TASO team (data officer and counsellor) visiting the triplets at Amani Children's Home. Photo: USAID RHITES-EC

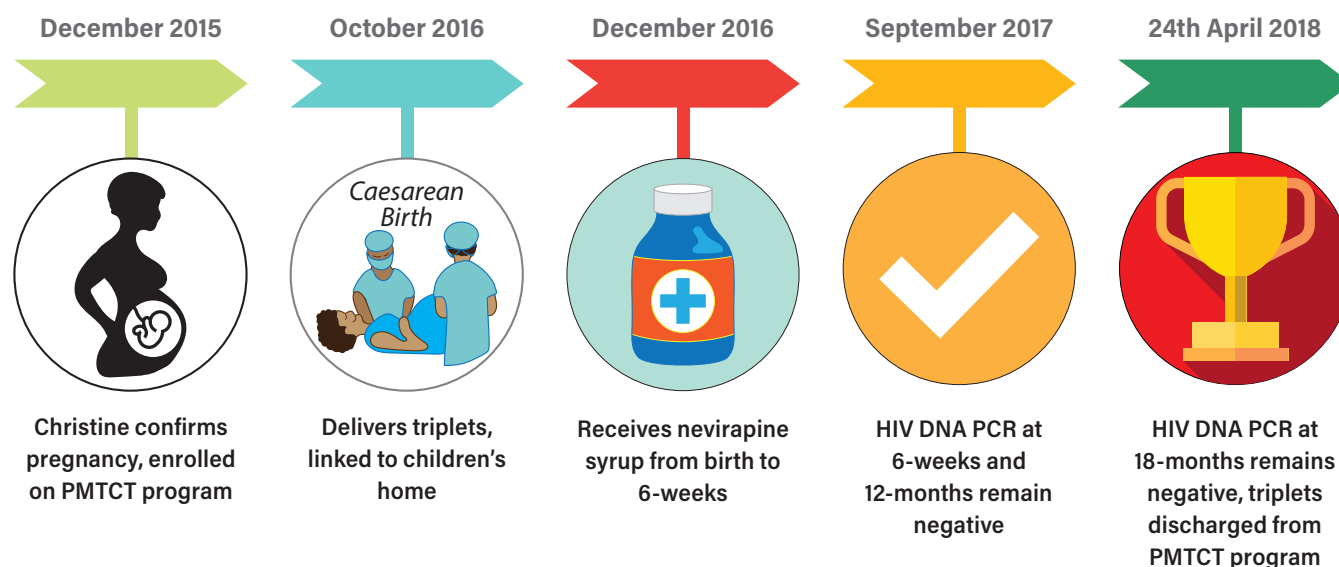
"I was picking up my medicines but was afraid to take them because my partner did not know that I was HIV-positive. In addition, my partner was not prepared for the pregnancy," Christine said.

With support from a counselor and an expert client, Christine was transferred back to TASO–Jinja for antenatal care (ANC) where she was enrolled in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and intensive adherence counselling

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Figure 1: The PMTCT Journey of the triplets from pregnancy to successful discharge as healthy HIV negative infants at 18-months of age



(IAC) programs. Throughout the pregnancy, members of the CDDP support team scheduled special visits at her home and offered her psychosocial support.

Christine was asked to bring Peter (her partner) to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) clinic, where the TASO team encouraged him to test for HIV. Peter tested HIV-negative. Through discordant couple counselling sessions, the couple stayed together. Peter supported Christine to continue attending ANC, eMTCT clinics and IAC sessions. After three consecutive monthly IAC sessions, Christine's viral load was undetectable.

On 12th October 2016, Christine gave birth to triplets at Jinja Regional Referral Hospital. Unfortunately, Peter, a subsistence farmer earning less than \$30 USD monthly, was unable to take care of Christine and the triplets. With Support from the TASO Jinja Team, volunteers and Jinja District Probation Officer, the triplets who were 21 days old, were referred and linked to Amani Children's Home. The parents continued to visit them once a month. The TASO Jinja team also provided a drug (Nevirapine syrup) to the triplets daily for a total of six weeks to prevent HIV transmission. TASO conducted follow-ups for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and anti-body tests at six weeks,

12 months, and 18-months. On 24th April 2018, the triplets were discharged from the PMTCT-EID (Early Infant Diagnosis) program with HIV negative results!

At three years old, the triplets were reunited with Peter and Christine in the presence of district, village, and culture leaders, as well as relatives to ensure that there is a full-time support system for them.

"We would like to thank TASO, Amani Children's Home, USAID RHITES-EC, family members, local leaders, the District Probation Officer and Community Development Officer for supporting our children during the first years of their lives. If it were not for them, the children would not be as healthy as they look today," said a grateful Peter and Christine.

With support from USAID RHITES-EC, TASO provides care and treatment to 7,343 clients, 96% of whom have achieved viral load suppression. In addition, 90% of pregnant women who have gone through the PMTCT program from 2016 to 2019 have delivered HIV-negative babies.