Chapter 9:  
**Inspiring HIV Testing in Upington, South Africa**

(Excerpt from Part Two: Stories of Learning)

Gail White tells the story in Chapter 9 of Thabang Pusoyabone, station manager from Radio Riverside in Upington, South Africa, taking an HIV test live on-air as part of a community learning programme. The story demonstrates the importance of formative research and the power of role modeling, especially when it is combined with live broadcast and real-time online media.

More information: [www.col.org/LearningWithCM](http://www.col.org/LearningWithCM)

COL's Healthy Communities programme: [www.col.org/HealthyCommunities](http://www.col.org/HealthyCommunities)
Fear of testing for HIV is driven by many factors, not least of which is the fear of rejection by family, friends, colleagues and others in the communities in which we live. It is a fear perpetuated by the stigma and discrimination associated with AIDS. Although the South African constitution protects people living with HIV from discriminatory practices, social realities tell a different story.

Regular testing for HIV is an important strategy in any national protocol to address the increasing prevalence of HIV. Through sharing stories and experiences of people who have already been tested, community media can play a vital role in the promotion of testing by providing accurate information, ensuring that listeners know where to access services, and helping to alleviate the fears associated with testing.

Radio Riverside, a community radio in Upington, South Africa, did just that. In an episode of the radio-based learning programme, *Summer for All*, which focused on HIV testing, the producers scripted a live HIV test, including pre- and post-test counselling, to guide listeners through the whole process of testing.

Needs assessments conducted for the *Summer for All* learning programme in Upington had shown that many people fear needles and blood. Many people assumed that an HIV test involved pain and large quantities of blood. People were also unsure about the length of time they would have to wait to get the results of their tests, and were anxious that their results would not be confidential. The live on-air HIV test was therefore scripted to cover all of these aspects.

The station manager at Radio Riverside, Thabang Pusoyabone, who is well known and respected in the Upington community, volunteered to do the test on air. A trained nurse conducted the test in the Riverside studios, explaining the process as she went along. She informed listeners from the outset of the programme that regardless of whether the test results were positive or negative, the results would remain strictly confidential.
HIV tests in South Africa are often done in informal settings using a mobile clinic, a service offered by civil society groups such as the Treatment Action Campaign and the Desmond Tutu Foundation. *Summer for All*, a community learning programme broadcast on Radio Riverside in Upington, South Africa, encourages listener-learner groups to make use of this service.

The outside broadcasting unit of Radio Riverside is used to engage with listeners by taking the studio into the community and promoting interaction and dialogue.
She also explained that she required only a drop of blood in order to do the test — the outcome of which would be available after just 15 minutes.

During the quarter-hour waiting period, the Summer for All presenter interviewed Thabang to find out how he was feeling and the reason for him testing. Thabang simultaneously updated his Facebook page, explaining that the reason that he had decided to be tested was so that he could lead by example. He expressed his hope that other colleagues and friends would do the same. Listeners were also given an opportunity to call the studio or to text their questions or messages of support during the programme, extending the dialogue into the listening community.

As a result of this programme, another popular presenter at the station also agreed to get tested and then shared his experience with listeners during his morning drive-time show as part of an HIV-testing campaign conducted by the health department. This simple intervention led to 79 people requesting an HIV test on the same day following the broadcast at a small rural health clinic in the area.

This example illustrates the power of radio as a vehicle for community learning. An important lesson learnt was that if communication programmes are produced to address people’s concerns, gaps in knowledge and the overall needs of the community, those programmes can lead to significant behavioural changes and measurable outcomes. As well, the HIV-testing radio campaign demonstrates the influence of community role models who lead by example.

Perhaps most significantly, the campaign highlights the power of storytelling and shared experiences in conveying health education in contrast to the use of traditional didactic approaches in which experts tell people what to do. This intervention was successful because listeners could relate to and identify with the experience of the station manager. They shared his anxiety in waiting for the test results and applauded his brave stance — and in return, they “rewarded” his behaviour by following his example.

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The Media and Training Centre for Health (MTC), established in 1994 as an affiliate to the National Progressive Primary Health Care Network,
has provided training to the majority of community radio stations in South Africa. MTC takes a collaborative approach to media development.

For further reference, see:

- Radio Riverside, Upington, South Africa – www.radio-riverside.co.za
- Media and Training Centre for Health – www.mtcforhealth.co.za
- “HIV Test Diary” episode of *Summer for All*, featured on Speaker’s Community Learning Programme show – www.spreaker.com/user/4497107/dagboek_toets_test_diary_riverside