

MY CASE STORY: RITA NYAMBURA

Born in 1999 in Dagoretti, Nairobi Kenya, I was abandoned and left under the care of MY grandmother who unlike majority of grandparents who love care and treasure their grandchildren, MY case was different since I was mistreated and malnourished by my maternal grandmother. My name is Rita Nyambura and this is my Recovery story

In 2012 at the age of 13 years, with no knowledge of my biological parents whereabouts and all the mistreatment by my grandmother I found a family that agreed to adopt me with the help of our then local area chief. My hope for a better, loving and caring home did not last, I was mistreated and beaten thoroughly by my new family and I was forced to work making it hard and difficult to concentrate on my studies.

On one Saturday my cousin (who was my confidant) came to my foster parent's home and asked me to accompany him to the shop. We had a conversation while on the way and he told me that he had a secret to reduce stress and pain after being beaten. He was older than me and hence he introduce me to powder tobacco (Chavez). I started using it and by the time I realized its effects I was already an addict. My then class teacher noticed that I was using Tobacco after she was informed by one of my friends who found it in my locker. A meeting was set between my teacher and my foster parents and they were informed about the drugs, what followed was a thorough beating and as a punishment I was eventually sent to a boarding school far away from home.

While in boarding school, I used to sneak out and go find the Tobacco and it was here that I substituted to using alcohol since it was more available than tobacco.

After completing my primary school education, through all the hardships and addiction to alcohol and tobacco, I ran away from my ruthless foster parents and I ended up in the streets where there were a lot more children of my age. It was in the streets that I met a girl who I used to spend time and sleep in the streets with who introduced me to Khat commonly referred to MIRAA. I was later arrested by the police and I was returned to my foster parents where I was taken to a boarding secondary school for my O level studies.

While in form 3, I got pregnant and I was suspended from school. I was taken back to my maternal grandmother's home by my foster parents since they couldn't take it anymore. My grandmother opened up and told me about my biological parents. She told me that my dad didn't anything to do with us and went ahead to marry another woman. She informed me that my mother left me at a tender age for greener pastures in another country.

At this time, I was still using Tobacco, Miraa and alcohol. I tried to terminate the pregnancy but it failed. My grandmother took me to a local day secondary school to complete my secondary education. At the beginning of my final year I was blessed with my baby girl. I had to drop out of school to tender for my young one. As much as I found school boring, I later returned to school to do my final secondary examination (KCSE) and I passed with a C+.

I later enrolled at the Kenya Medical Training College (KMTTC) to pursue a course in paramedics. While in college, I was introduced to Heroine by a friend who was a leader of a gang in the college. I started using/smoking heroine since I wanted to fit in to the group of 'cool' team. After my classes I used to go to a nearby den to buy some heroine and bhang. I used to lie to my grandmother to get money.

After I graduated with a Diploma in Paramedics, I ran away from home and back to the streets around the den that I used to go while in college. I would manipulate people through phone calls to obtain money to buy Heroin. One day due to addiction and lack of money, I sneaked to my grandmother's home and tried to 'steal' my daughter so that I could sell her to a woman who wanted to buy a baby in order to obtain money for the drugs. My grandmother was suspicious of my visit, since it was very rare for me to go visit them; she called the police and I ran away to avoid being arrested.

It was while living in the Den that I heard about a program called Medically Assisted Therapy (MAT) through a friend whom we were using Heroin together. I heard that MAT supported people with substance use disorder through the recovering process. Since Heroin had ruined my life, accompanied by my friend and boyfriend I took a bold step and went to the clinic. I started by receiving the treatment and I was subjected to Methadone; a medicine that help one to stop heroin and avoid the withdrawals effects. The clinic also offers free quality health care services and the staff have been trained on attitude change on how to handle people who use and Inject drugs thus there is no stigma and discrimination.

At this point of my life, I promised myself that if methadone would help me, I would never use Heroin again. While at the clinic through the clinic's manager, I heard about KENPUD (Kenya Network of People who Use Drugs) an organization that advocates for the rights of people who use drugs. The clinic's manager advised me to visit them (KENPUD) and I did so. My visit bore more fruits than I expected, I was offered a job opportunity as a Maskani Officer (peer educator). I was attached to the den that I used to go use drugs. I was happy about it because it a dream come true and an opportunity to serve the drug users in my area by educating them on their health and human rights and also encourage them on the importance of MAT.

So far so good, KENPUD has helped me achieve some of my goals; I have been able to enroll my daughter to school, I can comfortably rent my house, support my grandmother and also educate and help other drug users to join MAT.

My name is Rita, and am a recovering addict.