



Celebrating 21 years of *Stepping Stones*

1995-2016

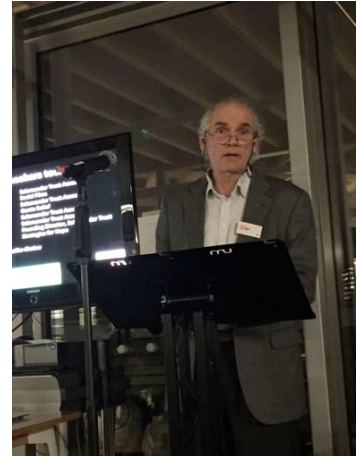
Stepping Stones Stories from Strategies for Hope.....



'Stepping Stones with Children' launch & 'Stepping Stones' 21st birthday Glen Williams

It's almost 21 years to the day now since the International Conference on HIV & AIDS in Africa, held in Kampala, Uganda, where Alice Welbourn and I officially launched the *Stepping Stones* training package.

But the story began in April 1993, when I asked Alice to develop a proposal for a film, and/or some printed materials, on the theme 'Women and AIDS in Africa'. We gave this project the working title '*Breaking the Barriers*'.



At the time, I was managing a project called *Strategies for Hope*, supported by ActionAid, and funded mainly by what is now called DfID, and was then the Overseas Development Administration, and NORAD. We were producing videos and case study booklets designed to promote practical strategies of HIV and AIDS care, support and prevention in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Our first video had been about the work of The AIDS Support Organisation, TASO, in Uganda. It was supported by a small, case study booklet. We expected Alice to produce something in the same kind of format. Little did we realize what lay in store for us...

Over the next 2½ years, Alice turned those initial plans on their head. Alice now proposed a fully-fledged training manual, not just for and about women, but for and about men too, and not just with adults but with young men and women also, supported by an optional training video. I suppose we could have objected to Alice's proposals, but we not only accepted them; we became enthusiastic advocates for them.



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ActionAid's project funding team came on board, and we began fund-raising in earnest. At the time, raising funds for HIV-related work was much easier than it is now. Within a few months, several donors had committed themselves to the project, which, in the meantime, had changed its name. '*Breaking the Barriers*' had become '*Stepping Stones*'.

In January 1994, Alice travelled to Uganda to carry out first hand research, with assistance from the local ActionAid country office in Kampala and the Redd Barna office in Mbarara. She also began drafting sections of the '*Stepping Stones*' manual.

In the Spring of 1994, however, Alice's work on '*Stepping Stones*' slowed down, and with good reason. I vividly remember sitting with Alice and Nigel in their home in Thame, when Alice told me that she was HIV-positive, and that she would need some time to make some adjustments in her life and work. At the time, anti-retroviral drugs were not yet available: being HIV-positive was widely regarded as a sentence of premature death.

But Alice was determined not to allow her HIV-positive diagnosis to deter her from continuing with the '*Stepping Stones*' project. On the contrary: if anything, being HIV-positive seemed to strengthen her absolute commitment to producing a training manual and video which would set new standards. Over the next several months she redoubled her efforts, and by mid-1994 she had written a first draft of the manual.

But the draft manual had to be tested and revised before it could be regarded as ready for publication. We also needed to organise the production of a video to accompany the '*Stepping Stones*' manual. To do so, Alice went back to the village of Buwenda in southwest Uganda, where she had previously done some research for the manual. Here she was joined by four Ugandan fieldworkers and a small film crew led by Jamie Hartzell from the UK. Over a period of four weeks, they carefully and painstakingly filmed all 15 scenes which now make up the 70 minutes of the '*Stepping Stones*' workshop video. At the end of the final workshop in Buwenda, the team showed the video footage to the local people. As friends and neighbours saw themselves and one another on screen for the first time, there was a lot of laughter, back-slapping and embarrassed grins, but



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generally everyone appearing in the video quite rightly felt immensely proud of their contributions.

Back in the UK, while Jamie Hartzell edited the '*Stepping Stones*' workshop video, Alice revised the manual, which eventually reached 240 pages in length. Both the manual and the video were completed in September 1995, but were not officially launched until December of that year, at the International HIV Conference in Kampala.

Before the conference, Alice did a quick survey of developments in the village since the '*Stepping Stones*' filming had taken place about 16 months earlier. These included significant changes in attitudes and behaviour within the four age and gender groups that had taken part in making the video. Young women and young men, for example, reported greater mutual respect for one another; older women and older men reported less wife-beating, less quarrelling and more sharing of household costs by couples; women in both age groups reported greater ability to discuss sexual issues with their children; and all four age and gender groups reported a sustained increase in condom use.

Many other evaluations of the impact of '*Stepping Stones*' have taken place during the past two decades. The accumulated evidence has led to international endorsement of '*Stepping Stones*' as a uniquely valuable tool in reducing gender-based violence and promoting safer sexual behaviour. I am confident that, at some time in the not-too-distant future, we shall also be celebrating the success of '*Stepping Stones with Children*' in protecting and promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Glen and Alison Williams ran the *Strategies for Hope* programme, which published the original *Stepping Stones* amongst many other resources. Between 1995 and 2015 they distributed nearly 41,000 *Stepping Stones*-related materials around the world.

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