

Nkosi was born in **South Africa** on February 4, 1989. He never knew his father, and his mother had a terrible illness: her body had a virus called HIV, which often leads to AIDS. When she was **pregnant** with Nkosi, he became infected with the virus too. There is no cure for AIDS. In Nkosi's country, more than 70 000 babies are born with HIV, and half the people under the age of 15 will die of AIDS over the next 10 years.



Nkosi Johnson

A Young Hero

Babies that are born infected usually do not live longer than two years in South Africa. But Nkosi was **strong**. Sadly though, when he was two years old, Nkosi's mother had to take him to an AIDS care centre because she was too sick to care for him herself. A volunteer worker named Gail Johnson asked Nkosi's mother if she could become Nkosi's **foster mother**. She agreed and Nkosi became Gail's foster son. Together, Gail and her friends started a new **AIDS care centre** for children. They called it Nkosi's Haven.

In 1997, Nkosi's biological mother died of an AIDS-related illness. Even at this trying time, Nkosi was **fighting** another battle of his own. Nkosi and his foster mother wanted him to go to school, but some of the parents didn't want him there because he had **HIV**. Gail Johnson began to talk to the public about the problem, and eventually, Nkosi was allowed to go to school. After this happened, Nkosi Johnson became a hero. He began to travel and give **speeches**, helping others to understand HIV and not be afraid of people who had AIDS.

As Nkosi spoke for people living with AIDS, he often said these words:

"Care for us and accept us – we are all **human beings**...We are normal. We have hands. We have feet. We can walk, we talk, we have needs just like everyone else. Don't be afraid of us. We are all the same!"

In 2001, Nkosi Johnson died of AIDS. He was 12 years old.

