

## SNAPSHOT

# Youth-Friendly Health Services

Youth in Kenya can receive health services like HIV testing and counseling and reproductive health care.



Photo: Serah Njenga/APHIAplus Kamili

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When adolescents walk into a health facility seeking reproductive health services, their hope is to meet a health care worker who understands their issues regarding sex, relationships, drug abuse or unplanned pregnancies. The last thing the teenager expects is to be misunderstood, judged or — worse still — given a cold shoulder.

Bernadette Mbaka, a nurse at Kitui District Hospital’s Youth-Friendly Service Center, knows this well. The center, which APHIAplus Kamili established in partnership with Kitui’s County Department of Health in September 2013, has been an eye-opening experience for Mbaka.

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The Youth-Friendly Center targets people aged 15 to 25, providing integrated services in HIV testing and counseling, reproductive health, family planning and cervical and breast cancer screening.

APHIAplus Kamili trained Mbaka on long-term family planning methods. She started visiting the outpatient department waiting bay and the maternity and gynecological wards twice a week to spread the word among youth about the Youth-Friendly Center.

“Within a short time, the number of youth visiting the center increased. I was overwhelmed!” Mbaka said. She cares for approximately 120 patients a month.

Working with an APHIAplus Kamili peer educator at the center has allowed the team to perform HIV testing and counseling for all clients. Those who test positive are linked to HIV care and treatment. The peer educator personally escorts HIV-positive patients to the facility’s HIV services clinic and ensures that they enroll.

Mbaka explained that the services offered are not limited to health issues. “We often get clients brought in, either by parents or teachers, for disciplinary counseling or to discuss poor performance in school. These sessions are very helpful because the clients end up opening up to me and together we find solutions to help them make better life choices,” she explained.

APHIAplus KAMILI supports five youth-friendly service centers across in Kitui, Embu, Machakos, Meru and Kirinyaga.