

Zuki addresses Aids in the workplace

By ANGELA GRAHAM

NOT many people are comfortable in the role of HIV and Aids advisor, despite the government's drive to make the disease less stigmatised.

Yet it is a role that Zuki Bhaku approaches with passion because she's realised that this is one of her purposes in life – to advise and counsel those infected and affected by the disease.

This role has been a driving force in her career and it's one reason she has ended up as an employee relations manager at a Port Elizabeth tyre manufacturer.

One of Zuki's key roles is to advise employees living with HIV within the company and make sure they have what they need in terms of nutrition, anti-retroviral drugs, family understanding and support.

It is a role she takes to heart because her brother died of the disease a few years ago.

"He was very quiet about it and none of us



REACHING OUT . . . Zuki Bhaku hands out e-Pap to workers.

knew until it was too late," says Zuki. "It's important that people infected with HIV have the support of their families and it is equally important that families come to terms with the disease.

"I don't wish to see another family experiencing what we went through when we lost my brother."

When a good friend

and some acquaintances began confiding their HIV status to Zuki, she realised that because of her experience with her brother, those infected could now talk to her with ease about their challenges.

That in turn has meant she has found her purpose in a society where people still avoid anyone who discloses

their HIV status.

This purpose had a lot to do with Zuki's upbringing. She was born in Duncan Village in East London and forcefully removed to Mdantsane in the early 1970s.

Her mother was a psychiatric nurse and, throughout her childhood, Zuki remembers people with psychiatric problems coming to the

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house to seek help.

"As children, we were never allowed to make fun of people who were different from us and this taught us to show compassion and respect," said Zuki.

"These are some of the fundamental qualities I need to do my job. It never escaped us that we were just luckier than others as we were constantly reminded that the tables could turn any time. My mom was and still is my chief inspiration."

Zuki graduated with a B Sc and a psychology honours from the University of Zululand.

When Stellenbosch University introduced a post-graduate diploma in the management of HIV Aids in the world of work, Zuki was one of its first graduates and she now is studying for her masters degree in HIV Aids management.

When Continental

Tyres in Port Elizabeth offered her the post of employee relations manager, it seemed like a dream come true.

"It was everything I wanted to do," she says.

Zuki worked quickly to install many employee benefits and social initiatives at the firm. For example, the workforce now receives a nutritional supplement, e-Pap, known to boost immunity especially in people living with the virus.

Zuki also initiated a feeding scheme for creches in the sur-

rounding communities through the supplier of e-Pap.

"Our employees are from these areas, and it is pointless trying to keep them happy at work if the communities in which they are living are in pain. It's all part of the same system and has to be seen as such," she says.

She has had such an impact at Conti that she was recently awarded the international award from Continental AG in Europe – and flew to Germany to receive it.

Her real reward, though, is seeing the light in a person's face when they realise they're going to get help – someone is not going to turn their back and walk away.