

## Skillshare development worker shares lessons with UK practitioners

When she visited friends and family in the UK earlier this year, Skillshare International development worker Wairimu Gachungi extended her trip to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS issues, leading discussions with 40 health and development practitioners and community volunteers in Leicestershire.

A visit to the UK by a current development worker is a rare event because they are usually working thousands of miles away, often in remote rural locations, without the resources necessary for international travel. So Skillshare International welcomed the opportunity to facilitate public engagement activities when Wairimu came to the UK in January 2009.

We invited Wairimu to give a presentation about her work at lunchtime and again early in the evening, to maximise the opportunity for people working in health and community development to attend. In each slot she gave a detailed presentation about her work to audiences comprising around 20 health and development practitioners and community volunteers.

Wairimu is the HIV and AIDS Mainstreaming Officer with Kang Brigade Development Trust in Botswana, a community based vocational education training organisation. Her role focuses on the facilitation and coordination of the pilot of an HIV and AIDS mainstreaming programme, including documentation of best practice for replication in similar 'brigades'. At the events in Leicester, she shared examples of good practice including forming HIV and AIDS groups with young people, integrating health messages into sport and entertainment activities, community mobilisation, peer to peer education and peer counselling. The audiences engaged in lively discussions about the challenge of some cultural differences, including attitudes to violence against women, under age sex (including between teachers and pupils) and attitudes towards sex between men.



*Skillshare International development worker Wairimu Gachungi, © Skillshare*

The events were jointly organised by Skillshare International and Leicestershire AIDS Support Services (LASS), a fellow member of the UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development, and were a successful first collaboration on our common interest to develop public understanding of issues around HIV and AIDS. Both organisations have strong local networks of practitioners, friends and activists and this was an opportunity to learn about the commonalities between Southern Africa and the UK in terms of the epidemic and responses to it, with the aim of improving approaches and building public support for action on HIV and AIDS.

The activities with Wairimu inspired further collaborative working between Skillshare International and LASS, who have organised a second public meeting, this time with a health worker from Ghana.