***Louise’s story 1st December 2016***

***Louise\*(real names have been changed\*) from North Yorkshire was diagnosed as HIV positive at aged 19***

*When Louise met a new man at the age of 19 she was naturally cautious before entering into a sexual relationship. She asked about his sexual history and was given reassurance that there would be nothing to worry about. The relationship ended a few months later and Louise couldn’t shake off her suspicions that something wasn’t quite right.*

*It took a while to build up the courage but Louise followed her gut instinct and went to her local sexual health clinic for a check-up. Unfortunately Louise tested positive for HIV, a diagnosis that turned her world upside down.*

*Louise said: “Luckily I had a really good friend who I could confide in and I had already discussed my doubts as to how safe I really had been with my previous partner. Having a supportive friend really did help me cope with the diagnosis. The team at the clinic were fantastic but the worst part of it all was that I had to have my child tested. Even though she was born before my previous relationship I had so many doubts as to whether I’d kept her safe enough and worried about all the ways I could have put her at risk. All I could think was - could I have passed it on?*

*“After a stressful wait for test results thankfully it came back negative. While that was a huge relief I was finding it really hard to cope with the whole situation. I faced the normal pressures of any young mum and on top of that the reality of my situation.”*

*Louise had the support of a HIV specialist nurse but had reached a real low point and sought help from North Yorkshire AIDS Action (NYAA) where she received counselling for over a year, helping her to adjust to her situation.*

*Louise continued: “My HIV specialist nurse was a fantastic support, explaining what medication was available and how I could best manage my condition. I was reluctant at first to take medication but after having a close call when protection failed with a new partner, and seeing what they had to go through, I realised I needed to do everything I could to eliminate risks. I now take regular medication which is quite a commitment but the most important thing for me is to stay well for my child.”*

*Five years on Louise still struggles with knowing who to trust in relationships and how open to be, particularly as she lives in a small town.*

*She said: “It’s difficult but I always reveal my HIV status before I begin a new relationship. I could never knowingly put someone at risk – I wouldn’t want anyone to feel the way I felt. Having a child to look after has kept me strong and I’ve realised I do deserve to be happy - I just need to find the right person to be happy with.*

*“Looking back I realise how naive I was just taking somebody’s word for it that it was safe to sleep with them. I would warn anyone to make sure they practice safe sex and have regular sexual health check-ups, and if you’re not sure talk to someone about it.”*