

Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women

December 2008

1214 Steelhead Ct, Ste 3B, Columbia, MO 65203, 573-445-5820, www.StepUpRwandaWomen.org

From its beginning in 2006, the Step Up organization has partnered with an organization of women in the tiny village of Sahera in southern Rwanda. The Abasa organization represents a community of about 60 women and their children. The women were all raped during the 1994 genocide and many of them are living with HIV/AIDS. Step Up has been providing trauma counseling, training and funding for income-generating projects for the women.



The annual activities for Step Up reached a peak in July when a team of board members and volunteer counselors traveled to the village of the Abasa women for a cow giving ceremony. Step Up received donations from U.S. contributors to give a cow to 12 women in the Abasa organization. The July ceremony marked the official handing over of the cows to the women who gave each cow a name following Rwandan tradition. The cows are part of the Step Up initiative to assist the women to generate income to support themselves and their children. The cow project also mirrors Rwanda's rural economic development plan for each household to own a cow. The donations covered the cost of purchasing the cows and building stables for them. Each cow and stable cost \$400.

As part of the cow giving ceremony, some of the Abasa women gave speeches and read a poem that they wrote to thank members of the Step Up organization for helping them in the last three years. The women gave the Step Up team members peanuts and other grains from the harvest of crops that Step Up funding enabled them to plant. The women wanted to show their appreciation and to demonstrate how much the Step Up micro-finance projects have helped them.



A happy Abasa woman with her cow



Two political leaders from the area were present at the ceremony. The officials promised to help the Abasa women with cow breeding and veterinary care free of charge. They also agreed to look into the possibility of providing land to the other Abasa women who are eager to receive a cow.

The officials were also supportive of the proposal to plant Moringa trees in the Abasa village as another income-generating project. Moringa trees have already been planted in the southern region and have potential as a marketable source of food and medicines. The Rotary Club of Columbia, Missouri is exploring collaboration with the Rotary Club of Kigali, Rwanda to support start-up of the project in 2009.

Representatives among the Abasa women who are participating in a honey beekeeping project also reported to the Step Up team about their accomplishments. Beekeeping was traditionally the work of men in Rwanda. The Abasa beekeeping project is the first one in the country to be owned and operated by women only. Thanks to the training provided through the intervention of Step Up, eight Abasa women have learned the skills for keeping bees and they are planning to teach these skills to women in other associations.



Participants in the trauma training

Training in Trauma Counseling

Fourteen years after the 1994 genocide, there is still only a handful of professionally-trained and certified psychologists and psychiatrists in Rwanda. The national mental health needs are met primarily by social workers who are high school graduates and are not trained as therapists. The need for therapists is extreme, with many individuals still suffering trauma reactions and depression as a result of the genocide. The risk is that, like children of Holocaust survivors, the children of genocide survivors will develop problems that are a reflection of their parent's experiences.

In July, Step Up started phase one of its collaboration with the Kigali Health Institute (KHI) to train trauma counselors in Rwanda. KHI is the Rwandan institution that trains allied health professionals in physical therapy, nursing and dentistry. A team of five Step Up mental health professionals from Missouri, California and Washington state presented a two-week intensive training program in trauma therapy to 18 of the faculty, staff and students at KHI. The volunteer team paid for their round trip tickets to Kigali and KHI provided lodging in its guesthouse.

The team gave lectures and demonstrations on such topics as listening skills, relaxation, therapies in the treatment of trauma and issues of sexual and domestic violence in survivors of genocide. Brent Blair, from the University of Southern California, presented a program on "Theater of the Oppressed"

which engaged the participants in nonverbal expressions of trauma and oppression.

The administration and faculty at KHI are eager to have more short training courses from the Step Up team and, if possible, to develop a degree program to train professional counselors.

2009 Fundraiser

Step Up is planning to hold its annual fundraising event on May 2, 2009. The fundraiser will consist of a dinner with entertainment by a Rwandan ballet group followed by a silent auction. We are soliciting items for the silent auction.

Membership and Donations

If you are interested in sustaining the ongoing Step Up projects in Rwanda, consider joining Step Up or making a tax-deductible donation. Membership information is available below or on our website. If you are already a member of Step Up, we appreciate your support and encourage you to renew your membership for 2009.

The Columbia, Missouri Rotary Club will assist the Abasa women to start raising chickens and rabbits in the coming year. Please inform Step Up if you know of other Rotary clubs that might be willing to sponsor any of these income-generating projects to help the Abasa women become self-sufficient.

We encourage you to join Step Up! to bring hope to the survivors of the Rwandan genocide.

Your donation will help us build and maintain the Rwanda counseling center to assist women survivors of rape and other gender-based violence. The center will be called *Nsanga*, which means “come to me” and it will be a place for hope and healing.

As a friend of Step Up! you will receive our quarterly newsletter and information about events and trips that Step Up! members will be taking to Rwanda. You will also receive updates on how our endeavors are assisting the families of Rwanda.

Member Information:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Membership Levels

\$500 - Platinum Level

\$300 - Gold Level

\$200 - Silver Level

\$100 - Bronze Level

\$60 - Basic Membership

\$25 - Student Membership

One Time Donation

Donation Amount \$ _____