

Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women

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MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER

When I started Step Up 15 years ago, I knew for sure it was going to be a long and a strenuous enterprise. I was not sure if I would reach my destination but I was determined to undertake the journey anyway. As Mahatma Gandhi rightly put it:

"It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result."

When I start Step Up, I was not sure where my journey would lead me. Even the women of Abasa who I wanted to help had some doubt about me! After interviewing them, one of them asked me if I would keep in touch and try to help them or if I would, like anyone else, write my book and just forget about them. My answer was simple. "Do you believe in miracles," I asked. A couple of them said, "we are trying to do so." Faced with that skeptical answer, I just offered them a few words from my heart: "When I came to you," I said, "my hands were empty and they are even emptier after listening to you. But my heart is full and it is asking me to do the right thing. Please help me to believe in my heart."



The Women of Abasa

As Gandhi said, I did the right thing and was fortunate to see the fruit of my actions that started only 15 years ago. Together, the Step Up board members, advisors and

supporters have seen great results from our actions to help the women of Rwanda. Since 2004, the friends of Step Up and its donors have changed. This January 2019 Newsletter retraces the history of Step Up giving our progress over the last fifteen years.



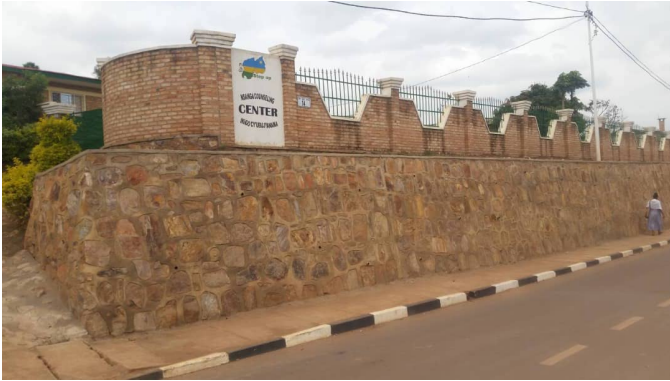
Cow Giving Ceremony

STEP UP HISTORY AND MISSION

Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2004 by Professor Rangira Béa Gallimore whose mother, sister, and 3 brothers were killed in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Ten years after dealing with her personal loss, she found a sense of meaning and purpose in tragedy by helping others to heal. Dr. Joan McEachen and her husband Phil, urged Dr. Gallimore to take the first step in acting on her desire to help. She did so by recruiting friends and colleagues with expertise in counseling, psychology and psychiatry. They formed the nucleus of advisors and original board members for Step Up.

The objective outlined by the Step Up board members was to empower Rwandan women survivors of the genocide by increasing the availability of mental and behavioral health services for this population with a significant trauma history. The mission was also to establish a counseling center as a safe space where those

affected by trauma could receive service and interact with each other.



The Nsanga Center

STEP UP APPROACH AT INCEPTION IN 2004

August 2004 to June 2006 was the inception and establishment phase of the organization. During that time, we determined the project scope and objectives while gathering information about the need for mental health services in the post-genocide Rwanda. It was also the period for writing grants to obtain funding, organizing fundraisers and identifying donors so that the project could proceed.

In June 2006, two psychologists who were members of Step Up joined Professor Gallimore in Rwanda. She was doing academic research in Butare on sexual violence and its consequences after the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda. Through her research, Béa as she likes to be called, had already identified the Abasa association as a potential partner for Step Up to work with in Rwanda. The Abasa association was made up primarily of widows along with some of their young daughters who were raped during the genocide. Many among them suffered from fistula. Also among them were several infected with HIV.



The Nsanga Center

The word “abasa” in the Rwanda national language, Kinyarwanda, means those who look alike or share the same destiny. The Abasa women chose that name to indicate the unfortunate resemblance they shared since 1994--genocidal rape. Not only were the Abasa women mentally affected, they were physically weak and too financially deprived to go on with their normal lives. After seeing first-hand the conditions in Rwanda, the Step Up trauma team suggested that the board redefine our objectives. It was clear that a holistic approach was needed in the circumstances to help these women get back on their feet. Their financial needs were also given priority based on the many responses provided by Abasa members in their interviews with the Step Up team. Although their HIV medication was free at that time, the necessary nutrition to keep them alive and to cope with the harshness of HIV medication was an obstacle underlined during our interviews with the women.



The Nsanga Center Grand Opening

Step Up redefined and amplified its objectives after this encounter with the women in Abasa. Step Up adopted the Abasa Association and decided to provide direct support to them. Since 2006, support to the Abasa women has included micro-finance projects in concert with the government of Rwanda and participation in the GIRINKA one cow per family program. Apiculture training was provided to eight women of the Abasa. Direct micro-finance loans were given to enable the women to start their own income-generating projects in accordance with the goals of the Rwanda Vision 2020 national development strategy. Step Up also supported continuing education for some of the Abasa young girls. The youngest of them was 7 years old during the genocide. Most of them had already quit school and didn't see a bright future in front of them. Scholarships provided by Step Up allowed these young ladies to attend secondary and post-secondary schools. We are proud to announce that two of them have already graduated from college.



Women Preparing Donuts to Sell at the Nsanga Center

ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNSELING CENTER

Although the construction of a counseling center was put on hold, in 2006 Step Up started sponsoring and providing intensive educational workshops on mental and behavioral health issues, including cognitive and neurological issues, for practitioners who work with Rwandan trauma survivors and their dependents. Through the years, these workshops and mental health trainings culminated in the establishment of the Nsanga Association that was made up particularly of Step Up trainees. Established in 2009, the Nsanga Association is our Rwandan partner and sister organization located in the city of Butare in the Huye District of southern Rwanda. For several years, the Nsanga Association organized and delivered *pro bono* psychological services in a small room provided by the local government.



Prepared Donuts at the Nsanga Center

In 2013, Step Up was finally able to purchase an old house in Butare that was remodeled and expanded to be used as a permanent community-based health and counseling center. Like the association, the counseling center was called the Nsanga Center. It was named after Béa Gallimore's mother who was killed in 1994, at the age of 66. She was called Nsanga which means "come to me or welcome". It is a name that embodies the

kindness, hospitality and generosity that defined Béa's mother through her life.

The grand opening of the Nsanga Center took place in 2016 and it has been operating since then. The main clients at the center are women survivors of rape, children (today's young adults) born from rape, and children whose identity is still uncertain because they were babies found alive next to dead bodies in 1994. The questions about identity and lack of kinship have caused psychological and other difficulties in their lives.

The Step Up objective for the time being is to staff and equip the center to provide onsite mental and behavioral health assessment and treatment to survivors of genocide such as the Abasa members and other traumatized people in the general population. Space at the center is also being used to provide education and training.



Women Enjoying Donuts and Tea at the Nsanga Center

Our greatest obstacle to success is finding funds to staff and sustain the center. Thanks to your help, since 2017 we have been able to provide a modest salary to Jeanne Nyirakamana (BS & MS in Clinical Psychology) who has worked without pay since 2006 as a representative of Step Up in Rwanda. Other counselors trained in mental health and graduates from the Clinical Psychology Department at the University of Rwanda in Huye (at undergraduate and graduate level) are eager to be hired at the center but we are unable to provide a salary to them. Any money raised by Step Up sponsored events or received through donations goes towards the sustainability of our ongoing Rwandan projects described above.

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