

# Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women

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## Message from the Founder

When we were young, my mother would send me or one of my siblings to find the lamp in the house so that it could be cleaned and lit up for the night. Often it was already dark inside our modest house making it really hard to find the lamp. When I was the one charged with the task, I would always come back empty handed. My mother would say to me, “go again search and search (*gushakashaka*) and if you do not find it, “search by your heart.” I hated that expression! I always asked myself, “how in the world could one search by the heart in the darkness?”

As a scholar and a researcher (*Umushakashatsi*) teaching at the University of Missouri-Columbia, I was used to searching with my mind. When I suffered the personal tragedy of losing many members of my family in the 1994 genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda, it seemed that the light of my life was snuffed out. During that darkness, it was only when I remembered my mother’s words and I resolved to search by the heart that I was successful in finding personal peace and a way to contribute to peace building through my work as a teacher, scholar, and as a humanitarian through Step Up. I owe many thanks to all the friends of Step Up who helped me to rekindle my own light and the light of the many women of Rwanda that Step Up has been assisting since 2006.

Happy New Year! May light shine over your life in 2018!

## Addition To Nsanga Counseling Center

In 2017, Step Up made a new addition to the Nsanga Counseling Center in Rwanda. For those new to Step Up, the Nsanga Center building was purchased and remodeled by Step Up. Although it started operating in 2014, the grand opening for the center took place in the summer of 2016. Since then, Step Up has been helping its sister association in Rwanda to operate and maintain the center by paying the utility and security bills as well as the annual taxes. We are thrilled to report that thanks to the initiative of Jeanne Nyirakamana, the Rwandan representative of Step Up and the manager of the Nsanga Center, the center is now financially self sufficient since the installation of a commercial-grade oven for baking bread. Jeanne proposed that Step Up help in building the oven which was completed in May 2017. The center has been producing bread for sale and using the proceeds to pay for the annual operating expenses. Additionally, the center serves tea with milk along with the bread to women living with HIV who visit the center for counseling.



Oven at the Nsanga Center



Fresh Baked Goods at Nsanga Center

### **Salary for Jeanne Nyirakamana**

Jeanne Nyirakamana took charge of mental health counseling at the Nsanga Center and is doing a tremendous job in providing several group sessions for women and young people in the community, especially those who recently learned from their mothers or relatives that they are the children of rape. They are now in their twenties and are still struggling to cope with the terrible consequences of the genocide in 1994. Jeanne has been working on voluntarily basis since 2006. Last year, we were able to start paying her a salary of \$400 a month thanks to pledges and donations from Step Up friends and supporters. We are counting on your continued pledges and contribution towards her modest salary in 2018. You can pledge a month of her salary, or make any other contribution to help us to meet our \$5,000 goal in 2018.



### **In Memory of Dr. Flore Zephir, a Dear Friend of B  a Gallimore and Step Up**

B  a and the members of Step Up in Columbia, Missouri are extremely saddened to inform you of the death of our dear friend and colleague Dr. Flore Zephir who was a professor and later the chair of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Missouri. B  a and Flore met in 1981 in graduate school at Indiana University, Bloomington. They later reconnected in 1990 at the University of Missouri where they both taught in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. They had been friends for almost 40 years until her sudden death on December 15, 2017, during heart surgery. Like most friends of B  a, Flore was a very good friend of Step Up and a diligent supporter of the organization's work as B  a's colleague and department chair. Flore was present at several Step Up fundraising events and at the many lectures and workshops co-sponsored by Step Up and the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. In the words of B  a, "Flore was my friend, my confidant, my soul mate and she will be remembered by many for her integrity, compassion, advocacy for justice and her joy that still irradiates many hearts".