

Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women

January 2015

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

Message from the President

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." **Maya Angelou**

In 2006, as a researcher, I met the women of Abasa—an organization of about 60 women and their children. The women were all raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. My research was centered on analyzing the voices and stories of female survivors of sexual violence. But instead, I was met with their silence. I set out to interview the Abasa women to gather information for my research, but I immediately saw that these women were harboring unthinkable stories of tragedy and abuse that even they had never expressed or processed mentally and emotionally. It was at that point that I put my socio-linguistic research aside and began building relationships of trust and support with the women by listening to what they wanted to share with me, not as a researcher, but as a friend. As most of you reading this newsletter know, my mission started as a case study, but through the Step Up association it became a journey of engagement and understanding with the Abasa women. I am so thankful that you have chosen to accompany me along this journey by supporting Step Up.

I am pleased to report that Step Up has reached its initial goal! As of July 2014, Step Up finished construction of a counseling center for the Abasa women and other genocide survivors in the community. We were able to achieve this goal due to the hard work of Step Up board members, your generosity, and the moral support from American and Rwandan friends. However, the establishment of this center would not have been possible without the enduring strength and resiliency of the Abasa women who shared with me the atrocities they endured and their mental anguish which allowed me to see the need for increased mental health resources in Rwanda.



Renovated Entrance to Nsanga Center



Nsanga Center Gate with Logo

I spent the last academic year on sabbatical from the University of Missouri in order to continue my research in Rwanda. On December 13, 2013, Step Up purchased a single-family house in Huye District to use as a location for a psychological counseling and training center. During the first 6 months of 2014, the house underwent major renovation to convert it from a family residence to a professional clinical facility. Jeanne Nyirakamana, our Step Up representative in Rwanda, and I oversaw the

necessary renovations which transformed the home into a clinic. We are pleased to showcase the new look of the building in the enclosed pictures.



Bea Gallimore Greeting Guests to Nsanga Center

The counseling center is named “Nsanga,” after my mother, who was brutally murdered along with my three brothers and a sister in the 1994 genocide of the Tustis. Nsanga means "come to me" or "welcome." The center's name is fitting because my mother never stopped giving her time, love and service to all people she encountered in hopes that her actions could build a better world. Similar to my mother's aim, we are striving to make the Nsanga Center a place where Rwandans will feel welcome to receive support, hope and care. Thank you for helping me to honor and acknowledge my mother's service, humanity and spirit of compassion that touched everyone she encountered in her life.

In August, we had a modest ceremony for the informal opening of the Nsanga Center so that counseling could begin on a small scale. We are still in need of counselors at the Nsanga Center. Currently, all counseling is done on a voluntarily basis and counselors can only work at the Center on a part-time basis because these volunteers must work other jobs to sustain themselves and their family. The Step Up Board is currently applying for more grants to secure funding to hire two full-time staff members (at \$500/a month for each employee, totaling \$12,000/a year). The Nsanga Center will not be eligible to receive any assistance from the local government until after one year of operation. Therefore, in this first year, financial assistance is critical.



Renovated Nsanga Center

In September 2015, I am taking early retirement from the University of Missouri after 25 years of service. My retirement will allow me to devote more time to Step Up and to other genocide education projects in Rwanda. I will also be planning the grand opening of the Nsanga Center that will take place in July 2016 (a year and a half from now). Please mark your calendars, as I hope that many of you will be able to attend. Step Up will also be organizing a vacation package for all who would like to attend the grand opening. This unique experience in educational tourism will include competitive airfare to Rwanda, a 10-day hotel stay, transportation within Rwanda, visits to memorials sites, the Akagera Game Park and an excursion to track the famous and rare Rwandan mountain gorillas. This trip planning service will be free of charge. However, we encourage all who would like to take advantage of this unique opportunity to give a donation to Step Up in return for arranging the travel package. Please recruit as many friends and family as you can for this exciting expedition in the heart of Africa. Thank you, as always, for your continued support of Step Up. Happy New Year and we hope to see you in Rwanda in 2016!