



Umatima [HEART]

*Reviving the Women
of Rwanda*

A Division of the Elevation Project

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The Pulse of Africa



"If you want to know the pulse and strength of Africa, spend a day with the women of a village. In the midst of deep suffering, domestic abuse, societal and poverty constraints, the women are the stability of Africa. They will carry the buckets upon their heads, touch the wounds of the sick, accept the burdens of helping the village survive - and all the while, they will be singing praises to God."

*~ Jena Lee
Hope in the Dark*



If you were to spend some time on the Youth for Christ compound in Kigali, Rwanda, you would meet a group of women who typify that statement. Women like Rose, Marvita and Delphine.



Living Like Widows

Rose

In 1996, Rose was a prostitute, hooked on alcohol and drugs, and involved in witchcraft. She was considered a crazy person in her village, and no one wanted to be her friend. She had three children who she never cared for and who didn't know their father.

One day, intending to go and ridicule the local prayer group, Rose got connected to Rwanda Youth for Christ (YFC). On Christmas of 1999, Rose began a new journey; one that didn't include drugs, alcohol or prostitution.

With her main source of income (prostitution) gone, Rose and her children had a very hard time getting enough money for food. It was during this difficult time that Rwanda YFC gave Rose the opportunity to work on the compound.

Rose is now able to afford food for her three children and the two others she takes care of. She thanks God that she got a job that she didn't even apply for. She thanks Him for using Rwanda Youth for Christ. When she came to the compound she was very miserable, but now she has joy.

Rose never thought that she could be of any use, but now she has learned a lot. She knows how to make paper beads, and braid hair, and she is intent on teaching others. She thought because of AIDS, her death was imminent and no one would want to be friends with her. Now she sees herself as loveable and useful.



Marvita



As a young girl Marivita was raped and became pregnant. She had a healthy baby boy who she loved, but she had a very difficult time liking men and thought that she would never get married. She was encouraged by a neighbor that there are good men and that if she found someone who loved her, she must also try to love him. Eventually, Marvita met a man who loved her and cared for her son as his own. They were married and had a child together.



In 1994, Marvita was pregnant with her third child (her and her husband's second baby together) when they went for an AIDS test. At that time the results took about a month, and before they were able to get their results, the genocide began. Her husband and oldest daughter were killed. Marvita was left alone with two children to try and care for. Even her family had rejected her.

Eventually, Marvita and her children were taken in by a friend who helped her find a plot of land so that she would be able take care of herself. Her friend helped her begin work on a house, but passed away soon after.

Nine years later, the house is still unfinished and, during the rainy season, it is like they are living outside. Marvita has since gone for another test and has been diagnosed with AIDS.



When one of her husband's relatives died, she took in two of their children. Now with four children to care and provide for, Marvita found it even more difficult. During this time, one of the local leaders came and told her she should go to Youth for Christ, so she did. She found this group of women and was integrated in to it. She is well accepted, and with the payment she receives for her work at YFC she now has some money to buy food for her and her family.

Delphine

In 1995, when Delphine was 15, her family was attacked and many of her relatives killed. After this she left to find a new life in the city. She got a job in a white man's house, and for a young woman with no education, things were looking up.

When she was 17, she missed a payday due to malaria. When she went to go and collect her pay a few days later, she was directed to the man who had taken her money. Delphine went to this man and he raped her. Because of her lack of education, the authorities did not believe her when she reported it. Instead they forced her to live with him. She was not accepted in his village, and life was very difficult.

Delphine and her rapist had two children together when he forced her out of his house. She lived with her mother until she died, and then went to live with her father until her rapist came and forced her back to his house.

It was when she was pregnant with her third child that she went for an AIDS test. It was positive. When she told the man, Delphine found out that he had been diagnosed long ago, and had been taking medication since, but had never told her. In fact, in her efforts to protect him by telling him about her positive test, he ridiculed her and told her she did not behave like a city woman.

Delphine and this man live together still. They are not legally married so neither she, nor her children have any right to his inheritance. He does not provide for them, but is just another person in the house.

In the midst of that ongoing misery, Delphine is thankful for her job at Rwanda YFC. Through it she is able to provide for her children.



Each woman's story is unique, but they all include more hardship and pain than anyone should ever have to face. War, rape, HIV, and poverty are things that these women know all too well. But now, for them, it is a different story. Now they have hope.



By employing these women, Rwanda YFC has not only provided them with a source of income, but also a place for them to belong and feel accepted. We at Greater Vancouver Youth for Christ would like to join with Rwanda YFC and walk beside these women as they journey towards wholeness: spiritually, physically and socially.

Here's how...



Umatima [HEART]

Aim

To work with disadvantaged women in order to empower them to live lives of all fullness, spiritually, physically and socially.

Objectives

Phase 1: Crisis Support

Phase 2: Advanced Life Skills Training

Phase 3: Micro-Credit Fund

Phase 1

Greater Vancouver YFC will work with Rwanda YFC in order to develop Phase 1 Crisis Support for the women already involved in the program. This will be a transferable program that can run with more women in the future, and will include: counselling, mentoring, advocacy, and basic life skills, and will always encourage self-reliance rather than dependence.

For those able to go further, they will graduate to Phase 2.

Phase 2

A Life Skills program will be developed that will enable training to be given, allowing the women to assume a productive and fulfilled life. This will have a spiritual component as well as a practical one, and will include advanced life skills training, job training, plus further counseling, mentoring and rehabilitation in order to assist the women in breaking the cycle of poverty they find themselves in.

As well, skills and gifts will be identified that could be used in the building of basic business plans, and developed into income generating ventures in Phase 3.



Phase 3

A Micro-Credit Fund will be established to provide small business loans to women who have been identified in Phase 2 as having the ability to take part in an income generating project.

The aim will be to give these women the ability to provide for themselves and others, thus allowing them to break free from the desperate situations they are trapped in. Utilizing the skills and resources these women have gained during this program, as well as their own natural abilities, will give them the dignity to go forward with their lives and the ability to help others just like themselves in the future.

It is expected that the loan repayment will go to funding further ventures in the future, providing sustainability for the program and help for even more women.



Want to Get Involved?

There is no way a program like this can stand on it's own. It needs the support of people like you. By giving to Umatima [HEART] you will not only be giving these women a source of income, and helping them provide for their families, but also restoring their sense of worth and hope, and investing in the future of their communities.

You donation could provide:

- counseling, rehabilitation and basic income support for women in crisis;
- resources for life skills training;
- start-up business loans for those able to move to Phase 3;
- support of staff for those who work alongside the women, including counselors, crisis support workers, etc;
- basic employment training;
- grants towards basic necessities, such as housing and food;
- school fees for children of the women involved.

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read Rose, Marvita and Delphine's story, and for considering how you can contribute to this project. Their stories are full of pain and hardship, but with your support, we can empower them, and others, to continue on this journey of healing that they have begun with Rwanda YFC. And hopefully, we can help many more women in the future!

With appreciation,



Andy Harrington
Executive Director
Greater Vancouver YFC/Youth Unlimited

If you are interested in supporting this project, please contact us at the address on the front of this proposal.





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