



Living Stories

THE ADOLESCENT GIRLS' POWER PROGRAM



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND





“I was in a very bad state and looked older than my years. Everyone pitied me because of my shabby unkempt appearance. Today, after joining the Safe Space, I can plait and sew, and my children and I are smart and happy.”

**- NAKIGUDDE SARAH, 22,
MOTHER OF 3, LUWEERO
DISTRICT**

THE CHALLENGE

The focus of CRVPF on children and adolescent girls is based on regional national surveys on violence against children which do not provide the full extent of the various risks and experience of violence faced by adolescent girls in comparison to younger children. Similarly, research on violence against women often neglects to recognize the specific risks that adolescent girls face. This lack of a gender and age perspective means that the particular needs and vulnerabilities of adolescent girls often remain invisible or marginalized when programs and policies to end violence against children and violence against women are designed (Patton et al., 2012). Consequently, girls remain vulnerable and continue to face high levels of violence, especially sexual violence in their homes, school, and out in the community.

HOW CRVPF TACKLES THE CHALLENGE

CRVPF partner organizations in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia identify in-school and out-of-school girls who they invite to join girls groups that meet regularly in safe spaces within the community to empower girls to speak out, make healthy decisions and learn skills for income generation as a means of mitigating physical and sexual violence against them.

PROGRAM FOCAL AREAS

Vocational skilling, agency, safe spaces, peer mentorship, supportive relationships, power-building, self-confidence, reproductive health, financial literacy, coping with adversity



SAFE SPACES AS SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

When girls were invited for training at *How To School Safe Space*, most parents in Lyantonde district were skeptical initially, and thought the organization wanted to use the children for child sacrifice. This perception has changed as the girls in the group learnt vocational skills such as making jewelry, reusable sanitary pads, and soap. The parents were encouraged to give their children startup capital to buy materials for their handicrafts business after realizing the positive influence of the Safe Space.

“I could not talk in public; but in the Safe Space, everyone is given an opportunity to talk and that is how I gained my self-confidence. I now relate with other girls from the same village.”

-Nakabiito Mary, Peer mentor, Mukalazi Safe Space



No Situation is Hopeless

Kellen Mbabazi became a mother at the age of 17 years, and by 21 she had three children, an absent husband, and no education. Coming from a single parent home, and with a husband in jail, she lacked self-confidence and could see no hope in the future except either becoming a house-help in town or going to farm in the forest. Joining the safe space, was the beginning of a journey of building agency and gaining self-confidence.

“I can now write my name, and speak confidently about what is right for me.”

In the past, Kellen could not participate in community discussions. Today she can confidently speak up in community meetings. She seeks out girls within her community who are idle at home because of lack of school fees, and trains them to make reusable sanitary pads. She also tries to mentor them because most also lack parental guidance and care. As she waits to graduate, she makes and sells jewelry using some of the profits to take care of her family, and reinvesting the capital to buy additional materials. She is educating her children and dreaming of starting her own business. Life is no longer about suffering and lack.



Equipping girls for productive futures

Victorious Club Girls Safe Space hosts girls aged 15 – 20 years who regularly meet to learn and earn. They have a tarpaulin and some chairs, and some also received materials and capital for tailoring and hairdressing. Most of the girls dropped out of school as they lacked school fees and decided to get married.

In the safe space they were taught vocational skills including flower arrangements, envelopes and sanitary pads, baking, liquid soap, hairdressing and tailoring. The group sets goals and pool their resources to help those in need. They bake wedding cakes using a charcoal stove and “dongolo” a type of saucepan.

Nansimbe Adha, 18 years, received UGX300,000 from CRVPF-supported partners, and with an additional UGX50,000 from her mother purchased a sewing machine. This machine helps her earn income as she repairs clothes, and makes bags, Gomesi (traditional dresses), pants, and dresses for sale. Her earnings support

her parents with household necessities and pay school fees for her younger brother.

Nakacwa Hadija lacked training to apply for the jobs she was interested in, and when she got employment, she would not be paid sometimes. She would farm and sell the produce but could barely afford basic necessities like soap and sanitary pads. Today she is versatile. She used the UGX 200,000 startup capital she received to purchase a sewing machine and is the only tailor in her neighborhood. She also makes snacks and gives a local hawker to include in his wares and they share the profits. Nakacwa plans to open a large tailoring and design shop in the future.

The girls in the safe space have seen a reduction in cases of defilement and gender violence as the girls who lack parental support can report to the community organization, the police, and the woman representative for assistance.



Finding the voice within

Growing up **Joan Nakawalya**, believed her future lay in finding a man to marry her, She was shy and because she had never gone to school and felt she had nothing of value to share. Today the village chairman seeks out this 18-year-old girl and invites her views in community meetings.

To attend the Faith Safe Space meetings, Joan had to leave home on the pretext of going to fetch water. As she gained self-confidence, she started sharing her views within the community. These were not received well, by her father who had not attended the parents' community meeting to understand the importance of safe spaces for the girl child. However, when he observed the positive changes in her behaviour, he began to listen to her views and suggestions. When men approached her father for her hand in marriage, Joan's father respected her right to wait despite the number of cows he was being offered as bride price.

Aside from advocating for the rights of the girl child, Joan has started a liquid soap making business which helps her contribute to the family income and to pay school fees for her younger sister. She sees a bright future ahead despite having no formal education. She wants to start her own organization to be able to help other girls and she is planning to campaign for the position of Community Youth Chairman.



“As a Peer Mentor I lead other girls by mentoring and advising them. We are trained to identify the girls’ space, the activities to be done, how to conduct community dialogues and campaigns and to maintain registers.”

-Madina Haron, Tubuyoleka Safe Space, Central Region



“I knew I was too young to become a bride. Because I was attending the safe space I had learnt many skills including handicrafts so I did not need his money.”

- SUSAN, GOD WITH US, SAFE SPACE

Knowledge is power!

God With Us Safe Space trains young girls in vocational skills and builds their self-confidence by teaching them self-control and how to think smart. When one of the girls stopped attending lessons, Racheal Ayinembabazi aged 16 was concerned, especially when she found out that the girl's grandmother had sent her away to work. She mobilized her fellow girls and approached the Village Chairman with the problem who gave them a letter to take to the police Officer in Charge.

The Safe Space members found the young girl the girl labouring on farmland whereas she had been taken away under the guise of being taught tailoring. The police officer informed her employer that it was illegal in Uganda to employ girls under 18 years of age. The 13-year-old girl was released and now attends the safe space.

When a man and his family approached Racheal's family for marriage negotiations, they offered her money to influence her decision. She was not tempted because she earns her own money from making handcrafts. She knows that she is too young to become a bride or a mother. She dreams of buying a sewing machine and improving her skills to also make and sell bar soap.



The partner organizations identify and invite in-school and out-of-school girls to join girl's groups that meet regularly to empower girls with life skills, confidence building and sexual reproductive health discussions.



“Apart from the skills training I have benefited from the safe space in many ways for example I have been helped to realize my potential and unlock my power, agency and currently I am creating a bright future for my family. They have admitted that girls can take a part in public discussions and shape the community around them.”

Irene Noles, Tanzania

Girls can make a difference

“I was forced into marriage as a teenager because my parents separated when I was young so I was raised by grandmother. My uncle always suggested that I have to get married to reduce the burden on my grandmother.

Fortunately, I learned about the safe spaces through attending the girl’s movement campaign that was conducted by KIWOHEDE and Wadada Wa Leo at Bunju B Primary school which is located near our home. Thus after meeting with them I went home and told my mother about the safe space and girls voice power project.

I have joined the safe space because I was jobless and my hobby was to be tailor but I could not afford the tailoring fee. In the safe space, the skills training is provided for free and it is also located near my home so I do not incur transport costs. es but I learnt through attending the girl’s movement campaign that was conducted by

KIWOHEDE and Wadada Wa Leo at Bunju B Primary school which is located near with our home place. Thus after meeting with them I went home and told my mother on the safe space and girls voice power project.

As a girl, I feel that I have peace in my mind, because the safe space is a place I can go to get relief when I have a life challenges. At the beginning some girls who were not attending the safe space claiming it was a place for prostitution and wasting time but currently they sees girls selling batik (African print) products in their communities, conducting campaigns and educating other community members. Now they wish to join us. My mother feels happy that I am in the safe space hence rather than being on the street without any work. “

“I am stacked with power to change things around me; I am unstoppable.”



“I learned to be a good leader, counseling and mentorship and how to write short project proposals. We were also trained in environmental hygiene and sanitation and life-skills training including making sanitary pads.”

Obsinet Tadesse, is 17 years and lives in Adama city, Ethiopia, with her four sisters and parents. A high performing student, she hopes to be a chemist in the future.

“I believe I can achieve my dreams, However, there is still a negative attitude from the community towards girls. When I and my four sisters go to the market, church or any other places everybody says our parents are going to get a lot of down when we are getting married. Nobody asks us about our education or appreciates us for what we have achieved so far. I feel bad why the end destiny or goal of girl is always marriage by the community”, says Obsinet.

“I joined a safe space because my parents never allowed me to go anywhere except school and church. “Even if I am the top ranking student I have poor communication skills others and my teachers also advise me to improve it. But always when I go back home I spend my time studying and reading books. I was always worried

how to improve my communication skills.”

Since joining, Obsinet has become a leader in the group. *“Being engaged in the safe helped me to improve my communication skill with others. I am able to have friends who mentor and guide me if I face any challenges. I am also sharing what I get from safe spaces with my sisters at home during family discussions.*

After joining the safe space and other project activities I became more confident and understood how valuable girl I am as a girl not only for my family, school or community but for the world as well.

Now I feel that I am capable of doing more. The safe space makes me feel more confident, visionary, energetic, Generally I have become unstoppable and my motto is ‘nothing is impossible’.”

“I can no longer be deceived to get into sex for money. I am making my own money.”



My Sister's Keeper

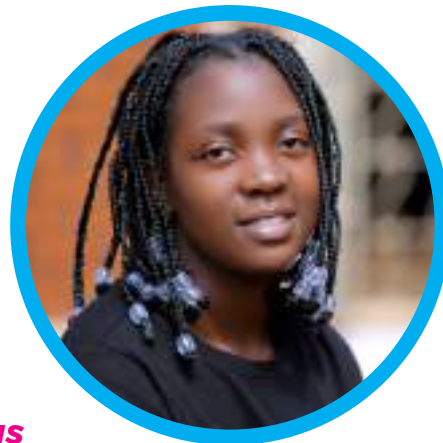
In Shabibah Namugerwa's village, child kidnap and defilement of girls is rampant. Shabibah, 13 years is in primary 7 and as the Chairman of *Charity Girls Safe Space* she counsels the 30 group members. They make their own reusable menstrual pads and do not have to spend money or miss classes during their menstruation, which is reducing school dropout rates. They also pool their resources and make and sell soap and jewelry so that one day they can buy some animals to graze and sell to build capital and purchase land for themselves. Nakironya Mary, 10 years, learned about this safe space on the village community radio. She is happy that today she has learnt self-control and no longer quarrels with her mother when frustrated. She is able to make good decisions and knows that she can earn her own money by making handicrafts instead of being lured into sex with sweets by men. She now wants to complete her education and become a policewoman.

Mukama Mulungi Safe Space has two communal sewing machines that members use to make sanitary pads and for their own projects. The members learn hair dressing, tailoring, baking, soap making and sell their products within the community. The group buys fabric in bulk, and members can buy pieces to make their own clothes using the communal machine. The resources are pooled together and used to help those who need a boost for business.



“My dream is to become a counsellor,” I went through Life Skills training in confidence building and Smart Thinking. Girls now come to me with their problems and I calm them down and advise them on what to do. The Safe Space has helped me out that even when I leave this program, I will still help people.”

-Nantongo Bashira, 19 years



“No matter how far you go or what you study, handworks are the best, because even the clothes the president wears have an aspect of hand work” - JOWERIA NAMBOLANYI, 19-YEAR-OLD SINGLE MOTHER

Empowered to help and lead young women and girls in the Masaai Community



"I was married off to an old man who I did not know. I was also forced to undergo female genital mutilation and cutting when I was in Standard 6 and it was so painful. The man I was forced to get married to gave my father a good blanket, some few cows, sugar and a ring as a dowry. I was lucky when the safe space came to our location; I reported the case to them, and they shared it with the Ward Executive officer and they arranged for my rescue. I am now at HIMD rescue home and I am doing a course on Early childhood education and development; this is a miracle to me. I believe I will be the best teacher of young children in my pastoralist community. I will also educate girls in my community about forced and early marriage and its effects and I will be their role model." -**Anna Letion Mshao, Arusha, Tanzania**

I stopped going to school when I completed standard seven (primary education) and my father forced me to get married. I am now married with three children all girls. I got married when I was 16 years.

In the Masaai community girls and women don't have voice, choice and we have no right to raise our views. I learned about the safe space from our Village Executive Officer. I joined the safe space because when I left school and got married I never joined any group or received any information or any other knowledge

about girls.

In our safe space, we dance, we sing and discuss challenges we are facing in our families. I also received information on self-identification, child protection and abuse of power. I got correct information on family planning, where can we get it and how to use it and I share this information with other young women and girls. A lot of girls want to join the safe space, because I have taught them how to use sanitary pads,

I feel good, empowered and I can now talk in front of people; I am a leader in my group as

the Treasurer. I have changed a lot; I am no longer the scared girl; I want to also educate and inform my co-wives.

At first, husbands and In laws of the girls did not like the group because they thought we were planning against them but after attending the meeting with Arusha cluster, they do not have any problem as long as we fulfill home responsibilities after the safe space activities.

Lilau Simel Laitayo, Arusha, Tanzania

Sexual Reproductive health and coping skills

Young girls face numerous problems especially around menstruation and defilement. Bright Future Safe Space has girls aged 10 to 20 years who are learning how to protect themselves against rape and defilement, personal hygiene, public speaking, and crafting. The parents are happy that they know where their children are, and that the girls can report gender based violence cases to the group leaders. Being able to make your own pads and liquid soap is a life-saving gift especially in these harsh economic times.

Nakayiwa Harriet is a 13-year-old who makes and sells sanitary pads. She has learnt that on menstruation days it is important to bathe and change your pads frequently. She also makes and repairs her own clothes, and those of her family and neighbors. The money earned enables her to buy scholastic materials. The lessons from the safe space have improved her self-confidence and performance at school, and reduced the burden on her parents. She recently campaigned and won the post of Head Monitor at school, and is on track with her goal of becoming a tailor and a community leader.





Dreams come true

Madina a teenage mother, had a dream of starting a Make-Up studio but did not have the skills and means to do so. *“I had just given birth, my child was three weeks old when I heard about this program. I was living with a relative and did not have money to buy diapers for my baby or food to eat. I was badly off.”* After joining the safe space, Madina was trained in cosmetology and makeup artistry skills. *“Before getting this money, I was employed. But when I received UGX 1million as startup capital, I used the money to pay off my employer by buying things from her, and now I just pay her rent. Now I own my business; I use my make-up, pedicure and manicure skills on friends and as a result I have got an opportunity to do make up for a bridal entourage in June this year.*

-Madina Haron, Tebuyoleka Safe Space



Preparing girls for future success

Ebenezer Girls Power Group has 47 members ranging in age from 12 to 21 years, who have learnt various crafts such as making candles, soap, pads, envelopes, hairdressing and tailoring. They have two communal sewing machines that enable them to make sanitary pads to supply the local supermarket. When the group started, some girls like Namulindwa Gloria, 18, and Namala Suzan, 17, were at home idle with no skills or capital. With the skilling and capital boost from CRVPF and Team Uganda they are longer idle and helpless, but have become empowered. They make and sell snacks and clothes, and save money with the group which is helping them better prepare for a good future.

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