

'They Took My Home, but They Can't Take My Future'  
Tongogara Refugee Camp, Zimbabwe  
Wheaton College, Norton, MA  
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Peace is having freedom from oppressive thoughts, fear of the future, and just living in the present. In Tongogara, many including myself do not feel any sense of peace because we worry about many things, including our families, community, and even our personal studies. We wake up thinking about what the future is going to be like and these thoughts consume us. This is why I designed this project - I want the people in my community to have a sense of peace within them, not worrying about education or what the day will hold for them. I want them to live in the present and know that there is a better tomorrow.

**Personal story:** I am originally from Bukavu in the Congo. At the age of eleven I experienced tribal war. My family was attacked, my mom was raped in front of me and my elder sister died - all on the same night. We fled our home with the help of an unknown soldier who was given orders to kill us in the bush. With the help of friends, we fled Congo. Since 2009, my family and I have lived in Tongogara. I couldn't start school for three years because space is always limited and not everyone is admitted. I passed 10th grade, one of only 2 girls out of 8. Sponsored by UNHCR and Terres Des Hommes, I proceeded to boarding high school. For my fellow students who did not pass that was the end of school for them. This is how I came to know the United States Achievers Program (USAP), an organization that helps high achieving, low income and students access full scholarships in the US. With their assistance, I was accepted by Wheaton College, which offers one Refugee Scholarship annually.

**Tongogara Refugee Camp Background:** My home is next to a desert about 420 km from Harare, the capital city. Home to about 13 000 migrants from different countries, with the majority of my neighbors coming from Congo. Tongogara has been without electricity since 2010. However, the refugees face many more challenges daily. They are not allowed to work, nor have any source of income. Most profoundly, Tongogara is known for its high rate of HIV and AIDS. The rate of early child marriages and early pregnancy is at its peak. 80 % of people, especially the youth, find solace in drugs and prostitution. 85% of people who are HIV positive are below the age of 20. It seems that the dangers of drug use, HIV and AIDS do not scare people anymore. The spaces along the camp's edges at which they gather to hang out and do drugs increases each year. I want to create an alternative space for my community

**Project Summary:** Children and young adults have limited access to education and no form of entertainment which leads to a sense of hopelessness and negative behavior. I will create an information and recreation Centre in Tongogara. I will acquire a section of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) to be used for the new *Recreation and Information Centre (RIC)* which will have a computer lab and a room for indoor games which will serve more than a thousand children. The establishment of a multi-purpose, youth-friendly information and recreation Centre will provide a platform for reinforcing the roles and responsibilities of the youth through community development. This project will benefit everyone in the Tongogara as those in and out of school will have a place to study and explore online. Mathematics and English lessons will be taught by people who finished some schooling but did not continue. As most students do not have access to books, this will be a place for them to access information online in their school subjects and do more research on assignments. People will be able to obtain online degrees and learn the language and culture of other countries, which they can still use whenever they return to their countries or immigrate to another country.

**Feasibility :** I am confident that this project will be a success since I lived in Tongogara for 10 years and understand its operation. The Camp Administrator has allowed me to use a section of the ECD for the Centre. I have also established connections with Camp Officers through my participation in many groups. I worked with Terre Des Hommes and UNHCR, the organizations that help run Tongogara and provide support to the refugees. As a Child Protection President, I was also a Committee of Youth Mobiliser. Through these experiences and connections, it will be easy for me to get people at the Counselling

Center and many other departments to come and talk to the youths and provide counselling and other engaging activities. It will be easy for me to gather a lot of the youth to join in the activities since I am well known and trusted.

### **Project Timeline:**

**Week 1&2: Source, purchase, transport supplies:** Order equipment and transport to Tongogara. **Week 3&4:Set-up, hire, train:** Set up prefabricated computer lab and a room for indoor games with electrical connection. Hire five paid staff members and 20 volunteers who have computer skills and workshop facilitation and youth engagement capabilities. The volunteers will be given use privileges in the new RIC. Training will be held for the five staff on computer skills, how to assist visitors and customers, and how to handle all types of situations. Invite skilled community members to offer their talents. For example, those who can play a piano or guitar can provide lessons while another person carries out an engaging reading club or math and English lessons weekly for the youth. **Week 5:Grand Opening:** Invite people to come and celebrate the Grand Opening of the *RIC*. This will be on a Sunday so that all the kids in the Camp and the host community will be able to come and have fun at the Centre. This will be free of charge, and also refreshment will be provided. **Week 6&7:Engagement:** Carry out awareness campaigns, and road shows (on sex education), going to schools and talking about the importance of education and inviting students to *RIC*.

**Expected Outcomes:** The project will benefit people in many ways. Firstly, the literacy rate will be increased in the camp as more people will have access to education through the internet, and through English and math lessons. Delinquency will be greatly reduced as youth will have a source of entertainment. They will be able to have fun and learn new skills. There will be opportunities for the youth to organize a Braai (barbeque) for which they will be charged. These events will be a good way to bring people together and build a stronger community. The youth in Tongogara will have a friendly space where they meet weekly and engage in participatory dialogue such as Gender Based Violence, climate change (which many youths have no knowledge of) with other community members and relevant stakeholders at the local and national level. As the literacy rate and access to information increases so will the knowledge of what is happening in the real world. This could be further studied by showing them short videos of countries and discussing them, talking about climate change etc. This space will be the first Information and Recreation Centre ever at the Camp.

**Sustainability and future direction:** Five young people will be selected to work at the Centre. The small amount of money which youths and the host community will start to pay to get in the Centre will help pay them and pay for internet services. Additionally, youths will volunteer to maintain the place. The 5 people who will be selected from the 20 top candidates will be monitoring the Centre as a committee. I will keep in touch with them on a weekly basis. The remaining 15 candidates will still be leading other activities such as running the book club, among other activities, and helping with organizing events. They will also be the people who will be chosen in case there is any need of replacement for the 5 members. Eventually, this project will continue running even while I'm in the United States studying. The Centre will also be a source to generate income as activities will be taking place in the Centre such as kids' birthdays which parents will be charged a small amount to hold.

**Qualification and Personal drive:** Living in the Camp is not easy for anyone, but I accepted the Camp as my new home. There are still people in the Camp who do not accept Tongogara as their home, I want people to look at me and believe that there is hope. I started volunteering in my community at a young age because I wanted to make a positive change and be an inspiration for young people, especially girls. My coming to the USA and having this big opportunity which gives me and my family hope that my future is now brighter is something most youth in the camp will not have. I want every youth in the Camp and the host community to have hope that everything will be okay one day. It hurts me to see people, especially children, hopeless and in despair. I have always wanted to do something which can give refugees in the Camp the zeal to not give up and keep carrying on. With Projects for Peace, this is my chance to be able to give back to my community, doing something that will impact generations to come.