

Title of Project: They Took My Home, But They Can't Take My Future Youth Center  
Country of Project Implementation: Chipinge, Zimbabwe: Tongogara Refugee Camp  
Sponsoring College: Wheaton College (MA)  
Designated Project Leader: Muhiya Mwehu (Agathe)

### **Summary of the Project:**

My project aims to create a space where young adults in Tongogara Refugee Camp have access to education and some form of entertainment. The goal of the project is to reduce delinquent behaviors, teen pregnancy, and early child marriage. Serving more than a thousand children, the center will become a place where students come to study, do research, get tutored and have educational indoor games. This project will benefit students of all ages in academic areas including Mathematics, Science, English, and any subjects they seek tutoring and be able to obtain and have access to books.

### **Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

Several other fundraising efforts contributed to my project. Another UWC student in Swaziland won a \$5,000 Wonder Grant from Global Changemakers. The grant was to provide computers and a center for students to study in Tongogara. After learning about my project, he then asked if we could combine effort and collaborate since we are all working on the same goal. Once authorized, the \$5,000 will supplement my project and the money will enable us to get additional materials needed at the Center.

### **How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

I wanted this to be an opportunity to do something for my community that will impact generations to come. As a second-generation resident, I know that this may be temporary housing but growing in the Camp and realizing how students, youth, and children lack educational resources, lack of exposure, and a place to study and do research was a hopeless situation. When I first heard about the Project for the Peace grant, I knew that this was my chance to make a change and do something now for my community. After talking to my friends and people in the Camp, I knew what my community needed.

### **Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

Due to the lifestyle in the Refugee Camp, many youths feel hopeless and give up on education because they feel like the future isn't bright. The center will be a place that brings young people and students together so that they can study, be informed, and know that there is life outside the camp and that the future is brighter than it seems to be.

### **Why did you choose your host site to work in? (What was it like to work on your host site?)**

I chose this site because it is where I grew up, and I know it very well. After living in the camp for 10 years, I saw and knew the needs of my community. Young people are bright in the Camp and in need of resources to enable them to do research, continue with their education, and get exposed to opportunities. I also wanted to set an example for the people in the Camp who get resettled to developing countries; the USA, and Europe to look back, invest and help those left behind.

Getting this opportunity to work on the project is something that I will always be grateful for. The project gave me a chance to be a role model for many people in the camp, especially young girls who might think that the future is not bright. After arriving at the Camp, it was thrilling to see how youths were willing to help and work together at the project as a way of investing in themselves and their future and make the project their own. I received and still receive help from many youth volunteers who are passionate, inspiring, and willingly ready to make a difference.

### **Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

The Covid-19 Pandemic made me doubt my success. Two days after arriving in Zimbabwe to do my project, a 'National Lockdown' was announced by the government of Zimbabwe. This meant that no Intercity buses were to travel, people were not allowed to travel without a valid reason and a travel letter. I was delayed for a week in Harare upon my arrival because I could not find transport to travel to the Camp. After arriving at the Camp, I needed to talk to the Camp Administrator (AC) about the project, but he was working remotely for two weeks. Everything was working at a very slow pace, and there were a lot

of regulations to follow. Traveling and internet connection was the biggest challenge for me. For example, whenever I needed to obtain more funds for the project, I had to travel nine hours one way, and this caused more delays in the progression of the project. When it was time for me to go back to school, I was still working on the completion of the project, but since this is an ongoing project there will still be more things to work on and make improvements.

#### **What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

I went at the time of National Lockdown and the work hours were from 8:00 Am to 3:30 Pm. Some of the officers in the camp were working remotely and made it harder to communicate with people. The internet connection in the Camp is bad; I couldn't send emails, send myself money on Western, or communicate with people at Wheaton if I needed another transaction of the funds. As a result, there were a few delays. For example, there was a time where we paused the renovation work for almost a week because we needed materials and I had to travel to Harare to get the money for those materials.

#### **How do you define peace?**

Peace to me is when people live in harmony with themselves, the absence of fear, hostility, and freedom from oppressive thoughts, and just living in the present and knowing that the future is brighter. Peace is when the mind and the soul are in harmony.

#### **How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?**

The project will contribute to peace both short and long term as children, youth, and students in the camp will be able to find a sense of purpose and knowledge from the exposure to the outside world and education. Living in the Camp, you don't get to know much about the world around you and this results in many people feeling hopeless. Refugees being exposed to education; knowledge of the outside world is good because it allows us to learn from others and stay informed which is important as it makes us feel in charge of our lives and what is happening around us.

#### **How has the project changed the way I think about the world? How has it changed me?**

There are plenty of passionate people out there willing to take steps to ensure that there is peace. And I have seen it with the help of so many people I have during this process. This project has made me realize that it takes the effort of different people combined to make the world a better place. While doing this project I have received help from different people; The Davis Foundation for the \$10,000 grant and used iPads from Medfield High school to donate to the Camp (we plan to take some to the center for people to use). We have received donations of books from different individuals and organizations. All these show how it only takes one individual willing to change the world, and when forces are combined, great things happen. This project has personally changed my life as well. I have learned to be patient, collaborative, manage stress, planning skill, decision making, and financial management which can be used infinitely. And mostly the project has taught me if one desires to go far, they must go together with others.

#### **Was the Project impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic?**

Yes, the project was impacted a lot by the pandemic. From my arrival in Zimbabwe till when I left there was a national lockdown. The cost of some things went up, for example, the transportation cost from Harare to the Camp was twice the normal price. Business hours changed from 8 am to 3 pm, officers in the Camp were working remotely. With the bad internet connection in the camp, it became nearly impossible to communicate. It was not over when it was time for me to travel back to the United States but with the help of my team members, we were able to find a way to work together and complete the work in my absence. The advice I would give to the future PfP is that starting the planning process earlier does help a lot. Doing research and establishing a network with the people at the site before going to the site can be very helpful.

I believe that it would still work if the project was done remotely. I am still working remotely with the people present at the site and supervise how everything is going. My advice about working online is that the expectations and goals of the project should be made clear for all the team members at the start for better progression and that there should be accountability and transparency.

**Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result.**

Hard work, perseverance, and determination are what are needed to succeed. In everything we do, giving our all is the only way to excel and make the desired change. [Agathe Mwehu]

