

Together in Sport Rwanda

SC046396

GIRLS' SPACE

The Creation of a Girls' Vocational Hub

Charity Report – 8 January 2019



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THE STORY SO FAR

During the ten years that Kari Spence and Together in Sport Rwanda (TiSR) have been involved with Faith and Hope Primary, the need for some form of girls' vocational training has become increasingly important. Felix, headteacher at Faith and Hope Primary School, social worker and community Pastor has identified a girls' vocational hub as by far the biggest community need.

Girls in the community of Gako, where Faith and Hope is situated, are very much second-class citizens compared to boys. A very small percentage of girls go on to attend secondary education after completing Primary 6. This is due to a combination of financial constraints, and also the cultural expectations that women should be out working in the fields, or as maids for more wealthy families.

There are currently no other routes to the workplace or training opportunities for those many girls leaving education after P6 in Gako.

In 2017, an affordable plot of land on the edge of school grounds became available and was purchased by the charity, with the aim of eventually building a dedicated girls' vocational hub. Whilst helping to clear this land of small bushes and cassava roots, on a TiSR Board trip in February 2018, conversations were struck up (through an interpreter) with local women about the plans for this land. The women were visibly excited about the prospect of a different future for their daughters and friends, and it became clear that the skills of cooking, sewing, hairdressing and nail-work were those with the most earning potential in Gako.

Also during this visit, a previous Faith and Hope pupil was recognised out in the fields adjacent to school, picking grass for goats with her mother. For a full day's work they would earn £1 per day, a typical scenario for many girls forced to leave school after Primary 6. As it was a day when the school children were being fed, they were offered a mug of porridge and it was very obvious that they were extremely hungry. They said they had not eaten anything before working in the fields, and that this was a typical daily situation.



The day before this encounter, Kari and accompanying Board members, Sue Spence and Chris Neill, had visited Nyamirambo Women's Centre in downtown Kigali. This project started in 2007, on a very small scale, a few women in a room in someone's home learning sewing skills. It has now grown into a self-sustaining model where fifty seamstresses create clothing, accessories and home items, with profits being used to fund NWC initiatives and pay a fair wage to the seamstresses.

The inspiration provided by seeing this project in action, coupled with the obvious need for some form of vocational training for girls in the community of Gako, made the charity realise that a similar set up, starting very small with few overheads, might be the best approach.

PILOT PROJECT

In order to assess the feasibility of such a project, TiSR launched Girls Space Pilot Project in February 2018.

Felix, the headteacher, was prepared to rent out a room in his house for the sewing tuition, utilising two existing treadle sewing machines, and also to make his kitchen available for the cookery classes for the duration of the one year pilot study. Prior to the start of the project, he had also travelled to a similar African project in the southern province of Rwanda, to examine its curriculum and general set- up.

He then identified six girls as being the most vulnerable, and the most likely to benefit from training of this type, and invited them to commence training.

THE FIRST SIX GIRLS

The first six girls were chosen because they had little or no hope for the future, apart from working in the fields, tending goats, becoming servants or prostitutes. All have lost at least one parent to AIDS and two are orphans. One girl is from another province and, when Felix heard her horrific childhood story, he invited her to stay with his family, to enable her to join the project.



In Rwandan culture, it is assumed that boys will automatically go on into secondary and further education. Unless families are wealthy, girls do not have this opportunity. In impoverished rural areas, the majority of girls finish their education after Primary 6, usually aged around 13/14 years old.

The Rwandan government is working towards increasing the number of women in higher positions in society, but the reality in rural villages is that little has changed in generations.

From the start of the pilot study in February, Felix's wife Esther has led the project, teaching both cooking and sewing skills. As several of the girls no longer have a mother to confide in, Esther has taken on the role of substitute 'Mum' and has provided extremely valuable emotional support. She is responsible for the planning and delivery of the lessons, in accordance with correct framework guidelines. Prior to commencement of training, each girl had access to an interpreter and filled out a variety of recognised monitoring and evaluation documents, including allotting a comparable numerical value from 1 to 10 to a number of questions put to them about their happiness, self worth, confidence, sense of belonging and predicting where they saw themselves at measured times in the future. These values were low (2 and under) for all six girls initially.

As the early weeks passed, Felix began sending pictures of items the girls had sewn. It had been expected that it would take them a few months to pick up the basics of simple sewing techniques, but everyone was amazed at the complexity of the garments they had already made! What was also very obvious was the look of happiness on the faces of all the girls.



School uniform shirts, blouses and trousers were being made within six weeks. Complicated bags and rucksacks followed, and by the time the two summer volunteer groups arrived in Rwanda, the Girls Space Girls were taking orders for made-to-measure shirts, trousers, dresses, playsuits and backpacks. They were enjoying their new skills so much that a visit was arranged to meet a well-known designer in Kigali, which inspired the girls even more.



The six girls now make ALL the uniforms for the 510 Faith and Hope Primary School pupils, undercutting even the local markets.

The social enterprise anticipated by the charity many, many months into the future was already happening!

Their cooking skills had also greatly improved, and to prove it the girls made and proudly served a huge spread of delicious traditional Rwandan food to this summer's volunteers, which they all enjoyed immensely.

At this point, four months after the start of the pilot study, the girls were asked to answer the same questions put to them at the beginning. This time their 1 to 10 values were around 8-10 across the board (with one girl telling Kari that she would have put down more than 10 for her happiness if she could....)

Girls Space meets at Felix and Esther's house three mornings per week, and one afternoon is dedicated to sports.

The cost per month is around £200. This covers rent of room and kitchen, night watchman (due to increased security risk), cost of food supplies and sewing materials, water and transport.

Girls Space is, and will continue to be, separate from Faith and Hope Primary School, both physically and financially.

REUSABLE SANITARY PADS

At the end of 2017, a 16-year-old ex-pupil of Kari's, Suzanne McDowell, asked how Rwandan girls of menstrual age managed each month. When she heard that they either used rags or shut themselves away, regularly missing school, she was determined try to do something about this.

Independently, she researched sustainable ways of providing girls and women in Rwanda with sanitary protection. She came across a Glasgow company called Tots Bots/Bloom and Nora, who make reusable nappies and sanitary pads. She then got in touch with Kari to ask if the charity could take it further.

Very generously, Tots Bots donated 30 bags of reusable pads, each bag containing four multi-sized pads. These attractive shoulder bags were taken out to Faith and Hope in February 2018, along with two large suitcases full of donated disposable pads and packs of pants.

On the morning when the pants and pads were distributed, there was a wide spectrum of reactions..... The girls and young teachers were taken to a private area of the playground, where the very unfamiliar items were first explained, then handed out for inspection. Solemn, embarrassed, puzzled faces gradually broke out into broad smiles, giggles and loud laughter as the penny dropped. They began to realise how different their lives could be... One young teacher emotionally said "these will change my life!"



When Kari visited school and Girls Space in summer 2018, she took with her some spare Tots Bots material. On her return in October the girls had deconstructed a pad to use as a template, and made their own pads. A subsequent meeting with Tots Bots on Kari's return strengthened the ecological company's relationship with TiSR when they generously offered to donate any waste materials, to be turned into reusable pads in Rwanda. A very positive recycling story!

TiSR are incredibly grateful for this generous offer from Tots Bots/Bloom and Nora, which will literally change lives in Rwanda.

The provision of reusable sanitary protection, hopefully as a self-sustaining social enterprise, will continue to be an important part of the ethos of Girls Space.



THE FUTURE OF GIRLS' SPACE

The Girls Space Pilot Project will continue to be fully monitored. Data will be collected and evaluated throughout the course of the project. This data will be fully documented and stored.

To date, costs have been covered by funds already raised by Together in Sport Rwanda, and fundraising by volunteer trips in 2018 has already raised the amount necessary to build a dedicated Girls Space building on the plot of land already secured by the charity.

The ongoing monthly running costs will require increased regular funding after the building is completed and as, gradually, more girls join the project. The aim is to commence building in summer 2019. Word has spread - Felix has already received many requests to help more girls.

From January 2019, Kari will be in Rwanda working independently. She will be on site to personally monitor and evaluate the progress of the pilot girls, as well as visiting related projects for research purposes.



ONCE GIRLS' SPACE IS OPERATIONAL IN ITS OWN BUILDING

The charity anticipates that the vocational course will be of two years duration.

YEAR 1 PLAN

- Cooking and sewing tuition, plus one afternoon of sport.
- Introduction to literacy skills by completion of a Girls Space journal each month, reflecting and evaluating what they have achieved, and setting personal goals for the month ahead.

YEAR 2 PLAN

- Introduction to hairdressing and nail work.
- Advice about setting up a business.
- Continued enhancement of literacy skills.
- Participation in work experience placements.

PILOT PROJECT GIRLS will mentor and teach those in subsequent years.
The cycle continuing as the social enterprise grows.

This model, if successful, could be rolled out to more communities.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Together in Sport Rwanda relies on personal and corporate donations in order to fulfil its commitments to the school and the community it serves. There are a number of ways you can help the charity in general or the Girls' Space project in particular:

Girls' Space Project

If you would like to become a supporter of the Girls' Space Project – corporate or personal - and help us meet our target of a sustainable vocational hub for girls in a building of its own, please contact Kari Spence on kari@togetherinsportrwanda.org or give her a call on 07872 396528.

General Support

Please click through to the charity's website <http://togetherinsportrwanda.org> to become a Friend of Faith and Hope or contact us on info@togetherinsportrwanda.org for any other areas of support that interest you.

Queries

If you have any questions or are looking for other information, please don't hesitate to drop Kari an email or contact us on info@togetherinsportrwanda.org.

Thank you for your interest!