



"From despair to regained Dignity"

OUR STORIES

TESTIMONIALS FROM THE
CORNERSTONE PROJECT
TEEN MOTHERS PROJECT.
KIGALI RWANDA

JUNE 2024

HOPE
AND
HOMES
FOR
CHILDREN



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WELCOME

Welcome to the inspiring stories of teen mothers supported through the Teen Mothers Project, implemented by Hope and Homes for Children with generous funding from Clifford Chance. This is a journey filled with heart, where we've stood by these teen mothers and their families, ensuring that no child is left without the love and care of their own family.

In Kicukiro District, we embarked on a mission to support teen mothers facing tough situations. We didn't just offer a hand; we wrapped our arms around them, providing everything from financial support to counseling, education, and healthcare.

It's been a journey of growth and empowerment for these young mothers,

and we're thrilled to share their stories with you. Our goal was simple: to make a positive impact in the lives of these young girls and their families.

Since 2021, the Teen Mothers Project has been a source of encouragement to these teen mothers in Kicukiro District. With Clifford Chance by our side, we've been able to uplift 252 young mothers, showing them that they're not alone and that brighter days are still ahead.

So, as we gather to celebrate our achievements and look to the future, let's remember the strength and resilience of these incredible young girls. Their stories remind us that with a little love and support, anything is possible.





WHY DID HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN END UP SUPPORTING TEEN MOTHERS?

Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) extended its support to teen mothers to ensure that no child is separated from their family, which aligns with the organization's core mission of eliminating child institutionalization. The rationale behind this support is multifaceted:

- ***Preventing Institutionalization:*** By aiding teen mothers, HHC aims to prevent the institutionalization of their children. Young mothers often face significant challenges that can lead to the separation of their children, including economic hardship, social stigma, and lack of family support.

- ***Strengthening Families:*** Hope and Homes for Children's support is part of a broader strategy to strengthen families at risk of separation. This includes providing financial assistance, healthcare, education, and promoting healthy family relationships, thereby creating a stable environment for children to grow up in.
- ***Advocacy for Child care and Reform:*** Hope and Homes for Children has been instrumental in advocating for child care reform and has partnered with the government to develop strategies that support children in recovering their right to a loving and safe family environment.

The support for teen mothers is a natural enhancement of Hope and Homes for Children's commitment to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a nurturing family environment, free from the risk of being institutionalized or abandoned.

By focusing on teen mothers, Hope and Homes for Children addresses a critical need that has the potential to impact generations, fostering a cycle of empowerment and positive change within communities.

MEET *NATALIE

"Today, I can buy whatever I need and support my mum to look after the family. My daughter's smile is my strength, and our future together is a canvas of possibilities."

– Nathalie

*Nathalie, 18, is a teenage girl who has been supported in raising her daughter, Austin, as part of the Teen Mothers Support Project.

In 2013, Nathalie's parents separated, moved away, and left her to raise her three younger brothers. Before long, two were taken in by neighbors, and the other started begging on the streets. Nathalie stayed home, alone. She was only 10. ***"I've always loved studying,"*** Nathalie says. ***"I was scared of being home alone, so I asked the teachers if I could stay late. I was afraid murderers would come to my house."***

Over the next four years, Nathalie moved from one family to another. The family that took her in refused to pay for her school fees, preventing her from continuing her secondary education.

Nathalie decided to repeat primary school just to keep studying. Eventually, she found new foster parents, but soon after, just as she finally felt safe, she faced her greatest challenge yet. ***"When everyone was away, a boy came and saw***

that I was alone. He raped me. I tried to fight him, but he was bigger than me and nine years older. I was only 15."

Seven months later, Nathalie visited a doctor with stomach pain and learned she was pregnant. ***"My first thought was that I couldn't go to school anymore,"*** she remembers. ***"Two days later, my foster mother told me to wash my clothes and get ready to leave."*** In Rwandan culture, girls who live with their parents and get pregnant face stigmatization, being labeled as misbehaving or accused of not being raised properly by their families.

"I was so unhappy," Nathalie recalls. ***"My baby reminded me of the rape and how I was stuck in this situation, instead of in school. I even considered abandoning her."*** Determined to carry on, Nathalie found work and money to travel to Kigali to stay with relatives—her seventh home in four years. There, she reached out to Hope and Homes for Children for assistance.

Local leaders, from where Nathalie was living, referred her to Hope and Homes for Children, and she was accepted into the



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project for support.

After acceptance, she was invited to a group therapy session with other teen mothers to help her overcome her traumas and internalized shame. ***"It felt like a family,"*** Nathalie explains. ***"I was crying so much, but hearing the stories of other girls restored my broken heart."***

To help young mothers become financially independent, Hope and Homes for Children listens and prioritizes the choice from each one's aspirations.

Nathalie, who had always loved cars, chose mechanics. ***"After the counseling, I called my mother and asked for help—***

could she look after my child so I could do the training?" Today, she has been looking after Austin for over a year."

Nathalie's tuition fees were covered, and she attended classes five days a week. One of seven young women among 49 men, Nathalie scored the highest grades in her class—twice.

Soon after, her internship at a garage was funded. Impressed with her skills, the director offered her a permanent job. "Female mechanics aren't common in Rwanda, and Nathalie faced some doubts, but she proved them wrong.

"Thanks to my job, I can buy whatever I need and pay my mum for childcare,"

Nathalie proudly states. ***"It's amazing for me."***

Austin is now two years old and growing up happily. Nathalie has not only turned her and her daughter's lives around but is also inspiring other teen mothers. By joining 'Voices Matter'—a group of passionate young advocates for childcare reform—she now shares her experiences at public events to encourage other young mothers.

Nathalie is just one of the 252 teen mothers supported since the project began in 2021, with plans to support many more. ***"I was healed from my past and focus on my future,"*** Nathalie says. ***"I'm happy with the life I'm living now."***



MEET *OMBI

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I am confident that I will achieve greater success than I have today. As I grow and accumulate wealth, I will initiate a project to support teen mothers. This is my grand aspiration.

My foremost goal is to ensure that my son receives a formal education, enrolls in a reputable school, and pursues the studies I could have undertaken if not for an unexpected pregnancy.

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-OMBI-



Ombi was born in Kicukiro District. She lived with her mother, her baby, and two male siblings in a small rented home near the Kigarama community hub, a hub supported by Hope and Homes for Children to prevent family separation and promote children's rights, especially the right to live in a loving family. Ombi does not know her father well; he abandoned the family when she was 2 years old and has not visited them since.

Ombi's mother supported her in attending primary and secondary school up to S2, but Ombi did not go far in formal education because she became pregnant. Her mother was shocked and desperate, believing her daughter could study and become a great person in Rwanda.

When Ombi was three months pregnant, she left school and stayed home in a discriminatory environment. Neighbors frequently urged Ombi's mother to take her to the hospital for an abortion, but as forced abortion was uncommon in their family, her mother resisted until she met Hope and Homes for Children.

Ombi encountered Hope and Homes for

Children when she had a three-month-old baby. Coming from a poor family, she felt unhappy and isolated from the community.

When Ombi arrived at the community hub to meet Hope and Homes for Children staff during a baseline evaluation activity, she was surprised to find many other teen mothers with similar or worse problems. She began to question why she felt so unhappy and why she saw herself as the family's burden. However, she did not fully understand her feelings until she was invited to a group counseling session, as suggested by the consultant in the baseline evaluation report.

Ombi said, ***"I was helped to overcome fear, shame, and the feeling of isolation from society. In group therapy sessions with hundreds of peers, we talked, shared critical experiences, healed each other, and comforted each other. I began to see myself as a normal person, not a burden to my family or a source of shame. I started to develop confidence and self-love."***

Ombi was not only happy with the

group therapy sessions but also pleased that her mother was invited to a mediation therapy group session. She appreciated the outcomes of these sessions, which quickly improved things at home. She said, ***"My mother was also invited to a meeting at the community hub, along with other teen moms and their parents. We discussed issues like fighting discrimination, positive communication in the family, and the importance of forgiveness and understanding. I was surprised that my mother began to take care of my son and started talking to me again. A good mood returned to our home, and now my mother looks after my son while I work."***

Ombi works in a salon, helping people with their nails, making them clean and neat. Hope and Homes for Children supported her in joining vocational training, where she chose to learn hair cutting, pedicure, and manicure. She can earn money for her basic needs and savings, managing to save 2,500 Rwandan francs every week. She is committed to paying school fees for her son, saying, ***"I love my son and I want him to prosper. I believe I will be able to pay for his education."***



MEET *MWIZA

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Now, I work as a tailor, provide for my family, and dream of a bright future for my daughter. My life is no longer overshadowed by darkness; I bask in the light of hope and possibility. My dreams are now within reach, and my daughter will know the love I missed.

- Mwiza-

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Mwiza* is a resilient young woman, She and her little sister live with their father after their mother left due to family conflicts and remarried, giving them three half-siblings.

Mwiza's life has been a testament to strength amidst adversity. When her parents parted ways, she and her sister were sent to live with grandparents who treated them harshly, wrongly blaming them for the family's strife. Despite their innocence and confusion, they faced severe physical and verbal abuse, with Mwiza, as the eldest, bearing the brunt of the pain.

At the tender age of 16, amidst the turmoil, Mwiza sought solace in a young man who feigned love, leading to an unexpected pregnancy. She recalled, **"I thought I had found someone who cared, but I was wrong."** The revelation threatened to shatter her world, fearing further violence from her grandparents.

In a brave but heartbreaking decision, she fled, leaving her sister behind, and sought refuge in Kigali as a house worker. Five months into her pregnancy, she reached out to her father, who welcomed and supported her through the challenging times.

The weight of her circumstances led to depression and the difficult choice to leave school, as hope seemed a distant dream.

The birth of her child, under trying conditions without even clothes for the newborn, marked a turning point. Despite the hardships, Mwiza persevered. Hope and Homes for Children, in their mission to aid teen mothers in distress, connected with Mwiza through a compassionate community volunteer. **"Their support was like a lifeline,"** Mwiza reflected.

Joining Hope and Homes for Children was a beacon of light for Mwiza. The initial financial assistance allowed her to provide for her child and herself, reigniting the spark of life within her. She reunited her family, bringing her sister back home. **"For the first time in a long while, I felt a glimmer of hope,"** she shared.

Through group therapy and shared experiences with other young mothers, Mwiza's will to live and hope for the future were rekindled. She discovered a community of support and understanding, which empowered her to pursue a six-month tailoring training,

equipping her with skills to sustain her family. **"Learning to tailor gave me a new sense of purpose,"** she said. Today, Mwiza works as a tailor, providing for her loved ones and nurturing her child with the love and support she once yearned for. Her journey with Hope and Homes for Children has been transformative, filling her with self-esteem and a newfound sense of purpose. **"I am proud of how far I've come,"** Mwiza expressed.

Now, Mwiza dreams not only for herself but for her daughter. She envisions a future where her child experiences the affection and care that was absent in her own childhood. With aspirations to expand her business and own a tailoring workshop, Mwiza's life is no longer overshadowed by darkness; she basks in the light of hope and possibility. **"My dreams are now within reach, and my daughter will know the love I missed,"** she beautifully expressed.

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AMONG TEEN MOTHERS, HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN SUPPORTS THE MOST VULNERABLE

In the shadows of society, where the light of hope rarely reaches, there exist young souls, teen mothers, who find themselves captured in the ropes of despair. Hope and Homes for Children with the support of local leaders and community volunteers seeks out these young girls, who, against the backdrop of adversity, have been rendered invisible to the watchful eyes of support systems that cradle others (teen mothers).

Aged between 13 and 19, these girls are either on the cusp of motherhood or already cradling the future in their arms. They dwell in homes where poverty clings to the walls, and the risk of family separation looms like a specter. Some have felt the sting of estrangement, their families turning away, leaving them to navigate the turbulent waters of life alone due to the conflicts and stigmas surrounding their pregnancies.

Among them are the orphaned, who have felt the cold hand of loss, and now, as teen mothers, they face the daunting task of filling the roles of both parents. Others have been uprooted by the relentless tide of urbanization, drawn to Kigali with promises of work, only to find themselves jobless and adrift the moment their pregnancies came to light.

There are those who, in their tender years, have become the de facto heads of their households, caring for siblings while grappling with the responsibilities of motherhood. Malnutrition, an all-too-familiar foe, gnaws at their health and that of their infants, casting long shadows over their futures.

And then there are the homeless, the ones for whom hope is but a whisper in the wind, a concept so distant it seems like a cruel mirage.

Hope and Homes for Children reaches out to these young women, selecting them not for the depth of their despair but for their potential to rise from it.

The organization wraps them in a supportive environment, with a holistic intervention to ensure that not only their dreams restored but also nurtures them. It is here, in this haven, that these teen mothers find the strength to weave new narratives of resilience and renewal.

For these young women, simple interventions are more than a support system; it is the architect of a new reality where dreams deferred blossom into dreams fulfilled, where the most vulnerable among others are given the chance to stand tall and reclaim their place in the world.



TEEN MOTHERS IN A GROUP THERAPY SESSION





MEET *BEA

A Community Volunteer in Kigarama Sector

In Kabutare Village, in Kicukiro District resides Uwanyirigira Bea, an unusual figure revered for her firm commitment to community welfare.

As the village chief and a dedicated foster caregiver, Bea's influence extends far beyond familial boundaries.

In her official capacity within the Community as CNF (National Women Council), Bea assumes a pivotal role in advocating for the rights and well-being of women and children within the Bwerankori Cell of the Kigarama Sector.

In working with Hope and Homes for Children, Bea leverages her position of influence to identify and support vulnerable teen mothers within her community.

Through systematic home visits and meticulous needs assessments, she extends a

compassionate hand to those wrestling with family conflicts and socio-economic precarity.

Bea's concerted efforts extend beyond immediate interventions; she facilitates the establishment of peer support groups, cultivating a nurturing environment conducive to mutual empowerment and solidarity among teen mothers.

Moreover, Bea accompanies teen mothers to proceed with civil registration for their babies born to teen mothers, thereby safeguarding their entitlement to legal recognition and societal protections.



LOCAL LEADERS AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE SUPPORT OF THESE TEEN MOTHERS

To enhance community engagement and create a lasting impact, Hope and Homes for Children provided training to local leaders and volunteers. This initiative focused on identifying at-risk teen mothers, understanding their unique needs and rights, and imparting knowledge on how to support families of teen mothers through education on child rights, healthcare access, and ensuring birth registration.

Community volunteers were instrumental in raising awareness about the needs of teen mothers. They conducted home visits to evaluate well-being, pinpoint those requiring additional support, and facilitate connections to necessary resources. Moreover, they championed the cause of empathy and fought against the discrimination faced by teen mothers.

In collaboration with community health workers, these volunteers visited homes to identify families of teen mothers who were at a high risk of family separation, grappling with significant conflict due to pregnancy, ostracized by their own families, living in precarious conditions, or had become pregnant before the age of 18.

Local leaders and community volunteers have conducted campaigns, delivering messages to people gathered at churches and playgrounds. These campaigns aimed to raise awareness about the issue of teen mothers and promote messages against discrimination towards them.

At the grassroots level, local leaders and members of the Community Development Network (CDN) amplified awareness about the program and spurred the identification of teen mothers in need.

TEEN MOTHERS ARE ENTRY POINTS TO MAKE THE ENTIRE FAMILY FUNCTIONING AGAIN!

The Teen Mothers Project has made a significant impact on the lives of many, providing multifaceted support to **252 teen mothers** and their families. Emergency financial support ensured that these families could meet their basic needs, these teen mothers received group and individual counseling, aiding in their emotional healing and resilience, and they were empowered with seed capital to start income-generating activities, promoting self-sufficiency.

Overall, the initiative benefited **1,764 individuals (Parents, siblings, babies of teen mothers and other family members)**, offering not only financial aid but also health insurance to ensure access to essential health services.

Civil registration support assisted **56 teen mothers in acquiring IDs** and registering the births of **200 babies**.

Vocational training for 107 teen mothers in fields such as tailoring, mechanics, and hairdressing provided them with the skills and tools needed to launch their own businesses.

Family support extended to mediation sessions for 36 families, resolving conflicts and strengthening family bonds.

Moreover, 113 local leaders and 114 community volunteers were trained to support teen mothers, with these volunteers reaching out to 743 families to promote positive parenting, reduce stigma, and help integrate teen mothers into the community.



MEET *FARIDA

A parent of a teen mother

“*Without support, I feared I might have lost my way with Amina and her baby, either by abandoning them or being abandoned by Amina.*”

- FARIDA-



Farida, a mother and a widow, faced life's challenges with courage, raising six children on her own. In her modest home, she lived with two of her children and two cherished grandchildren.

Among her Daughters was Amina, the fifth child, who at the tender age of 15, grappled with an unexpected pregnancy. ***"It was a bitter pill to swallow,"*** Farida recalled, the revelation causing such a rift that she felt compelled to send Amina away from their home—a place that once brimmed with hope.

The harsh realities of life bore down on them, as they struggled to survive in the throes of poverty. Overwhelmed by the battle to feed her family, Farida saw Amina's pregnancy as an added weight, not a blessing.

Despite her anger, "a mother's love prevailed," and Farida welcomed Amina back into their home. Yet, tension hung in the air; they lived like strangers under one roof, their interactions steeped in resentment.

Farida's frustration was palpable as she accompanied Amina to her hospital visits, often voicing her fear that the new baby would only deepen their plight. The family's hardships persisted, with Farida's young son halting his education due to hardships.

A glimmer of hope appeared when Amina was chosen to receive support from Hope and Homes for Children. With this newfound aid, she discreetly provided for her child and herself, even managing to pay the rent. Discovering the source of this unexpected support marked a turning point for Farida.

Invited to mediation sessions by Hope and Homes for Children, Farida's heart began to soften. ***"Witnessing other parents forgive, I found the strength to extend a compassionate hug to my daughter, and we forgive each other."*** she shared. Together, Farida and Amina embarked on a journey of healing and revitalisation their family bond.

Amina enrolled in a six-month hairdressing course, eventually finding financial independence at a local salon. Meanwhile, Farida received a small investment to start a business selling crops.

Now, they stand together, their united efforts allowing the young brother to continue his education. They can afford school fees for him and the two grandchildren in their care.

"Without support, I feared I might have lost my way with Amina and her baby, either by abandoning them or being abandoned by Amina." Once struggling to afford even a single meal, they now meet their rent and savor the simple pleasure of choosing their meals. Their story stands as a testament to the transformative power of support, unity, and the enduring strength of a mother's love.





MEET *KUNDWA

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I was listened to with love and understanding; I received unconditional support, and that was my 'ouf' moment. I regained my dignity and the way people perceived me has changed. I see now community members coming to me for advice.

- KUNDWA-

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Kundwa was in the Kicukiro District. At 16, while in her third year of secondary school (S3), she encountered an unexpected pregnancy. The shock was intensified by the father's denial and rejection, leaving her to face this challenge alone. Despite her initial despair, Kundwa found comfort in the love and acceptance her son brought into her life. Hope and Homes for Children played a crucial role in healing the rifts within her family, nurturing self-love, confidence, and a vision for a brighter future. They provided her with training in mechanics and the necessary toolkits, setting her on a path of self-reliance and entrepreneurship.

Kundwa remembers her longing for freedom at 16, a desire that led her to a group of teenagers who drew her into a world of parties and betrayal. She was intoxicated and taken advantage of, a painful memory she expresses in her native Kinyarwanda: ***"I never knew that those I wanted to be like (Famous), wanted to be like me (living a simple life). The very people who tempted me were the first to mock my pregnancy, subjecting me to ridicule. And the one who impregnated me denied it, though he was the first I had been with. It was a wound that cut deep."***

This sentiment reflects the profound impact of her experiences. When her pregnancy was revealed, her parents disowned her, deepening her emotional wounds. She was advised to abort, but Kundwa, paralyzed by fear, refused.

The situation worsened when Kundwa fled her home, prompting her physically disabled father to search for her. Upon her return, their poverty was so extreme that she survived on Irish potatoes alone, her health declining during her pregnancy. After giving birth at a health center, her son was diagnosed with malnutrition at three months old, requiring a month-long hospital stay for treatment. Fortunately, her mother came back home and began to support her, and Hope and Homes for Children intervened to provide vital assistance through the Clifford Chance funded Project.

With emergency support, Kundwa started a small business selling biscuits and eggs, stabilizing her and her son Tracy's lives. Hope and Homes for Children also organized group therapy sessions for Kundwa and her peers, tackling the shared challenges of poverty, sexual abuse, discrimination, and rejection they faced. The sessions,

led by an experienced psychologist, were freeing for Kundwa. Moreover, her mother's involvement in family mediation therapy helped mend their relationship. Now working at Auto Garage Express, Kundwa earns a living while her mother, aided financially by Hope and Homes for Children, makes and sells clothing. Together, they provide for Tracy, with the grandmother helping with his nursery school fees. Kundwa's story ends with gratitude for the support that has allowed her to feel valued and hopeful for the future of all teen mothers in the country.

Kundwa's story is a testament to the resilience and strength of the human spirit.

She states: ***"From despair to dignity, I stand strong. I am Kundwa, strong and dignified, embodying the spirit of every teen mother. We rise, we thrive, and we possess the power to shape an honorable future. We are not to be underestimated."***

MEET *KHELIA

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“If it weren't for the support I received; today I wouldn't be living with my mom.”

- KHELIA-

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It's heartening to hear about Khelia's journey and the transformative support she received from professionals at Hope and Homes for Children, leading to her reunification with her family. Khelia's story highlights the importance of having a safe space to address emotional challenges, connect with others experiencing similar situations, and learn valuable skills like effective communication and sharing one's worries.

Khelia's journey is truly inspiring. Despite facing overwhelming odds, she managed to rebuild her relationship with her mother and receive the necessary support to attend vocational training, paving the way for a hopeful future. The work of organizations like Hope and Homes for Children plays a crucial role in providing aid, guidance, and opportunities for individuals like Khelia to thrive despite difficult circumstances. Her story is a testament to resilience, growth, and the power of support systems in helping individuals overcome adversity.

Khelia has gone through challenging times but found strength and support through the Hope and Homes for Children project. It's heartwarming to hear that she was able to reunite with her mother, build a positive relationship, and receive the necessary support to attend vocational training.

She said: ***"I was pregnant at the age of 17 and joined this project from Hope while I was pregnant. I was desperate. I was not living at home because I was afraid my mother would kill me because she didn't want me to leave school. I found another family to keep me temporarily.***

I thought I was alone in a chaotic situation until I met others in a group therapy session at Hope and Homes' community hub. I learned that I'm not the only person who made mistakes. I met others who had offended their parents and were responsible for children while they were still children themselves. With them, I learned to communicate my emotional sufferings, and I felt like a heavy burden was lifted.

When I sat down and listened to others' traumatic experiences after the session, I felt like my problems were the worst in the world.

From Hope and Homes for Children, I learned to speak in a small group and in public. I learned to share my worries with peers and professionals from Hope and Homes. What I appreciated most was that Hope and Homes for Children helped me go back home. They reunified me with my mother, and today I am a friend to my mother. She is the one caring for my baby when I go out for work. We share everything."

Khelia's journey from the challenges of teenage pregnancy to becoming a self-reliant individual and a source of hope for others is truly inspiring. It's a reminder that with support and determination, it's possible to overcome even the most difficult circumstances.



**MEET *SHALON AND
HER DAUGHTER !**

After years of loneliness now Shalon is full of confidence!

At the age of 16, she was in intimate friendship with her classmate and found herself pregnant. She is living with her mother, sisters and brothers in Kicukiro District.

After being pregnant she was hated by her own family, was in isolation and was not given any domestic tasks. Her mother could many times insult her in the house and would not babysit her grandchild. Everyone at home would often send her hate speeches. She was not well treated well at home, and she could not properly look after her baby boy for almost 4 years.

In 2020 local leaders referred this case to Hope and Homes for Children as a family that needs support to prevent family separation. After family assessment, HHC found that it is a family that is in need of support. Shalon was gathered with other teen mothers for group therapy after many sessions of individual therapy, she gained back her confidence.

Her mother was also invited to a peer to peer support group where she met other mothers who have teen mothers. They shared experiences and help each other to get a positive understanding of the teenage pregnancy phenomenon. During group therapy, Shalon found that she is not herself. She found many girls who were also mothers at an early age. They shared experiences and found ways of self-esteem and resilience. As many other teen mothers Shalon was trained in different aspects



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such parenting skills, child rights, family planning and together with her family she got financial support for income generating activity.

Today Shalon has got counselling sessions and her mother is no longer abusing her. Shalon had a safe space for telling her worries so that she is now free from isolation. Her mother is treating her respectfully because she also has got some positive parenting skills.

Shalon's baby boy was sent to nursery school while Shalon continues to pursue vocational training in graphic design. The teen mother and her daughter feel secure at home. The family is now living in a positive atmosphere, they are moving to self-reliance.

The mother said: "A teenage girl giving birth to a baby does not mean that she is a prostitute. There are plenty of them, sex workers, without children. We must treat them correctly and avoid their social isolation.

I will treat my daughter with love." If some one else as Hope and Homes for Children loves them and supported them while they do not know them before, we must love them as our children."



**MEET *SHALON,
HER DAUGHTER
AND HER MOM !**

MEET *VIVINE

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A simple act of supporting can transform despair into hope. Thanks to the support I received, my life has blossomed into something beautiful.

- VIVINE-

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Vivine came to Kigali City from Kirehe. According to her testimony, her mother abandoned them when she was young.

Vivine hardly completed primary school, unfortunately, due to the family's multiple challenges, she couldn't start secondary school. Vivine and her three siblings stayed with their father.

One day, a young girl working in Kigali told Vivine that if she doesn't attend school, she could find a job as a housegirl in Kigali City. Given the difficult circumstances at home, Vivine accepted the suggestion and asked the girl to help her find a job in Kigali.

A week later, they went to Kigali together in search of employment. Vivine secured a job as a housegirl in a family. Her boss asked her, 'Why aren't you studying while you're still young?' The girl explained that poverty in her family had forced her to leave school. The boss then posed another question: 'If I find a school for you, would you be willing to return?' Vivine accepted the opportunity and resumed her education.

Her primary school was contacted, and she started secondary school. She felt like part of the family. However, in 2018, the same boss who was paying for her school fees expressed inappropriate intentions towards her. She refused, and when he persisted, she decided to leave home and quit school. Back in Kirehe, she spent two months at home before returning to Kigali. In 2019, she found work near Gahanga Market as a housegirl.

While working in Kigali, she entered into a relationship and eventually intimacy.

After some time, Vivine realized she was pregnant. She sought medical confirmation and worked for six months before returning to her father. Despite her large size, he didn't notice her pregnancy. She gave birth after nine months, and living conditions which were bad became even worse, and she started and learned to cultivate crops to survive.

In 2021, she returned to Kigali at the request of her paternal aunt.

Unfortunately, the aunt's offer to help her learn a profession (such as hairdressing or sewing) turned out to be housework at her aunt's place.

However, fate took a turn when a community volunteer informed her about Hope and Homes for Children, an organization dedicated to identifying vulnerable teenage mothers. After meeting with Hope and Homes for Children, Vivine realized that she is not alone. Through training and group therapy with other teen mothers, they share experiences and the journey of pregnancy, which has helped her become resilient.

Vivine was able to purchase a machine for drying gel nails. Nowadays, she runs a mobile nail salon business. With the income from this business, she can pay her house rent and provide for her son. She's also a member of a savings group in the community, and she has a bank account where she can save a little money. Yes, she does have some money in that account. Vivine feels happy and hopeful about her future.

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