



# Against All Odds . . .

The struggles of young girls in Kisumu, Kenya and one organization's commitment to their community and to them.

Stories of empowerment, encouragement and the promise of a better tomorrow.

A collaboration of K-MET efforts through Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space



## **Acknowledgement**

**We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped to contribute to the production of this book. All those working tirelessly at K-MET to alter the realities of their fellow community members in a positive way, the Kisumu community at large and those who have benefited from Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space. Thank you for welcoming us into your lives and telling us your stories. Our hope is for the greater world community to be empowered by your strength and your voices be heard.**

**Asante Sana**

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## **Kisumu Medical and Educational Trust**

**K-MET, with its headquarters in Kisumu City, is a non-governmental organization registered in the Republic of Kenya under the Trustee Act. K-MET was founded by a group of visionary professionals from diverse professional backgrounds. K-MET is a grassroots organization operated by Kenyans for Kenyans.**

**From very humble beginnings, these professionals conceptualized and organized what they could do to help uplift the health, education and development issues in the rural areas of Western Kenya. Western Kenya, holds some of the worst health indicators, developing educational standards and lowest poverty levels within Kenya. It was against this background the visionaries began researching areas to promote health, education and sustainable development under a motto “Unity in diversity through shared concepts”. K-MET’s mission is to promote the development of underserved communities through innovative health and educational programs.**

**K-MET operates numerous programs to tackle the challenges that plague Kisumu’s residents, two of those programs are Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space. Both of these programs focus on serving at-risk and vulnerable young women.**

**To learn more about K-MET and all of their initiatives, please go to [www.kmet.co.ke](http://www.kmet.co.ke)**



## **The Kisumu Community**

Kisumu is the third largest city in Kenya with a population estimated to be at 500,000. Lying on Lake Victoria, Kisumu is a city full of charm with scores of positive attributes. A multicultural city in many respects, the majority of the population is comprised of the Luo tribe, one of the 42 tribes within Kenya. Kisumu's population is also composed of citizens from varying tribes and has an impressive amount of international residents. Main income generators are fishing, tourism and farming. Kisumu shares Lake Victoria, the world's second largest freshwater lake, with Uganda and Tanzania.

Kisumu's economy thrived throughout the 1900s with the railway and ports bringing trade and agriculture sources like sugar, fish and cotton to the region. However, Kenya's economy suffered a depression in the late 1980's and 1990's, and railway and port use were gravely affected. Kisumu's economy suffered greatly. It is projected, at present, to be one of the poorest cities in Kenya. Slightly over 50% of Kisumu residents are living under the poverty line. With a majority of the population living in high-density slum areas, opportunities are scarce and hope at many times seems fleeting. Most within these communities lack access to basic sanitation, appropriate infrastructure and underappreciated luxuries, like electricity and clean running water.

Many of the lucrative employment opportunities in Kisumu are dominated by males. Occupations in the community, like drivers, taxis and fishing are particularly popular in Kisumu and cater to males. In addition, the unemployment rate is staggering, and the poverty level continues to grow. The unemployment rate in Kisumu is at 30%, but over half the population are employed through petty, unsustainable and irregular means. The average resident makes only between \$40 and \$50 US dollars monthly. Kisumu is also faced with other grave challenges of epidemic proportions. The HIV/AIDS rate is at a dangerous 15%, whereas Kenya's national rate is 6%. In addition, Kisumu retains the highest proportion of food poverty in all of Kenya, at over 50%. In comparison, Nairobi holds an 8% food poverty statistic.

All of these seemingly insurmountable challenges are also strongly influenced by educational hurdles. School fees charged are unrealistic for the average Kisumu resident. As the cost of school fees continues to grow in conjunction with the revolving challenges this economy faces, school becomes an unrealistic goal for families and their children. This can be especially true for girls.

We are all familiar with the concept, when you educate a girl, you educate a family. Investing in a girl is a priority, when you invest in a girl, you are investing in a mother, sister, daughter, grandmother and wife. By educating a girl, the investment can manifest in all those she educates, and thus break the once continuous cycle of poverty. In a city like Kisumu, many young girls are faced with harsh realities, the loss of parents, hopeless poverty, enduring abuse and neglect, and grave financial burdens resting on very young shoulders. Tragically, some of these young women turn to commercial sex work, have unplanned pregnancies and engage in dangerous activities as alternatives.

Without constructive and positive outlets like school, many young girls are faced with lives full of complacency and are lacking inspiration. In response, HIV/AIDS rates increase, unsafe abortions occur, unwanted pregnancies rise and in general the community continues to suffer. These girls by majority are leaving school before they have the necessary skills and education to know their reproductive health rights and have the maturity to cope with huge challenges and irreversible decisions. Left to their own devices and lacking opportunities, this cycle will continue for generations to come. Young women living in the slum areas of Kisumu have not had the opportunity to be inspired, Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space aim to change that.

## **Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space**

Sisterhood for Change (SFC) and Safe Space are initiatives started by K-MET in order to tackle the challenges that young women face within the community. The goals of Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space are to educate and empower young women in the at-risk, vulnerable communities within the Kisumu district of Kenya. They arm them with reproductive health training, vocational training, and empower them to change the course of the cycle they are currently on.

These are their stories. These are girls who have experienced far too much hardship for their young years, but they, along with Sisterhood for Change, and coupled with Safe Space, are making an active choice, a decision to change their reality.

Many of the students at SFC and Safe Space have young children, they have not finished their education, and they are not sure of a path other than the unhealthy one that they are currently on. Once they make the commitment to participate in Sisterhood for Change, they are given the option of three different vocational trainings, catering, hairdressing or tailoring. These are trades that are particularly successful for women in the Kisumu community. The goal is for these young women to be equipped with a tangible trade, a skill that can assist them in obtaining sustainable employment for their future. Paired with intensive reproductive health training, the students hone their skills over a six-month period. They are then transferred to an attachment for three months. The attachment serves as a local apprenticeship, so they can further perfect their skills in the real marketplace and business. After the nine-month period concludes, SFC is confident that the girls are empowered and able to attain employment in their professional field.

Armed with knowledge of life skills, reproductive health and a confidence that was not present before, these young women enter the workforce as different people than they were nine months prior. Changed, empowered with dreams of a future that are not only realistic but that they are well on the course to achieving. The complacency that was once there is replaced by a stronger, more self-assured young woman, whose life has been strongly impacted by K-MET and Sisterhood for Change.

For those young women who are perhaps still challenged by the lack of opportunities in the community, there is a safety net called Safe Space, a K-MET initiative. The aim of this program is to catch any graduates of Sisterhood for Change who may be struggling for any number of reasons in finding sustainable employment. Safe Space works with the participants, empowering them and their trade. Operating as a business, the students hone their skills, but also sell their goods and services to the community as a group. Whether that is filling orders for tailoring school uniforms, catering an event for a luncheon or giving a hair treatment to a client in the neighborhood, Safe Space enables these young women to earn their own money, while increasing their confidence and enforcing their ability to go out on their own. As with Sisterhood for Change, reproductive health education and life skills are further instilled at Safe Space to ensure the participants are equipped with all the resources for success.

This book is dedicated to the young women who have made the choice to alter their situation and seek a change for the betterment of themselves and their children. Students who are currently enrolled at Sisterhood for Change, those in their place of attachment and participants at Safe Space are highlighted in order to convey their situation through their eyes and their words. They are merely a fraction of those who have experienced the positive effects of Sisterhood for Change, Safe Space and all that K-MET touches in the community, but they serve as a representation for what is possible, and what each young girl deserves.

## **The Stories of Sisterhood for Change**





### **Anastacia's Story**

Anastacia is a young woman of 22 years. When one sees her, she always greets you with warmth and a smile. She is compassionate and kind. However within her few years, she has had many challenges and has been faced with continuous obstacles. Her family is from the Kisii tribe, and they live far from Kisumu. Unfortunately, due to instability within her family, she is unable to reside with them. After years of not knowing what to do, or where to go, she made the courageous decision to move to Kisumu in hopes of a better life for herself.

Anastacia faced hurdles that are difficult for most to imagine in an attempt to complete her education, but she persevered. Despair and frustration left her with thoughts of suicide and unhappiness. After completing Form 4, which is the equivalency of high school, she was unable to accept her certificate due to the inability to pay the completion fee. The frustration for young women faced with these educational hurdles can at many times be overwhelming.

Facing a future of complacency and with no healthy options in sight, Anastacia left her home and sought out Sisterhood for Change. She now lives with her brother and his family. In a small two bedroom home within a slum of Kisumu, there are ten residents. She often feels withdrawn and not part of the family. In exchange for maintaining the home, she is permitted to stay there. This is the price she pays for change. Anastacia has dreams of one day becoming a nurse, but ultimately she wants to be self-sufficient and independent. This desire was her motivation for enrolling at SFC. Currently, she is learning and honing her skills in tailoring. She loves making clothes and appreciates the support of the tutors and her fellow students. She says that SFC has given her the encouragement and confidence to speak for herself.

Anastacia is happiest when she is singing. When she was little, she loved singing in Church. As Anastacia recants these memories, her face lights up. The same elation can be seen when she sings every morning at Sisterhood for Change. This may seem like a small accomplishment, but in comparison to the track Anastacia was on just a few short months ago, this is tremendous progress. It gives her a means of expression, a place where she can feel happy and safe and just be herself. SFC creates this safe haven for her.

Anastacia's future has clearly been altered by K-MET at Sisterhood for Change. In just the two months she has been in the program, her knowledge of herself, her own empowerment and her confidence have all grown.

## Usher's Story

As Usher enters the safety of the Sisterhood for Change gates each morning, she arrives with a wide smile and exudes happiness. She is quiet and a bit introverted, but her smile is always inviting. What at first glance one would not know about this young woman is how difficult her journey has been. In order to arrive at Sisterhood for Change each morning, Usher walks over one hour each way. This is after performing her morning chores and assisting with the housework. She is always early for class and eager to learn.

Usher lives with her cousin and her family. When she was just ten years of age, her mother passed away from sickness. Tragically, within the same year, her father died in an auto accident. At ten years old, Usher, an only child, became an orphan. As she was shuffled from home to home, neighbors and relatives offered to take her in, and she pressed forward and always maintained to hold her head high.



Usher's outlet for her pain became music. She is an extremely talented drummer. Drumming and singing give her the ability to escape the challenges of her daily life and gain strength within herself. They serve as an escape for her. The inner peace she feels while drumming cannot be matched. Sisterhood for Change readily gives her the opportunity for this sort of expression.

Prior to her enrollment at Sisterhood for Change, Usher's commitment to her education was always a priority in her life. From this inner motivation, and with the help of the Church, Usher graduated from Form 4 or high school. After graduation from high school, the next step in Usher's life was very unclear. Her cousin led her to SFC and helped her to see this opportunity. At SFC, Usher is learning how to become a professional tailor. She very much enjoys making clothes. She also values the reproductive health training at SFC, saying that now, she can stand on her own with confidence, a priceless attribute for any young woman.

Other than drumming, Usher's second passion is science. She loves thinking about how things work and dreams of a career in medicine. SFC has opened the door for her to dream. A young girl that faced so much tragedy is now stronger, supported and armed with the confidence to enter the world. She has the ability and the peace to formulate a future for herself. When asked about what life holds for her, she says that anything is now possible. She goes on to remark that this is something that she did not know before her time at Sisterhood for Change.



## Dolphine's Story

When you look at 20 year-old Dolphine, a strong, confident young lady looks back at you. She carries herself with a sense of grace and compassion. It is hard to imagine what Dolphine has endured before her time at Sisterhood for Change.

Dolphine spent her childhood with her family in a small village in Tanzania. Her family farmed, and she has fond memories of the times with them. When she speaks of them, she pauses and smiles. As Dolphine was just reaching school age, her village started to be overtaken by the crippling effects of AIDS. When she was six, Dolphine's father passed away from this disease. In the same year, her mother was taken by HIV/AIDS as well. Dolphine and her young siblings were beyond devastated, and were left with very few options. With nowhere to turn, she was taken in by an Aunt. Dolphine lived with them until she was eight years old. Suddenly, tragedy hit again, and her Aunt passed away. If she stayed in this home, she would have been taken as the Uncle's bride.



A distant relative agreed to take her in here in Kisumu. At the tender age of 8, Dolphine relocated to a new, unfamiliar city alone and without her siblings. With the help of a local Church, she was enrolled in school and things finally began to look positive and on track for Dolphine. Tragedy struck again when her sister was killed. She was the victim of a violent riot. All of this loss could certainly be enough for one to lose their sense of hope and trust in the good of the future, but not for Dolphine, she persevered. She earned such high marks at school that she was awarded a scholarship. Excelling in classes and soaking in all that school offered, Dolphine relished her opportunity to be in a learning environment. But sadly, when she was 15, the scholarship lost funding, and she was at an all time low.

Given all the sadness of her life, she started hanging out with the wrong crowd and people that failed to lift her up. A short time after being in this setting, Dolphine became pregnant. With no source of income and no where to turn, Dolphine tried her best to care for the child as a single mother with no support, no one to teach her, and no one to rely on. She had no guidance, no resources, and in so many respects, the community had failed this young girl. Dolphine attempted to do her best by this child, but when her son was merely four months of age, he died of malnutrition.

Now, armed with education, awareness and perspective, Dolphine realizes the precarious nature of her situation, but then, in that time, she had no options for help and no voice to ask for it. After the death of her son, she found the courage to return to school, through the assistance of relatives, and she managed to graduate from high school. With impressive accomplishments, Dolphine is model of strength. This is a young woman that has triumphed despite hurdles that most can only imagine. Through the assistance and empowerment of Sisterhood for Change, Dolphine recants her story and inspires all around her.

Her goals for her future are not unlike most. She simply wants to be happy, she wants to be successful. She would like a loved husband and children. But most of all, she wants to be independent and be able to speak for herself. She is thankful to Sisterhood for Change for all the empowerment she has received and believes it has given her strength. Dolphine loves praise songs. She often performs as the soloist when the ladies of SFC sing. When she sings, there is a confidence, a will, that was simply just not there just a few short months before. She is empowered, brazen with the knowledge that she is worth it. Sisterhood for Change has given her the means to dream, to know that things are possible.

## Effrancis's Story

Effrancis, a young woman of 19 years, has much in common with the other students at



Sisterhood for Change. She, like them, has seen far more than what her young years reflect. Before she came to Sisterhood for Change, she was working by cleaning houses, in order to feed and shelter herself. Raised just over the border in Uganda, Effrancis's father died when she was 9. Unable to support her and her family financially, her mother had no other option, but to send Effrancis to live with a relative in Kisumu. At 9 years old, Effrancis made this journey by herself.

After facing unsuitable living arrangements and plagued by horrific circumstances, Effrancis became pregnant at 16. While at the hospital, giving birth alone, as a very young woman, her baby did not survive. The father of this child remains her current partner, and they are expecting another child later this year.

Effrancis joined Sisterhood for Change for change in her life. She voices her desire to be able to stand by herself and for herself. Enrolled in catering, Effrancis, for once in her life, is able to focus on something for herself alone, and her own future. She is quiet and shy at first interaction, but underneath lies a very smart young woman, who just needed a chance.

Having left school at 12, due to her mother's inability to pay the school fees, Effrancis's main focus in life has been to support her mother back in Uganda. She sends money every chance she gets. At Sisterhood for Change, she can focus on herself, asking herself what she wants for her future, which is a question that she had not thought about prior to coming to K-MET. SFC offers her the time and the calm environment to learn catering, a trade that can help her and her situation, and inevitably her future.

She likes talking about her past and her challenges, she says that it makes her feel better about herself to speak of it. All girls, especially ones that have faced hurdles like Effrancis, deserve the opportunity to have someone just simply listen to them, to hear their burdens and their hopes. This is how young women learn, grow and change the mode of their future.

As Effrancis welcomes her second child into the world, this time she is armed with education. She possesses knowledge on reproductive health, for her and her unborn child, she knows her rights, and she knows how to stand up for herself. This confidence is something that will continue to be nurtured while at SFC and inevitably will break the cycle that has been created for her, only to be replaced with a confident, self-assured new one.

## **Jacklin's Story**

Jacklin, a 21 year-old catering student, is a bit of a shy and slight young lady at the onset. She grew up in one of the disadvantaged areas of Kisumu. Raised by a grandmother that stepped in, as her mother was too young at the time to care for her, Jacklin is a gracious and articulate young woman. She was raised without ever meeting her father. Jacklin has a grounded yet whimsical way about her. If you ask her, if she could do anything with her life, she will take a moment, pause, and then with wide eyes tell you that she would like to be a flight attendant. Though having never actually boarded a plane, Jacklin has an ability; she has the ability to dream for her future.

After just two short months at Sisterhood for Change, it is clear the impact the program has had on this young lady. When asked of the training, she remarks that there are so many things she knows now that she didn't know before. Now I can stand firm and say no to what I don't want, and say yes to what I am sure of. Lessons like this are priceless for a young woman.

Though very slight, she conveys strength, and has the ability to see a vision for herself. While speaking to Jacklin, you ask her what she wants for herself. There is not a moment of hesitation before she articulates that when she looks at her life, she does not want to live such a life again. She would also not like her children to live this life. Her ability to recognize this is a monumental step in the right direction. Jacklin is able to verbalize a simple, succinct, yet ever so powerful response to a question that many far older than her struggle with. The impact that Sisterhood for Change has had on her young life is vividly apparent, and its continuous effects will only yield positive results for Jacklin.

## **Millicent's Story**

Millicent is 21 year-old hairdressing student at Sisterhood for Change. Even at first glance, she is a composed, clear leader. She radiates in group environments as well as when praying and singing; however, there is a sadness there as well.

Millicent was raised a few hours away from Kisumu. At the conclusion of Form 3, the equivalency of the junior year of high school, her family was unable to continue pay her school fees. A challenge that plagues so many families and affects a large proportion of young girls like Millicent. School was what grabbed her attention, allowed her to learn and think about life in a different context. Without her education to motivate her, idleness quickly took over Millicent's life.

Millicent has a beautiful one year-old daughter named Camilla. When you speak of her, Millicent's face lights up. This is a mother that clearly loves her child, and she is her first priority. Unfortunately, Millicent had to make a grave sacrifice to enroll in Sisterhood for Change. Camilla had to remain to live with her family, hours away from Kisumu. The only occasion on which Millicent has seen her little girl in the last three months, was when the child grew ill with malaria. She is here because she believes that Sisterhood for Change will have a huge impact on she and her daughter's future.

Millicent is currently living in an uncomfortable living situation with a distant relative. Her desire to be at SFC far outweighs her disdain for the situation at home. Millicent can see that the home situation is temporary, and the effects of SFC will be permanent. She talks of the trainings, that they make you know what you never knew. When asked what is the best thing Sisterhood for Change has done for you, she responded that her dreams have become bigger. Any witness can see that this is true. One can only hope for this impact in each and every one of its participants. Her dreams have become bigger; there is true power in that statement. The sadness one sees in Millicent is gradually being replaced by strength. The effects of SFC on her are apparent, her self-confidence is growing and empowerment is taking its course.



## Sylvia's Story

Sylvia, a 22 year-old catering student, has a smile that is electric and a jovial nature that cannot be matched. She is from a nearby disadvantaged area of Kisumu. At a very young age, her mother passed away, and having never known her father, Sylvia was raised by her grandmother and aunt. An orphan, she was faced with tragedy so early in life.

Sylvia's grandmother and aunt did the best they could for her and her education, but by class 8, the equivalency of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they were unable to generate funds to pay for Sylvia's school fees. She was left with no other alternative but to drop out of school. Every time you have an interaction with this young lady she is full of optimism. She has an uncanny way of making every situation positive. When asked what she would like to do with her life, what she wants for her future, she took a moment, paused, mulled it over, and then was confident in her response. She said no matter what she does, she would like to do something that she can do well. Even if that were sweeping, if she is a sweeper, she would like to sweep well.

Sylvia loves to sing, she also loves praise songs. When asked about why she entered Sisterhood for Change she didn't hesitate. I want to be a better me. Her dreams for the future are encompassed around helping her grandmother, as she feels so blessed by her and her guidance. She also would like to be a part of something that could help other orphaned children in the future. When asked what motivates her to succeed, she responded the desire for knowledge. Sylvia has a presence about her that compliments all the Sisterhood for Change stands for. She wants better for herself, and she knows that she deserves it. This sort of empowerment and self-confidence is the aim of Sisterhood for Change.

## Vera's Story

Vera is a 19 year-old tailoring student with a tenacious desire for learning and a smile that radiates in a room. Her disposition and confidence is that of a natural born leader. A good friend to all those around her, who is always supportive of her classmates and very welcoming. Vera has an inviting and calming way about her. She was raised by a strong and positive mother, who is a teacher. Her parents instilled in their children that education is the key. She graduated from Form 4 or high school, a huge accomplishment for any young woman in Kisumu. Vera was then met with lacking opportunities for young women in her situation. Idleness was taking over, and she desired motivation.

Vera found Sisterhood for Change, and immediately knew it was the right decision for her. She loves learning how to make her own garments, and she is empowered by the knowledge that she can have a successful business. Ultimately, Vera dreams of becoming a nurse, and she believes that Sisterhood for Change is the catalyst for her to get to that goal. A leader, Vera leads her classmates in morning prayers with vigor and confidence. She is an excellent student, always inquiring and trying to perform better. One can see that this young girl's exemplary manner is only being compounded by the influence of Sisterhood for Change.



When asked about the program's impact in her daily life, she replied that it made her confident to speak in public, particularly in front of men. She is a student that is always eager to assist a struggling student with problems, traumas and issues, she always volunteers to do any of the less glamorous chores around SFC and adds a positive outlook on every situation. She values herself, respects herself, her decisions and her future. The effects that Sisterhood for Change will have on Vera will be tremendous because of her willingness to receive it.



## **The Stories of Sisterhood for Change while in Attachment**





## **Bridget's Story**

When you meet Bridget, her smile is electric. She has a way of welcoming you, that is inviting and her kindness shines through. Now, Bridget's strength and confidence are clear. She is now ending her first month in attachment. This is an internship, a practical environment, at a local salon where she is honing her trade, but life was not always this optimistic for her.

At the tender age of 15, both of her parents died tragically in a road accident. Traffic accidents are extremely common in Kenya and are one of the leading causes of death. The oldest of 5 siblings, Bridget was left to be the caretaker for all of her brothers and sisters. With school fees mounting and looming challenges of running a household at such a young age, Bridget made the difficult choice to drop out of school after finishing Form 2, the equivalent of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Given the loss of her parents and impending responsibilities, school was just no longer a feasible option.

Family members assisted where they could, but nothing compensates for the loss of both parents in such a sudden and tragic manner. Due to the idleness that replaced her lack of school, Bridget began hanging out with those that failed to lift her up. She had abusive boyfriends and was putting herself in unhealthy situations and poor environments.

At 21, she became pregnant, and gave birth to her son Griffin's Ricky. The father has no influence in his son's life, nor does he support Bridget or her son monetarily. Again, she felt despair. Faced with the burden of being the oldest sibling and tasked with caring for her family, she now had to adopt her reality as a single mother. Last year, a friend was telling her about Sisterhood for Change and K-MET. She prompted Bridget to inquire. Bridget has always admired and loved hairdressing. With the support of her cousin, she joined SFC and enrolled in the hairdressing vocational training. After undergoing her 6-month training at SFC for hairdressing, life skills and reproductive health training, Bridget was ready to begin her attachment.

Bridget is in her first month of the three-month practical learning experience. Her son has a safe place to go everyday, and she has learned that she indeed can be independent and self-sufficient. She happily takes pride in her daily work. Bridget looks forward to the

day when she is employed, can provide for herself and her family. Her resiliency is remarkable, and it is clear that Sisterhood for Change has given her the tools to be able to fully express herself, be informed about her rights as a young woman and to grow to her full potential. It will be exciting to see what Bridget will be doing in the future, as she shows a great deal of promise. Her ability to remain professional in the salon where she is learning conveys her maturity and sense of responsibility. When Bridget was asked what she wanted for herself and her son, she responded that she wanted to live a life that is good. Each young girl deserves at least that opportunity. SFC has opened the door of possibilities for her.

## Lavender's Story

Lavender, a 22 year-old young lady, is currently in her first month of attachment. She is working in a successful salon in downtown Kisumu. After her 6 months of hairdressing training paired with life skills and reproductive health training at Sisterhood for Change, Lavender feels confident in her skills and loves her chosen profession.

When you look at Lavender, one sees a confident, self-assured and beautiful young woman. She is articulate and kind, although prior to her involvement with Sisterhood for Change, she faced significant challenges in her young life. Lavender was raised in a disadvantaged area of Kisumu with her family. Tragically at 13, her father grew ill and passed away. At this point, her mother, facing the reality of being a single mother and being the sole provider for her family, was unable to pay Lavender's school fees, so she had no other alternative but to leave school. A bright young girl full of smiles was forever changed by the loss of her father, compounded with the absence of school. These burdens created a huge sadness within her. Lavender was left with nothing to fill this void. Her mother was trying desperately to support the family, so she was often left in the home with her siblings.



After staying at home for some time, she grew idle, and began hanging out with the wrong crowd and engaging in unsafe activities. At 18, she gave birth to a son named Nigel. It is very apparent, that Nigel is a priority in her life. Sisterhood for Change's impact on Lavender is clear. Before, she was timid, unsure of her future and what options there were for her, now she is self-assured, confident and empowered. Lavender is able to articulate her thoughts, goals and feelings.

Lavender would like to be a professional hairdresser, earn her own income and be self-employed. Lavender expresses that she wants to be able to depend on herself. She aspires to be like the other professional hairdressers that she works with in her attachment, who she sees as independent and beautiful. Lavender carries herself with dignity and grace, and the ironic thing is, to an outsider, one would never know that she is just beginning her attachment and she is not a professional in the field. Lavender wants a sound and healthy future for her and for her son. Sisterhood for Change has instilled in her values that are continuous and lasting, and she has made the choice to adopt these changes. The effects that the program has had on her, in combination with her internal motivation, has made it clear that success and happiness are on the horizon for Lavender.



## **Lillian's Story**

As with the other young women in their attachment, Lillian is also finishing her first month at a salon as part of Sisterhood for Change. She is in the hairdressing vocation, and when one walks into the salon where she works, it is clear that she is well respected and a part of the team there. This 20 year-old has had a life that many can only imagine.

Growing up in a nearby slum with her parents and four siblings, life in and of itself was a daily challenge. At 14, Lillian's parents simultaneously grew ill and both passed away. She and her siblings were left to fend for themselves with the assistance of relatives. She persevered and tried tirelessly to remain in school. For two years, Lillian managed to raise the immensely high school fees with the assistance of her aunts and cousins to keep herself in classes. At 16, it was clear that she could no longer keep up with the mounting fees, and she made the difficult decision to leave school at the eighth grade level.

Having lost both of her parents, Lillian had no strong adult guidance in her life, and she was lacking inspiration. She began hanging around the local slum, and trouble quickly crept in. At eighteen, she delivered her son Stanley. Now a single mother, she had to reevaluate her priorities and what kind of future she wanted for her son. She made the decision to come to Sisterhood for Change. Her motivation to move forward and join SFC sprang from her awareness that she knew she needed a change in her life, a new direction.

At Sisterhood for Change, Lillian saw value in the reproductive health training and the confidence that was gradually instilled in her over the course of her six-month training. She feels assured that when she graduates from SFC and her attachment, she can effectively gain employment and be independent for herself and for her son.

## Vivien's Story



22 year-old Vivien is in her second month at her hairdressing attachment. When you see her she is full of smiles and laughter. Within the salon where she works, Vivien collaborates with the other stylists and is an active participant and learner. Just last year, one could find Vivien on the side of the road selling roasted maize. This was all the promise she had for her future just a short time ago. So much of that reality has changed now. One day while idly sitting at her maize stand, she saw some

students at Sisterhood for Change in the midst of an outreach. Outreaches are weekly activities that the SFC students participate in as part of educating the community. They are certified in reproductive health training as part of their time at Sisterhood for Change, so the students generate a presentation each week in a different area of Kisumu to serve as peer educators. They were on one such outing when Vivien saw them. Their outreach was so profound that Vivien realized this was the change she needed in her life immediately.

Growing up in one of the nearby slum areas with her parents and six siblings, life was challenging but also full of encouragement from her parents. Plagued with financial hardship, school fees became a mounting hurdle. At the conclusion of Form 3, the equivalency of a junior in high school, the fees became too much for Vivien's family to bear, and she was forced to end her schooling. Again, as with many young women in this situation, she was left with nothing to fill her days and lacking inspiration.

At 19, Vivien gave birth to her daughter Chelsea Rita. Regardless of the challenges single mother's face, it is vividly apparent that Chelsea is Vivien's first priority. She wants more for her. Her involvement at Sisterhood for Change is hugely motivated by this factor. Her dream is to own her own hair salon, where she can operate freely and independently. She wants a future where she can support herself and her daughter. Sisterhood for Change has enabled that as a possibility. Arming her with the skills she so desperately wanted and needed, Vivien is now confident, inspired and changed.



## Stacey's Story

Stacey is a dreamer, and she has great aspirations for her future. As a spunky and spirited 17 year-old, Stacey has achieved so many of her goals already. She is in the attachment phase of the hairdressing program at Sisterhood for Change and began her relationship with SFC in October 2008. She is proud of her work and wishes to open her own salon in the future. She wants to be the best at what she does, with hopes of instructing other young women how to do the same.

Sisterhood for Change has had a profound effect on Stacey's life. The vocational training, matched with reproductive health education and life skills components have transformed Stacey's outlook and altered her choices. As a result of the reproductive health education, she has altered many of her dangerous behaviors. Once idle and complacent, Stacey was lacking inspiration, but she now is close to becoming the professional hairdresser she aims to be.

Stacey is a beautiful singer and especially enjoys the musical and dramatic outlets that Sisterhood for Change facilitates. Often performing as a soloist, it is clear to see that she relishes time dedicated to these activities, and her talent is inspiring all that are around her. Engaging in these kinds of outlets has give Stacey the faith that her dreams are indeed possible.

Stacey grew up in a slum district of Kisumu. Her family was unable to afford her school fees, so at fifteen she dropped out of high school with only two years remaining. She lives with both of her parents and has eight siblings. Part of her motivation to work is to provide financial support to her younger siblings. With no money to continue to her education and faced with limited job opportunities, her outlook on her future was somewhat bleak. Sisterhood for Change provided her with an opportunity that would otherwise be out of reach. Now the possibilities for her life are limitless. Stacy's story is a testimonial to the importance of providing economic empowerment and reproductive health training to the young women of Kisumu.



## Faith's Story



Faith is the picture of a Sisterhood for Change success story. She is a confident seventeen year-old young lady, who is in the second month of attachment at a local hair salon. She completed her Sisterhood for Change training in 2008, and since she has been working at the same salon in her attachment. Because of this program she is able to support herself and her family. Faith aspires to be financially independent, and she is extremely motivated. Before joining the program Faith's daily life was filled with complacency and idleness, K-MET and Sisterhood for Change provided her with an opportunity to improve her outlook on life and reach her true potential.

As with a number of the disadvantaged youth in the Kisumu community, Faith was unable to finish high school due to the high costs of school fees. She was forced to stop school at the age of fifteen after finishing Form 1, equivalent to the freshman year of high school. Faith is an orphan; she lost her mother when she was merely nine years old, and she was also very young at the time of her father's death. Faith is one of six siblings, and she currently lives with her aunt.

Faith recounts her time at Sisterhood for Change as one of great enjoyment. It is a place where she was able to make friends and form connections. Sisterhood for Change provided her with a place where she could feel safe, comfortable and at ease. She especially loved the music and drama therapies, and one of her favorite pastimes is singing. Faith felt that the vocational training that she received at SFC was competitive with other similar programs, and she now feels sufficiently prepared to embark as a hairdresser. Faith is passionate about hairdressing and now feels confident that this is a career she can truly pursue successfully.

It is easy to see the profound impact Sisterhood for Change has had on Faith's life. Faith is committed to continuing to improve herself. Faith looks forward to the day when she is self-employed. She is driven to be a role model to her siblings and to be someone that they can look up to. Faith also carries the burden of supporting her siblings monetarily, and she feels far more empowered that she will be able to assist with this because of her training at SFC. Faith now possesses marketable skills and self-confidence. She is a true example of what Sisterhood for Change aims to do for young women in the community. She is a reflection of what can be possible if provided the right guidance, resources and tools.



## **Abby's Story**

Motivated by the hope of a better future, Abby is a slightly introverted seventeen year-old single mother who is excelling in her attachment at a local salon. She is a talented hairdresser who loves to sing. Only a few short months ago this bright young woman was feeling lost and hopeless; she had no work and was struggling to care for her child. There are little career opportunities for a seventeen year-old with an eighth grade education level in Kisumu, where unemployment rates are staggering.

As a result of the high cost of school fees, Abby was left no option but to leave school at the age of fourteen. Shortly afterward, at the innocent age of fifteen, she became pregnant. Abby is the mother of a beautiful two year-old son. Abby collaborates with her son's father and her mother in order to support her son. She lives in a humble home of four with her son, her mother and her sister. Her father passed away when she was only ten years-old. Abby was too young to properly process this loss and still is unaware of how he passed.

A few short months ago Abby heard of the Sisterhood for Change program through K-MET. In search of an opportunity to change the path that she was currently on, and find a better future for she and her son, Abby enrolled in the hairdressing department. Abby selected this trade because it is something she is passionate about. SFC has complimented her admiration for this field and grown her skills to a professional's level; However, Sisterhood for Change has provided Abby with much more than merely hairdressing skills. She now has a confidence that she is able to pursue the future she has always dreamed of.

As a result of the reproductive health training, she is ready to make safe and educated decisions that will have only positive results for her and her family. SFC has versed Abby on an education that she was unaware of prior; she now knows her rights as a young woman. The multifaceted program offered by Sisterhood for Change has empowered and changed Abby and clearly impacted her decisions for her future.



Upon graduation from SFC, after she completes her attachment, Abby aspires to work in the hairdressing field as a professional. She now feels confident in herself and is ready to find employment. Abby's biggest motivator is her son. She is determined to provide a good life for him. When you interact with Abby, it is evident that her child is her first priority and motivator for a better life. She looks forward to being financially independent and doing something that she truly enjoys. This reality is something that she could not even dream of just a short time ago. Without the assistance of Sisterhood for Change, this might have never been possible.

## Maureen's Story



Maureen is completing her attachment at a small hair salon in Kisumu. She is only seventeen years old, but in her young age she has faced much tragedy. Maureen lost both of her parents at an extremely young and tender age. By the age of fifteen, both of her parents died leaving her to navigate life on her own. Maureen and her five siblings live with her father's second wife. There are eleven people in her household. After her father's passing her stepmother was really struggling to support all of the children. At fifteen her family could no

longer afford her school fees, so she was unable to continue her education; she had only three years of high school remaining.

After leaving school, Maureen was left with emptiness and a lack of motivation for her future. Without a high school education finding work is even more challenging within Kisumu. She would occupy her days idly in her home. Maureen found out about Sisterhood for Change and in January of 2009, Maureen enrolled in the hairdressing department. She joined the program because she was looking for change, and she wanted to become empowered. Today Maureen is in the in attachment phase of the program. Maureen loves doing all salon services, her specialties are manicures, pedicures, and she loves braiding.

Maureen now envisions living a better life, one where she is economically independent and stable. She wants to become employed in the hairdressing industry once she finishes her attachment and is grateful to K-MET and Sisterhood for Change for aiding in these possibilities. Her dream of a brighter future motivates her to continue to strive for these goals.

## **The Stories of Safe Space**

## Beatrice's Story

Beatrice is a soft-spoken young woman who works tirelessly everyday. As a tailoring participant at Safe Space, she is proud of her work. Beatrice renders beautiful and well-done products. Since her involvement at Safe Space, she has received contracts from two schools to make uniforms. Beatrice never wastes a minute, when she is lacking tailoring orders, she proudly carries her sample uniform to local schools to try and earn more contracts for her business. Since a very young age, Beatrice has always faced mounting challenges; yet, she is never discouraged. It takes a special and strong young woman to refuse failure.

At ten years-old Beatrice lost both of her parents after a tragic automobile accident. Beatrice and her six siblings moved in with her grandmother. As the oldest, Beatrice's responsibilities quickly changed from young carefree child to the primary care taker. As if the tragic loss of her parents was not devastating enough, Beatrice was faced with trial most cannot begin to process. One day, as Beatrice was on her way home from Church, she was approached by a group of men. The men invited her into their home and offered her soda and chips. The friendly offer quickly turned into Beatrice's nightmare. Beatrice was raped by each of the men in the house. She cried and screamed and finally escaped the house. A woman nearby took pity on Beatrice and brought her to the hospital. She was badly beaten, bleeding, and terrified.

Beatrice carried on, refusing to be destroyed by the multiple tragedies and horrors that had occurred in her young life. Soon Beatrice and her six siblings began to become a financial burden on her grandmother. Beatrice's Pastor agreed to assist her with her school fees, which served as a wonderful opportunity for Beatrice. Unfortunately when she was sixteen, the Pastor and the Church were no longer able to render the fees. Beatrice was forced to drop out of school at the age of sixteen. She completed the Form 2 level, the sophomore level of high school.

Beatrice knew the financial pressures on her grandmother and began to search for ways to relieve her of at least one mouth to feed. After confiding in her cousin of her concerns for her grandmother, she was introduced her to a young man. Her cousin believed this man would marry and support Beatrice. Beatrice began to date the man, and at the age of 18 became a young mother. The father of her child then refused to marry her, and he has now completely disappeared from her and her child's life. Beatrice was now burdened with finding food for her younger siblings and now her baby boy. She began to sell small food items such as sugar cane and vegetables by the roadside. She earned as much as she could, but it was not enough to support her son, her siblings, her frail grandmother or herself.

Beatrice's story does have a hopeful ending. One year ago Beatrice learned about the Sisterhood for Change program. She enrolled in the tailoring program; she has successfully finished her training and her attachment. She graduated from SFC, and she is now at Safe Space. Beatrice feels confident in the skills that she has learned. Beatrice believes the program has carried her from "nothing to something". She has learned many

new skills and is inspired by her colleagues. She is now able to earn wages from the work she does at Safe Space. She is full of dreams. Due to Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space, she feels confident that she will one day open her own business. She aspires to trade and sell fabrics from other African countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania. Beatrice wants to continue to make school uniforms and other traditional African wear. She is committed to providing a better life for her son. She wants him to go to and finish school. She knows that because of her involvement at Sisterhood for Change and at Safe Space, she is empowered, encouraged and is aimed to succeed.

## Maureen's Story

One look at Maureen and you see a strong businesswoman. She is always polished and professional. She starts every morning with a trip to the market gathering food for the catering department's daily sales and preparations. She is a meticulous record keeper, and she always logs her hours and expenses. She is extremely reliable and submits records in a timely manner. Maureen is a powerhouse; she works hard throughout the day, rarely taking breaks. Yet, she does not take herself too seriously. Maureen is outgoing, fun and welcoming. All who meet Maureen are extremely impressed by her.

Looking at this twenty-four year-old success story, one would never imagine the trials that she has faced. Maureen had a challenging childhood, living in a family with twelve siblings. She does not enjoy her home life and has a difficult relationship with her father. She is part of a polygamous family, and her father clearly preferred his other wives and children to Maureen's family. Her mother was able to support Maureen through all of her primary education. Payment was of course a challenge, and Maureen struggled through her academics. Despite these hurdles, she graduated from Form 4 or high school. She was not given the opportunity to further her education and found little job options for a young woman in her situation. Maureen began to feel totally hopeless. She became idle and depressed, and she filled her days with excessive sleep and lacking activity. Maureen environment became filled with those who failed to lift her up.

She became involved in a relationship with a young man who offered her financial support. Maureen became dependent on their relationship, and at nineteen years old she became pregnant. Her father was enraged by her pregnancy and was irate with the situation. Her boyfriend abandoned her and has completely disappeared from her life. Lacking healthy support, education and resources, Maureen began to consider abortion as an option for her and her unborn child. She ultimately decided to keep the child despite the absence of the child's father, and her difficult home life. She now has a four year-old daughter. With so many already in her household, Maureen has been unable to support her child and was forced to send her daughter to live with her cousin. She feels this is the best solution at present, as her cousin is able to care for her daughter. Maureen is working tirelessly to support her, and she is determined to provide her child with a good life. She feels that even though she comes from a challenged background that this child can still be given a good life.

Maureen learned about Sisterhood for Change during one of the programs outreaches. She heard that the program was established to help young women who came from vulnerable backgrounds. After hearing what the program had to offer, she sought this ray of hope. Maureen enrolled in the catering program. She has always loved to cook and loves to make pastries, cakes, and chapattis.

Before joining Sisterhood for Change, Maureen assumed her life challenges were normal. Since completing the program she is now aware of the opportunities that lie ahead for her and her daughter. She refuses to involve herself in abusive relationships and offers advice to her peers. Thanks to the reproductive health component of the program, Maureen now

knows her rights. She knows now how to protect her sexual health and how to avoid unwanted pregnancy. Currently, she is a participant at Safe Space in the catering department. Safe Space provides a haven for her to expand her entrepreneurial skills and practice how to run an effective and profitable business. She believes that “one of these fine days she will own her own business.” With the support of the Safe Space staff, Maureen has developed her own business plan. She knows that in the near future she will have established herself as a professional businesswoman and will be able to provide a promising future for her daughter.

## **Lucy's Story**

Lucy graduated from the Sisterhood for Change program in November of 2008 and is now working as a participant at Safe Space. School was a challenge for Lucy, but with diligence, she graduated high school at twenty-six years old and is now twenty-eight. Upon completion of high school, she finished computer coursework. Lucy feels comfortable in her home, and her family has always supported her.

Despite her many successes, Lucy has faced multiple struggles. Lucy currently lives and was raised in one of the slum districts of Kisumu. Although her family was able to support, her education funding has always been a challenge. After graduation from high school, Lucy was unable to find work. At twenty-six years old, facing an unknown future, Lucy became a commercial sex worker.

Lucy now works as a hairdresser at Safe Space. Here, she is able to hone her hairdressing and entrepreneurial skills. Working with the other girls inspires Lucy to see beyond her immediate situation and to begin to plan for the future. While Lucy is still engaging in the sex work industry, Safe Space provides her with an alternative income generating activity and the option for a better solution. She feels extremely confident in the skills she has learned at Sisterhood for Change and gives thanks to the Lord for her admission into the program.

Lucy has benefited from the reproductive health trainings and now feels more able to engage in safe sexual practices. Some Safe Space participants face emotional and mental health challenges. Lucy is an example of a participant who has really benefited from the supportive environment at Safe Space. She feels comfortable confiding in the staff and other participants. She has found friendship and formed connections at the center. Lucy dreams of one day leaving Kisumu and practicing her new found talent in Great Britain. She feels her involvement in this program has aided in making this goal more possible.



## **Dorothy's Story**

Every morning Dorothy comes to Safe Space and vows to find at least one client. When work is slow, you will find her cleaning the salon or working on marketing materials. As an active participant at Safe Space, she values the importance of her place there. She refuses to be idle and always finds work to do. She is determined to succeed, and she has already come extremely far. Dorothy has a quiet but confident disposition. She has a great sense of humor and is always joking with her colleagues. She is serious about her work and is quite talented.

Looking at a young woman like Dorothy, one would never imagine that she left school before finishing grade eight. She comes from a household of nine with six siblings. When she was young, one of her siblings tragically died. With so many mouths to feed, Dorothy's family was just not able to pay her school fees. At sixteen years-old, Dorothy became pregnant and struggled to support her daughter. Dorothy began to sell fruits and vegetables at the market. It was not lucrative and the customers were inconsistent, but she was at a loss and felt she had no other options. She felt hopeless and lacked a vision for a better future.

Dorothy has always had a love for hairdressing. Prior to joining Sisterhood for Change, she would often braid and style her friend's and neighbor's hair in her spare time. Attending a local hairdressing school was simply not an option for Dorothy, as neither she nor her family could possibly afford the fees. When she heard of K-MET and the Sisterhood for Change program, it was as though a miracle had presented itself. Finally, Dorothy could stop spending long hours in the beating hot sun selling vegetables for less than a few dollars a day. She could begin to study what she really loved, hairdressing.

The program has been nothing short of a blessing in Dorothy's life. With the income she is able to generate at Safe Space, Dorothy is able to afford nursery school for her daughter. She is confident her daughter's story will be much different than hers. Dorothy has big dreams for her future she plans to one day open a large salon that offers high quality hair services with an extensive make-up counter. She also wants to sell braids, weaves, shoes, jeans and handbags. Her vision is to run the most fashionable enterprise in Kisumu.

Dorothy feels that her involvement in this program has prevented her from indulging in the many bad influences that young women face in Kisumu. Dorothy will proudly tell anyone who will listen that because of Sisterhood for Change and Safe Space she is now empowered. These programs have changed the way she sees the future. Only a few years ago, she did not believe she would ever do more than work at the market. Today, Dorothy has growing dreams of a brighter future for herself and for her daughter.

