

Theopistar's remarks at FAIR Girls Gala in Washington, D.C.
April 3, 2012
JewelGirls Project Budget



My name is Theopistar and I am 18 years old. I bring you warm greetings from the FAIR Girls' JewelGirls program in Uganda. This is a special occasion not only for me because it is my first time to come to America, and I am honored to be here with all of the D.C. JewelGirls sisters and FAIR Girls friends. Although the settings might be different, I have realized that the problems that affect girls are the same even in America.

In 2011, I joined Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) and FAIR Girls, where I was introduced to the JewelGirls program. At about the same time, I was settling in at the UYDEL's rehabilitation program after experiencing slavery and exploitation at the hands of my employer where I was abused as a domestic servant for almost a year. At the UYDEL center where JewelGirls is held, I met many girls who had unique experiences of abuse and exploitation and I learned that I was not alone. It is in the JewelGirls meetings where we meet and share our stories that I found hope and reason to let go of my past feelings and concentrate on moving forward.

What is was like to be a Jewel Girl

The girls I found in the program comforted me and made me feel it is ok to talk about my situation; they also taught me jewelry making as a skill that I can now use to earn income in addition to the hairdressing skills I learned at the center. I cannot forget the first piece of jewelry I made. Although it was not perfect, I could not believe that I could make such an amazing piece from paper. I always saw this kind of jewelry with women and girls but I had no idea that it was made from paper. The Jewel Girls program has not only helped me speak out but given me an opportunity to inspire other girls who have faced worse experiences in trafficking, commercial sex, street life and domestic servitude to look at life positively and think to move ahead.

It is this confidence that earned me a leadership position in the program and I use this opportunity to support other girls together with other staff at the residential center. Each week, 20 Jewel Girls meet at the JewelGirls center in Masooli to make jewelry together, talk about our problems, and learn new skills about taking care of ourselves as girls and planning our future free from exploitation. I mobilize the girls, prepare sitting space, encourage sharing of stories and teach new members how to make jewelry.

All of the girls who are part of Jewel Girls in Uganda become a part of a loving source of support from UYDEL and the FAIR Girls team. We learn to listen and support each other and develop each other's confidence without fear of getting back where we were. I have learned practical skills such as making jewelry and hairdressing but most of all I have regained my self-esteem and I am glad to be inspiring other girls in the program to be strong. I am also glad that the jewelry we make in Uganda is being appreciated in the US and I thank all of you for all the support they provide to keep FAIR Girls and the JewelGirls program running in Uganda.

Trafficking of girls for exploitation is common in many parts of the world and Uganda is not an exception. Thousands of poor and orphaned rural girls are trafficked internally for domestic service (usually called house girls) and for sexual exploitation working in bars restaurants and as commercial sex workers. I was trafficked and exploited (physically, emotionally and sexually) as a house girl. Other girls in Uganda are trafficked to be sex slaves, having sex with men older than them with little or no pay. The boys usually collect scrap metals, carry baggage in markets or vend food and merchandise. Trafficking in all its forms robs girls of their childhood, it denies chances to go to school, decency to grow as a girl, denies growing up in a family and most of all exposes girls to life threatening situations including emotional trauma, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.

Why it is important to support JewelGirls

I have been asked by all the Jewel Girls in Uganda to say a big thank you to each person who has bought paper jewelry as it not only supports the program to run in terms of transport and materials, but also provides a small stipend for girls to buy personal items such as clothes, shoes and sanitary towels. With continued support it can be possible to provide food to keep the girls energized as they attend Jewel Girls workshops. Most of all, it can keep the program running to support other girls who will come after me, who badly need a support group. In the long run it will be possible to support girls to raise capital to start and run their own economic empowerment businesses that will keep them away from exploitation.

Thank you for listening to me, and thank you for supporting Jewel Girls in Uganda, D.C. and all around the world. I am but one girl whose life is changed, but there are many!

Uganda JewelGirls 2013 Project Budget (U.S. Dollars)

Item	Cost	Quantity	Subtotal	
Transportation	\$10 per month	55 girls	\$6,600	
Food @ workshops	\$2 per workshop/8x month	55 girls	\$10,560	
Workshop stipend	\$3 per workshop/8x month	55 girls	\$15,840	
Beads/Jewelry supplies	\$50 per girl	55 girls	\$2,750	
Ugandan Program Director Salary	\$585 per month for counseling, economic empowerment workshops, financial management, access to resources	Regina Kwamcu	\$7,020	
JewelGirls Coordinator Salary	\$165 per month for supporting Director	Aldrine Nakyanzi	\$1980	
In-Kind Workshop Space	Donated by local NGO	n/a	\$0	
			Total	\$44,750