

Your Gift to the girls

Drought brought about by the Locust invasion, economic instability aggravated by the Covid pandemic, cattle rustling, other cultural practices and community level trafficking networks are some of the factors that have driven the Karamoja girls to seek greener pastures in Kenya.

The HAART Shelter supported 32 girls and 3 infants who had been trafficked into Kenya as domestic workers, to provide cheap domestic labour in a commercial district mainly inhabited by a predominant business and residential community.

Due to the vulnerability of the girls, they would get preyed upon by unscrupulous men while on the streets after failing to secure employment. Some who got employment would not be spared either, their employers would withhold their hard-earned wages and endure physical or sexual assault.

In conjunction with the Government of Kenya through the Department of Children Services, the girls were rescued and handed over to HAART for access to shelter and rehabilitative services. Before admission to the HAART shelter, we conducted COVID-19 tests as well as a full medical check-up to ascertain what kind of care and support each girl required. In collaboration with different stakeholders in the Human trafficking sphere, including the Department of Children Services and the Secretariat of Counter Trafficking in Persons, demonstrated the power of partnership.

At our Shelter, the girls were assured of their safety, security and protection of their rights. Having been exposed to many challenges from their previous habitation, our girls were able to breathe a sigh of relief as they had a nice place to sleep, balanced meals offered thrice a day and high impact classes for personal advancement. In addition, the modules of safe migration and human trafficking taught with the hope the girls would be able to mobilise and influence their community on the dangers that plague labor migration with no solid prospects.

On their arrival, 4 girls were heavily expectant and during the course of their stay 2 girls had given birth and one had to be operated upon as a medical emergency. In readiness for childbirth, we offered classes that help prepare for pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and parenting.

As explicated earlier, some girls had been exposed to a harsh life on the streets and as such, their natural instinct was that of survival. Some had disrupted sleeping patterns and intrusive memories and as such, took some time to adjust to their new environment. In the early days during meals, our hospitality team noticed that some girls were hoarding food since that was a common practice when they lived without any assurance of the next meal. It took a while for them to accept that they were in a place where they were cared for, loved and provided for their basic needs with no expectations, demands or abuse attached to it.

The girls then began their healing journey in a foreign land. Our inhouse therapist worked tirelessly to offer support individually and as a group. This resulted in evident change in their level of confidence and self-esteem. Our primary mandate is to empower our girls and ensure they are well equipped to handle and make informed decisions to impact their lives. The psycho-social rehabilitation of our girls is very essential to help them to return to a meaningful life in future.

Among some of the training programs we took the girls through were self esteem, child rights, sex education, gender based violence, safe migration and human trafficking. Some practical lessons entailed beading, knitting, baking and braiding all which the girls enjoyed and were highly skilled at. Seeing that the girls were very talented, our Social Workers were very intentional about nurturing and encouraging them to explore and diversify these skills.



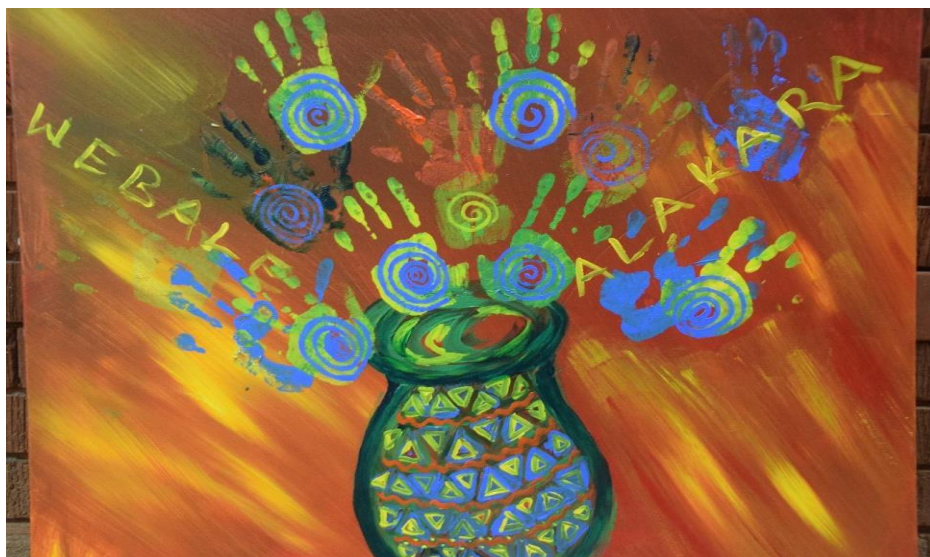
A girl engaging in beading



A group of girls engaging in a beading lesson

Nurturing their talents was an important element to be included in re-integration plans since it helps to ensure the sustainability of the social reintegration and increasing their confidence in general.

The girls embarked on art work where with the guidance of an instructor they made a beautiful mural to appreciate the support offered while at the shelter. In addition, the process in the creation of the art ended up being very therapeutic and the girls would get very excited anytime they had an art lesson.



A mural made by the girls (It reads 'THANK YOU' in Luganda and Karamajong)

Their departure was very emotional for both the girls and the social workers who had grown very attached and fond of each other, bearing in mind that one of the children born during their stay here was named after one of our managers.

All this would not have been possible without your general support.