



Counseling & legal Support for teen mothers

1. WHO WE ARE

Hope for Rwanda is a local non-profit making organization founded in 2012 from a lack of existing services for teen mothers and pregnant teens, we wanted to give vulnerable teen mothers a positive place where they felt loved instead of judged. We are based in Rwanda and we offer care and protection to pregnant teenagers, teenage mothers and vulnerable children. The organization is one of Rwanda's first centers for teen parents; especially teen mothers; and their children and today offers counselling & health advises, legal assistance, capacity building in economic livelihood human and children rights, prenatal and positive parenting advises to adolescent mothers aged 14-19 years old.

Our core programs focus on 1) Psycho-social support 2) Legal Aid 3) Economic Empowerment and 4) capacity building, The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the activities undertaken by Hope for Rwanda in the different programs i.e. trainings, parenting support groups, healthcare support, saving and crediting groups, vocational trainings, advocacy campaigns to mention a few.

2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Teenage pregnancy occurs in all societies, with considerable variation in magnitude and consequences among different countries and regions. In each case, a variety of complex socioeconomic factors are involved including poverty, communities and families acceptance of child marriage, culture behaviors, gender inequality, sexual violence, lack of education and information among others. Adolescent pregnancy is not only a health issue, but also a human right and development issue. Pregnancy undermines a girl's ability to exercise her rights to education, health and autonomy. It also prevents her from realizing her potential and adversely impacts the baby.

A country's economy is also affected by teenage pregnancies as adolescent mothers are prevented from entering the workforce. In Rwanda, despite all efforts, measures and actions put

in place to fight teenage pregnancy, young Rwandan girls have also been affected by teen pregnancy, although to a lesser extent than other sub-Saharan countries. However, this is still a very real challenge for girls especially in the pursuit of education and skills that increases success rates. The 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda affected the family settings which led to child family headed families and lack of parental guidance and this over years increased the numbers of teen mothers where more than 17000 teenagers got pregnant only in the year 2016-2017. The major challenge is based on culture where sexual education is not well communicated, the family fabric is no longer into existence and stigma is very much attached to teen mothers and their babies.

Adolescent pregnancy is dangerous for the child given that still births and death in the first week of life are higher among babies born to mothers younger than 20 years than among babies born to mothers of 20–29 years old. Deaths during the first month of life are 50–100% more frequent if the mother is an adolescent versus older, and the younger the mother, the higher the risk. The rates of preterm birth, low birth weight and asphyxia are higher among the children of adolescents, all of which increase the chance of death and of future health problems for the baby. Pregnant adolescents are more likely to smoke and use alcohol than are older women, which can cause many problems for the child and after birth.

And those victims are then stigmatized and rejected. The risk of being more abused and exploited is then high. This project will provide psycho-social, educational and legal support to 200 teen mothers with parental support and guidance, legal support and counselling.

3. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED RESULTS

The overall idea of this project is to establish a permanent space of solace and healing for teen mothers and their babies, where they feel loved, not judged; where they get moral support and are educated about becoming self-reliant healthy mothers.

3.1. The specific objectives of the Peace-building Institute are:

- To provide teen mothers with free counselling and other psycho-social support
- To create dialogue and exchange opportunities for marginalized teenage mothers
- To educate teen mothers on life skills, leadership and sexual & reproductive health and rights
- To provide teen mothers with legal advices.

4. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

A mother who has gone through our center's activities will:

- Regain her self esteem
- Have an extensive understanding on her rights and her obligation as a mother
- Have information and resources to advocate against her right's violation.
- Gain parental guidance through mentorship and support groups
- Learn about contraception and sexual transmissible diseases.

5. Legal Aid & Psychosocial support

The violation of one right leads to a number of other rights violation, this means that when a minor get pregnant, this leads to the violation of many of her rights, the child that she bears, her family and the chain continues until this impacts negatively the whole society and the country at large. From researches, teenagers who gets pregnant are mainly abused or exploited because for poverty not to mention that also those from wealthy families get pregnant. A 16 year old young girl who was sexually abused and got pregnant, luckily the perpetrator of the crime was brought to justice, but this is not the end of the tunnel. In the Rwandan culture, a girl who gets pregnant shames the family and the society hence she is kept in the backyard of the house and her child is called: "Ikinyendaro: bastard". Now this has changed because of civilization and the advent of rights, but they don't get support they require instead this pregnancy creates very complex family conflicts on property and legacy, alimony etc...

When she got pregnant, she was then forced to drop out of school, she was stigmatized by her peers, her family and the community at large. Her family rejected her because they believed she is a lost cause and that she is a prostitute. She couldn't get what to eat and where to stay. Unfortunately these consequences are not limited to the teen mother they also extend to the baby which brings even more challenges.

The legal aid program at Hope for Rwanda uses out of court settlement methods of dispute resolution between the teen mothers and the men who are suspected to be the fathers of the kids as it has no punitive mandate except through other partnership like with the National Police's department of gender based violence and other stakeholders. And because all teenagers we receive do not have enough information on the process of bringing the instigators of situation to justice on time, there are no tangible evidences to prosecute that man for rape. It is on this very

note that we offer mediation to the parties, conciliation among other methods of justice which may bring us to the common understanding with both parties. In all the non-judicial processes fails, we assist the teen mother to deposit a statement and provide her with court's assistance (free lawyers) if needed.

1. Psychosocial Support

Pregnant and teen mothers want to do what is right for their children. Because there are teens and often have low income, they need strong support networks and a comprehensive array of resources to help them parent effectively while working toward becoming self-sufficient adults. One of the consequences of having a child while you are young is that your health, psychological and social well-being is hardly affected. Our health and psycho-social support program facilitate teen mothers' access to health care to ensure that they are healthy, physically and mentally/emotionally. On the other hand the same program holistically create conditions for teen mother's children's normal growth and development, ensuring that these children access health care, education, recreation and effective parenting.

At Hope For Rwanda, we have established "Ihumure counseling center: A solace way to healing" where a competent and well trained Psychological Clinician uses all methods of professional counseling to help beneficiaries regain their self-esteem.

With an Individual therapy Approach (ITA) our professional counselor takes beneficiaries in a process on an intensive work one on one with in a safe, caring and confidential environment to explore feelings, beliefs on behaviors, work through challenging or influential memories and identify healing aspects. Through this Individual therapy we seek to promote well-being of beneficiaries to overcome many of the psychological problems like isolation, negative social attitudes, stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, stigmatization among many others teen mothers are facing in the society.

After a ITA, Group Therapy Approach (GTA) is a form of psycho-social treatment where a small group of patients meet regularly to talk, interact and discuss problems with each other together with the group leader. It attempts to give individuals a safe and comfortable place where they can work out problems and emotional issues. From this therapy, beneficiaries heal many psychological problems for instance the beneficiaries get opportunities to share their life experience so as to help each other. We have been able to observe that beneficiaries get out of it different benefits and outcomes are but not limited to Increased hope, Increased self-esteem, decreased loneliness etc....

We have been able to identify that many of psychological problems are rooted in families thus rejection and stigmatization of their own daughters once they get pregnant. With our Family therapy Approach (FTA) that involves all members of nuclear or extended family. This approach regards family as a whole, unity of treatment and emphasize such factors as relationships and communication patterns rather than traits or symptoms in individual members. A Family is a system with its internal

rules, patterns of function and tendency to resist change. FTA aims to help family members to understand their relative's problems and adjust to psychological changes that maybe occurs. Furthermore we are able to handle the root cause of psychological disturbances to beneficiaries from the family. Well understanding of the family will reach the whole society in general.

Holistically the program has a component that uses preventive approaches geared to protect and alert the Rwandan society at large but especially female adolescents. The focus is about psycho-education on Reproduction and family planning, sexually transmitted infection (STIs), HIV/ AIDS, Education and discipline, Nutrition, Drug abuse psycho-social development and more topic as we judge necessary