### **Young Queer Refugee Innovation Centre -YQRIC-Kenya**

**A project by**

**Community Support Initiative for Refugees (CoSIR)-Kenya**

**Displaced, out of School and with no hope!**

**Overview**

More than 1,000 LGBTI people are currently registered as refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya, uprooted from their homes, schools and communities as a result of homophobic persecution. Approximately 700 or 70% of those displaced are between the ages of 17 and 25. The vast majority of these victims of systemic gender discrimination and violence are not in formal school settings and are not served by other skills programs set up to help other refugees.

Despite being hostile to LGBTI persons and enforcing the law that criminalizes same sex relations, Kenya is still the only country among its neighbors where queer persons can legally seek asylum.

Young LGBTIQ displaced persons are at times highly vulnerable to exploitation and violence by those who are meant to support and protect their dignity. There have been many instances of sexual assault, such as rape, all related to the economic vulnerability of the victims. Many of of these displaced queer refugees and asylum seekers have had limited access to formal education , lack skills are often left unprotected and idle. As the average length of refugee resettlement period continues to extend- now lasting, on average, more than five years, a generation of queer refugees is left in limbo. Their ability to earn a living and develop critical life skills is severely constrained

**What we know, What is needed?**

Although a number of refugee organizations are beginning to serve this community, the vast majority of service providers lack awareness of LGBTI needs and are therefore homophobic to LGBTIQ refugees.

A lack of knowledge is at the root of the problem. No information on young LGBTIQ refugees has been systematically gathered, reported or shared on the nature of their needs or attempts to resolve them. Programs that do exist are too often based on assumptions rather than facts, lessons learned from UNHCR and other refugee agencies, or direct feedback from refugees themselves.

Creative, holistic approaches that meet the various needs of young LGBTI refugees are needed. Programs that can teach both practical skills and numeracy, along with vocational training and life skills, such as HIV / AIDS prevention . Queer youth engagement is essential to any change in the community.

**Project**

YQRIC is a project launched by CoSIR-Kenya to train 40 young (17-25 years of age) LGBTQ refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya. The objective of the project is to offer vital life skills to beneficiaries and to minimize vulnerability and promote self reliance.

The Innovation Center will be equipped with state-of-the-art leather and sandal making equipment to provide an opportunity for those trained with practical skills that can help them improve their lives. The LGBTI youth will be trained on how to make innovative jewelry, sturdy lanyards, elegant handbags and sandals as well as how to find market for the finished product

**Leather Sandal Making Project by CoSIR**

Sandal making business is a simple process requiring training of at least five days and two more days practice. The process moves as follows: -

* Start with a stiff leather sole, cut to customer size. ...
* Selection of the leather for your **sandal** insoles and straps.
* There can be many choices!
* Using rulers, strap-cutters, serrated scissors and cardboard patterns, leather soles and straps are cut to customer sizes and design pattern
* Then slots in the soles are cut and inserted the leather straps.
* Once straps are in, they adjusted to fit customer’s feet
* Straps and insoles are glued and affixed to leather sole
* Finally, brass tacks are added and finishing touches

The finished products (leather Sandals) in various sizes will be then packaged and distributed to our retail agents and hawkers most of whom are urban refugees.

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