



BUSINESS FOR BETTER SOCIETY

Threads of Transformation Program

April 2025

About Business for Better Society



At Business for Better Society (BBS), our mission is to drive lasting, meaningful change in communities worldwide through collaboration, innovation, and transparency. We believe that real transformation starts at the local level, which is why we partner with grassroots nonprofits.

We recognise that sustainable impact can be achieved through many forms of giving – whether it's through financial support, mentorship, technical assistance, volunteering, training, internships, or providing essential resources. Our focus is on working with nonprofits not based on their sector of work or region in the world but through a shared dedication to creating purposeful and enduring change.

Together, we are committed to building a better society for all.

Our values form the foundation of our work and guide our approach to creating positive change. Integrity, credibility, accountability, and transparency are at the core of our operations, driving us to pursue excellence through best practices, innovation, and continuous learning. We embrace a holistic view of giving, acknowledging that contributions can take various forms beyond financial resources, including mentorship, technical support, volunteering, training, internships, and practical supplies. Our global perspective extends beyond the developing world, as we strive to make a meaningful impact across diverse communities worldwide. While recognising that not all impact is easily quantifiable, we are committed to measuring and reporting our results using both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methodologies, ensuring that we can assess and communicate the true value of our work effectively.

In 2023 and 2024 BBS successfully implemented grants from GlobalGiving, for a two-pronged project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and The Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, to expand an existing program in Kenya. These experiences have honed our ability to execute impactful projects efficiently and effectively.

As an organisation committed to transparency and accountability, BBS adheres to stringent regulatory requirements and governance standards to ensure responsible management of donor contributions and operations.

Compliance with Hong Kong Regulations

As a registered charity under Hong Kong law, BBS fulfills all statutory obligations to maintain its charitable status. Key practices include:

- **Annual Independent Audit:** Each year, BBS engages qualified auditors to perform a comprehensive audit of its financial statements. These audits are conducted in accordance with Hong Kong Standards on Auditing and are filed with Hong Kong authorities by the November 11 deadline. This process ensures compliance with Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance and demonstrates transparency in financial reporting.
- **Review by Inland Revenue Department (IRD):** In May 2023, BBS underwent a formal review by the IRD of its processes, programs, and governance structure. The review affirmed that BBS operates in alignment with the definition of a charitable institution under Hong Kong law and remains in good standing.

Global Partnerships and Accountability

BBS extends its commitment to transparency through international partnerships:

- **GlobalGiving Permanent Partner Status:** Since 2020, BBS has been recognized as a permanent partner of GlobalGiving. To retain this status, BBS undergoes biennial reviews of its financials, projects, programs, and team. The most recent review confirmed compliance and extended partner status until October 12, 2026. This partnership underscores BBS's adherence to rigorous global standards for nonprofit operations.
- **Registered Benevity Nonprofit Platform Participant:** Every nonprofit on its platform undergoes rigorous vetting and validation through partnerships with trusted third-party organizations such as TechSoup Global and Moody's. This process verifies charitable status, monitors compliance with Benevity's strict ethical guidelines, and safeguards against activities like hate speech, financial crime, or misuse of funds. Additionally, Benevity employs ongoing monitoring and transaction security measures to maintain the integrity of donations and prevent fraud.

This alignment makes BBS a reliable steward of philanthropic resources for advancing shared goals.

Threads of Transformation



Background

For over five years, BBS has partnered with the locally registered non-profit Remember Youth for Change (RYC) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since 2016, RYC has supported youth affected by the ongoing civil conflict in Eastern DRC, with special focus on former child soldiers and war-traumatized youth.

RYC provides a comprehensive support system, offering vocational skills training, mental health support, and pathways to community reintegration. Programs include carpentry, tailoring, and agriculture, alongside essential literacy workshops in reading and writing. For younger children, RYC uses a play-based approach to healing. Play is a powerful tool that helps reduce stress, regulate emotions, and build social bonds. Group activities such as music, drama, and sports enhance emotional recovery and strengthen the sense of community through a “kids helping kids” approach.

In 2022, BBS was awarded a grant from GlobalGiving to support emergency humanitarian efforts near Goma and implement long-term development projects. One of the flagship initiatives funded through this grant was RYC’s tailoring program which was equipped with additional sewing machines and key supplies such as thread, pattern paper, tape measures, pins and other critical materials to run their programming.

The tailoring program now offers beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels, and has made a tangible difference in the community—providing clothing for refugee children, school uniforms, and reusable sanitary pads for women in refugee camps.

Threads of Transformation is the follow-up program that worked with six advanced tailoring graduates. Led by Ms. Saskia Lenaerts, a London-based designer with experience at Burberry and Alexander McQueen and an instructor at Kingston School of Art, this initiative focuses on design innovation, garment repurposing, and creative expression.

At its core, Threads of Transformation is a blend of fashion, healing, and sustainability. It explores how design can serve as a therapeutic practice, help dismantle stigma, and provide the tools for long-term livelihood. Through this initiative, individuals are not only building skills—they are reclaiming their narratives, contributing to their communities, and becoming powerful agents of change.

The Six-Week Pilot Program

The pilot, launched in the autumn of 2024, focused on fostering experimentation and creative thinking among six apprentices. By emphasizing the emotional dimensions of the creative process, the program encouraged guided exploration over rigid exercises with predetermined outcomes. This innovative approach underscored the importance of expanding creativity through experimentation, empowering participants to break free from conventional rules and techniques.

Pilot Key Learning Activity Highlights

Draping Exercises

Activity: Apprentices draped old military garments on each other, transforming them into new items through various techniques such as cutting and combining fabrics.

Outcome: This activity encouraged creativity in shape-making and silhouette design, fostering a deeper connection to their own identities.

Observational Drawing

Activity: Apprentices engaged in drawing exercises using their non-dominant hand and drawing without looking at the paper.

Outcome: These techniques helped them overcome inhibitions related to traditional drawing standards, promoting a sense of freedom in artistic expression.

Patchwork Collage Creation

Activity: Using leftover military fabric, apprentices collaboratively created a large patchwork piece that expressed sentiments related to their experiences.

Outcome: The resulting artwork served as a therapeutic manifestation of their struggles, juxtaposing themes of violence and peace through visual language.

Paper Collage Storytelling

Activity: Apprentices selected visuals from newspapers to create collages that reflected their narratives.

Outcome: This exercise fostered critical thinking as they articulated the meanings behind their choices, revealing deeper insights into their humanity and desires for peace.

Finalization of Projects

Activity: In subsequent classes, apprentices refined their earlier works using hands-on skills, culminating in a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Outcome: Further development of practical sewing techniques and engaged in discussions about their creative journeys.

Threads of Transformation



Sixteen Week Phase Two

The next phase of the program will be a 16-week initiative focused on collaborative design. This phase aims to deepen the apprentices' understanding of cultural narratives through artistic exchanges.

Learning Activities & Outcomes

Collaborative Design Project

Focus: Creating a design product from upcycled uniforms donated by UN personnel.
Expected Outcome: Apprentices will gain experience in collaborative design while learning about sustainability and resourcefulness.

Research on Local Artists/Artisans

Focus: Each apprentice will investigate a local visual artist or artisan to connect with their Central African heritage.
Expected Outcome: This research will broaden their awareness of cultural visual languages and inspire their creative processes.

High-End Prototyping Skills Development

Focus: Finalizing high-end prototypes to luxury standards.
Expected Outcome: Apprentices will learn about quality craftsmanship and market standards, preparing them for future professional opportunities.

Marketing Campaign Development

Focus: Creating an artistically considered campaign for "Threads of Transformation."
Expected Outcome: This will provide practical experience in marketing while fostering an understanding of how to present their work to potential buyers.

Building Sustainable Workshop Infrastructure

Focus: Establishing a tailoring workshop in Goma as a creative atelier.
Expected Outcome: This facility will serve as a space for ongoing creative exploration, allowing apprentices to continue developing their skills and pushing the boundaries of creativity.

Goma Program Suspension



As the capital of North Kivu province, Goma holds significant strategic importance as both a humanitarian and economic hub. However, this role has been severely undermined by escalating violence, which has forced many development initiatives, including Threads of Transformation, to halt operations.

The security situation in the region continues to deteriorate, creating a complex humanitarian and economic crisis. More than 2.5 million people have been displaced within North Kivu, with many of them now concentrated around Goma. Civilians face serious protection risks as they find themselves caught in conflict zones. At the same time, local businesses and livelihoods have been brought to a standstill due to widespread economic paralysis. Supply chains have been severely disrupted, leading to rising prices for essential commodities. The situation has also triggered growing food insecurity in an area that was once known for its agricultural productivity.

Given this increasingly volatile environment, Threads of Transformation was suspended due to several critical challenges. First and foremost were the security concerns. The deteriorating conditions made it increasingly unsafe for staff and participants to continue the program. Additionally, the project's use of military garments as materials for transformation became highly sensitive in an active conflict zone, where uniforms carry strong security implications.

Perception also played a major role. The association with military-linked materials raised significant concerns regarding how the project might be viewed within the community, especially in a region where affiliations with armed groups can have life-threatening consequences. As a result, Remember Youth for Change made the difficult decision to destroy all apprentice work and designs created during the pilot phase.

Lastly, the project faced substantial operational challenges. Supply chain breakdowns, movement restrictions, and resource shortages made it impossible to sustain the program. Collectively, these factors led to the unavoidable decision to pause Threads of Transformation in Goma for the foreseeable future.

Next Steps



Although the Threads of Transformation program remains suspended in the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to ongoing instability, its foundational concept—economic empowerment through the creative transformation of conflict-associated materials—continues to hold strong promise. The project was always envisioned as a scalable initiative, adaptable to different regions affected by conflict and displacement. Its strength lies in its ability to evolve in response to local realities while preserving the essence of its mission: turning symbols of division into tools for unity and opportunity.

BBS continues to monitor the situation in the DRC and remains in regular communication with Remember Youth for Change. It is our firm intention to return and continue working with the six apprentices as soon as the security situation improves and it becomes safe and feasible to do so. We remain committed to these young people and to the vision that was sparked in Goma.

With this vision in mind, Threads of Transformation will take on new life in the Adjumani refugee settlements in Northern Uganda. This next chapter will work specifically with women from the distinct tribes of South Sudan who have sought refuge there. Many of these tribes have a long and painful history of animosity. When civil war erupted in South Sudan in December 2013, individuals carrying generational grievances and negative stereotypes were forced into shared refugee settlements in northern Uganda. Over the years, tensions have intensified. In recent times, inter-tribal and inter-clan violence—including arson attacks and killings—has increased, straining not only the relationships among refugees but also between the refugee population and Ugandan host communities caught in the crossfire.

In response to these challenges, the Threads of Transformation program in Adjumani will place a strong emphasis on inter-tribal peacebuilding. We believe that the most sustainable path to peaceful coexistence is through meaningful connections—bringing together individuals from different tribes, clans, and communities to engage in dialogue and begin the process of “unlearning” historical prejudices. The women participating in this program will not only gain creative and entrepreneurial skills by upcycling conflict-associated materials into marketable products, but they will also build relationships across tribal lines, contributing to healing and reconciliation.

This relocation to Adjumani is both a continuation and an evolution of the Threads of Transformation initiative. It serves as a practical opportunity to continue testing and refining the model, while staying true to the program’s core values of empowerment, healing, and peacebuilding through creativity and collaboration.

