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Gender-based Violence: Heal My People

The Heal My People program provides medical treatment, psychosocial support, and economic assistance to survivors of gender-based violence. HEAL Africa works with a network of trained counselors in areas outside of Goma to identify and assist women who have been raped and tortured by rogue militias and with women who suffer from obstetric fistula due to complications in childbirth.

The program began in 2003 in response to the high rate of sexual violence being committed against girls and women in D.R. Congo and the utter lack of maternal health care. Local counselors perform the initial assessment, refer patients to local hospitals or to HEAL Africa, and continue to monitor the women following their medical care. The program is sustained by a grassroots voluntary effort of local dedicated women.

Since the program's inception, more than **14,000** women throughout North Kivu and Maniema Provinces have been identified and helped, and HEAL Africa surgeons have performed more than **1,400** fistula repair surgeries.

Heal My People:

- provides quality medical treatment for women who have lived with fistulae
- provides a community for physical, psychosocial and spiritual healing
- trains village women to be counselors who then refer victims of sexual violence for treatment
- provides the opportunity to learn new skills (literacy, sewing, crafts) so that women return with new knowledge and experience to their communities
- provides training for resident doctors
- raises awareness about sexual violence and creates venues for discussion through soccer tournaments, films, and radio programming, and national media.



Women who come through HEAL Africa have received counseling, training in family mediation, and have learned to make peace with women from various tribes, often from the tribe who committed the sexual violence. This is an important first step in the process of conflict transformation.

Healing Arts

Healing Arts trains patients at the HEAL Africa hospital in practical occupational skills. Patients have the opportunity to learn how to sew, weave, make soap, write, read, and receive small business and finance training. Products that are made at the hospital are sold both locally and internationally and give patients a wonderful opportunity to make money during their treatment. Healing Arts taught 250 women in 2008. Women who return home after fistula repair surgery receive a micro-grant which assists their economic and social reintegration back into their hometown. The fruits of the program are self-confidence, financial independence, and a reinforced sense of community.

Healing Arts also offers a primary school classroom for the children staying at the hospital. Many children are from rural areas and have never attended school before. More than 100 children learned to read and write through the school last year. The majority of the children have either passed through traumatic experiences in life either due to war or their physical handicap. Therapy through group games and art is also part of the program.



Grounds for Hope

Some women have not yet been healed. Others have no family to return to. Others have HIV/AIDS as a result of the rapes, and some need continuing medical treatment. Through a partnership of [Souls in Stride](http://www.soulsinstride.com/) (<http://www.soulsinstride.com/>) and the [Upper Room Community](http://www.upperroomcommunity.org/) (<http://www.upperroomcommunity.org/>), a plot of gardening land for gardens and housing in a sheltered community have been purchased so that women and their children may live, work and go to school in the area.

Stories of Women Helped Though Heal My People

- "Anna" walked 400 miles (700 km) to get to HEAL Africa. She had been living as a sex slave for years after being captured. She was shot in the arm, and escaped into the forest, walking and running for seven months, heading for HEAL Africa and Goma. Her arm is being treated before her fistula can be repaired.
- "Katie" is eight, and is also waiting for fistula repair, but she can't have the surgery until the sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) she also has have been treated and cured. She has been part of the community for three months now, and she's already learned to read at HEAL Africa. It's the first school she has ever attended.
- "Susanna" arrived in Goma for care from Maniema. After she was married she became pregnant and had traumatic labor for six days. The baby died, and she was left with an obstetric fistula. She was rejected by her husband and by her family. For twenty years she lived on the margin of society, unable to participate because of the smell associated with the incontinence from the fistula. She was repaired by surgery at HEAL Africa and was able to return home two weeks later, cured! What a transformation: her life is dramatically changed.



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HEAL Africa General Fund: Used where most needed. This is the most effective use of your funds because it enables HEAL Africa to use your money two or three times, filling funding gaps and paying for patients' care.

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Thank you for your support of HEAL Africa. HEAL Africa is a registered 501(c)3 charity and issues receipts in accordance with the IRS. Check Donations: Send a check to HEAL Africa, at the following address: HEAL Africa, PO Box 147, Monroe, WA 98272

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