



Jewel Girls

"An economic empowerment and art therapy program for adolescent girl survivors of human trafficking, sexual violence, and street life."

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Jewel Girls is an income generation and art therapy program that gives teenagers and young adult women (13-26 years) who have experienced human trafficking, sexual abuse/exploitation and street life a chance for safer, healthier, and brighter futures through self-help group therapy and jewelry making. Jewel Girls is a unique rehabilitation therapy that has successfully been employed in trauma and recovery programmes for young girl survivors of human trafficking, sexual abuse and street life in Washington D.C, Bosnia, Serbia, Russia and Uganda. Since April 2009, Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) has partnered with FairFund to implement this programme in Uganda.

UYDEL is a youth serving organization since 1993 working in 4 districts of Uganda (Kampala, Mukono, Wakiso and Kalangala) with young people 10-24 years who face various vulnerabilities that result into human trafficking, drug and substance abuse, child labour, child sexual abuse and reproductive health problems including HIV/AIDS. Through seven community youth drop-in-centers and outreach sites, UYDEL provides direct support services that broadly include accurate information about issues affecting young people, life skills for informed choices, vocational skills training for economic empowerment, counseling services for recovery, temporary shelter for rehabilitation period and reintegration and reunion of young people with their families. These efforts have not only provided important opportunities for UYDEL to continuously learn to deal with dynamic issues that affect young people but also provided the evidence of the challenges young people face to inform policy at national level. This therapy is based on the African model of story telling and the African practice of women supporting each other while they work together with their hands on a given task. To date, Jewel Girls Programme has supported.

Child abuse and neglect in all its forms has been cited as a major cause of death, trauma, HIV/AIDS among children and youth in Uganda. The Annual Police Crime report has consistently reported child abuse (particularly defilement) as one of the top crimes committed in the country, for the last 3 years¹. 'Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.' WHO 1999.

Recent studies on child abuse and neglect suggest that children in Uganda are increasingly abused in spaces where they supposedly should be protected and by people closest to them. Media reports and broadcasts also report on a daily basis report child abuse on a daily basis. Although the media reports cases of child abuse every day, there is clear evidence that many more cases are not reported due to lack of remedies in many remote areas of the country, corruption that leads to settling cases out of court, ignorance of parents and general lack of understanding and misconceptions about the rights and responsibilities of children.

In Uganda, child abuse and neglect takes different forms physical abuse (e.g. beating, burning,), sexual abuse (pornography, child prostitution and defilement), emotional abuse (e.g. calling names, verbal abuse and ignoring

¹ Uganda Police Force: Police crime report 2008,2009, 2010

children) child labour trafficking e.t.c. looking at child trafficking for example, Uganda is in Tier 2 and many studies on the subject suggest that it is steadily increasing and that Uganda is actually a source, destination and transit country for both internal and external trafficking of children and young girls. Most young people who attend UYDEL programmes have experiences of trafficking from rural areas to Kampala City to work as domestic workers, karaoke dancers, market/food vendors, stone crackers and many other forms of labour and sexual exploitation². Vulnerability to abuse is reinforced by household poverty, lack of opportunities to report, domestic violence in homes and moral decay³.

All young people attending UYDEL programmes report having been abused and or exploited in at least one way by people who should have protected them. They present trauma and depression and usually cry during assessment sessions, counselling sessions and when giving testimonies. Through continued individual counselling, group sessions and learning, UYDEL makes all efforts to instill hope for a brighter future.

Jewel Girls is one of the therapeutic programmes employed at the UYDEL temporary shelter at Masooli to deal with trauma of violence and exploitation, using jewelry-making as a means to learn new skills in earning a living and leading a safer and productive life. In small groups of 18-20, the girls meet 2 times a week to make unique jewelry as they talk about their lives, challenges and future plans so they can support each other to deal with challenging situations in a friendly space. Together with a facilitator and a jewelry instructor the girls hold informal discussions and learn skills of making African Jewelry from paper and other local materials. Once a month, a workshop is organized where a social worker provides information on such issues as reproductive health, life skills and gender among others. When the jewelry is sold, the group is able to raise more money to buy materials and continue making jewelry and also get some for personal items such as clothes, shoes, sanitary towels and pocket money among others, depending on the needs of each individual girl.

Since 2009, Jewel Girls has worked with 160 girls who also benefited from UYDEL other Programmes. Through this programme girls open up about traumatic situations that they have not talked about with anybody before, they get confidence and strength to go over their past, they make friends that support them deal with challenges and most important, they learn a skill that they can use to make money even when they are out of the center.

Through this programme UYDEL has learned that informal conversations in safe spaces and with peers who have the same experience increases confidence of young people to tell their untold stories and to find healing in knowing that a friend listens.

I love being part of the Jewel Girls Programme; we talk about things that concern and build us, we also advice each other on how to deal with life.

I am glad I have friends that I can talk to. Jewel girl (17 years)

² UYDEL 2010: Project report for the anti-child trafficking project

³ UYDEL 2011: Commercial Sexual exploitation of Children in Uganda