

# FIRST STEP INITIATIVE

SMALL GIFTS. BIG CHANGES.

Newsletter

First Quarter 2016

## Here's why we do it!



When grants are approved and funds given to the collective, there is a simple document prepared to cement the agreement. Our DRC staff present the money and have the president of the collective sign the document. You can see the joy on the faces of the women as they receive the funds that will allow them to take the next step toward financial security for their families. FSI staff member Beatrice (standing in the back row) celebrates with grant recipients for the recently funded corn milling and rabbit projects. With them are Sisters Francine and Veronica from the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, who provide support to our DRC staff.

## Just Funded – Reselling Rabbits

Since November 2013 five women have been raising rabbits for resale in the market. FSI provided funding to purchase a heater and the supplies needed to build additional hutches. They now are able to double the number of female rabbits they keep, significantly increasing their production and profit. Fifteen children and 10 other family members will benefit from this greater financial security.



## We Need a Treasurer!

If you or a friend with financial skills would like greater involvement with FSI, we would like to talk with you. This is a non-paid role on the FSI board of directors. Click [here](#) for more information.

## Volunteer Brunch

On December 12th, the Board of FSI invited volunteers to a brunch at the Metropolitan in St. Louis Park. The Board felt it was time to connect personally with our supporters, get their feedback, and hear their ideas for fundraising and events. Our Board Chair, Ellen Wolaner, opened with an update on FSI's progress in 2015 and spoke about our recent grants in the DR Congo. Then we had an open session where our attendees shared their knowledge and experience. Their ideas ranged from the use of compatible technology, ideas for sustainable projects, access to public media, and collaborations with local technical colleges. We heard about other networking opportunities and possible sources of funding for FSI. Several attendees had traveled to Africa and were aware of the cultural sensitivities for operating in the DRC and shared their experiences. One of our attendees teaches an aerobics/dance class with an African twist and we hope to combine a dance class with a fundraiser in the future. Thank you to all who attended. The Board thought the volunteer brunch was very successful and we hope to make it an annual event. Thanks to the Metropolitan, which provided an excellent buffet, and is always so accommodating to FSI.

## Just Funded – Milling Corn Flour

The seven women in this flour-milling collective support 30 children and an additional 10 family members. Each month, they buy about 350 bags of corn in Kasumbalesa, near the Zambia border. They grind the corn and sell about 500 bags of flour in Bungumbugu, which is about 150 km northwest of Lubumbashi. Their newly purchased corn mill will replace their existing, badly operating mill and allow them to increase their production. They will have excess capacity with the new mill and will offer milling services to others, generating additional income.



## Interview with FSI Treasurer Sally Anaya-Boyer



Sally Anaya-Boyer, our longest serving board member and Treasurer, will be leaving us, and Minnesota, in the coming year. Before she goes, here is the story of her connection to First Step.

*How did you learn about FSI?*

I saw an article about Chingwell Mutombu in the newspaper in 2011. I met Chingwell when I was on the Women's Foundation of MN board and she was an intern. I was delighted to read that she had formed a foundation to help women back home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, taking what she learned and using it to help people in need.

*What attracted you to serving as a board member?*

I was very interested in working with a grass roots organization where my input would be more involved and more personal. I had volunteered and been a board member with more established nonprofits but I wanted to volunteer for a younger nonprofit in the area of microfinance. We have since changed our model and now provide small grants to women business owners, many of which were our former microfinance clients. We are the only source of financing for these very small businesses managed by women who are often illiterate and not eligible for grants or loans elsewhere. I think of our funding as "seed capital."

*What have you learned as a consequence of being a member of this board?*

Board members of a small nonprofit are way more involved, as "working" members of the organization. Since we only have one part-time employee in the U.S., the board members run the organization and take on the roles of employees. Fortunately, we have great volunteers but it is still a lot of work and you must be dedicated.

*What has working on this board meant to you personally?*

It has been very fulfilling to hear the personal stories of our grantees in the Congo. They are so brave and so smart; I really admire their drive. Our employees and grantees in the DRC regularly send us pictures and videos of their projects. It is amazing to see what types of businesses they own and the circumstances in which they operate.

*If you could give one thing to the women of Lubumbashi and their families, what would it be?*

I would like to see them have access to more traditional banking, specifically savings accounts. The women have expressed a desire to be able to save their money safely. We are looking into how we may help them in this area.

## A year-end thank you from the DRC



*We received a heart-felt thank you from our DRC recipients. Here it is - a loose translation of their broken French.*

We women of different projects - we say infinite thanks, that the Grace of God keep you, and that you are filled with his Grace because you are people who don't know us but take pity in love to help us. It is a great thing and it is a miracle of God. Just for you to say that your agents here who are Ms. Beatrice and Ms. Doris and the regrettable

loss of Nadine who all have helped us a lot. Other people could only hide in their activities, but sacrifice for us to give us. May God protect them well. Merry Christmas to all and Happy New Year, Thank you we love you a lot.

### **Brackets for Good**

Brackets for Good is an Indianapolis, IN based 501(c)3 focused on activating new donors and increasing awareness for non-profit organizations through a competitive, online fundraising event, modeled after college basketball's Final Four tournament. This year FSI will join over 100 other Minnesota non-profits in this fund-raising challenge, with the winner taking home an additional \$10,000. Join us as we compete to out-raise our local opponents. The fun begins February 26. Make your donation by March 4 and help us move forward. Click [here](#) to open the landing page. You'll find FSI in the lower right bracket. Click on the "+" sign to donate.

### **Our DRC Staff**

The search for a new Managing Director in the DRC continues. A FSI board member will travel to the Congo in early summer to orient the new staff member as well as re-view projects.

### **Contact Us!**

First Step Initiative  
4940 West 77th Street, Suite 30  
Edina, MN 55435.

Phone: 952-215-5378  
Email: [admin@firststepinitiative.org](mailto:admin@firststepinitiative.org)  
[www.firststepinitiative.org](http://www.firststepinitiative.org)