

FIRST STEP INITIATIVE

SMALL GIFTS. BIG CHANGES.

First Quarter Newsletter 2018

Message from Ellen Wolaner, Our Board Chair

In February, I traveled to Manchester, England to spend time with our partners at Congo Children Trust / Kimbilio and to meet Bertin Mwale Subi, the Anglican Bishop of Katanga Province. Lubumbashi, where we operate, is in Katanga Province. It was a great opportunity to get to know one another in person, to discuss our joint sewing trade school program and new Young Mums project, and to craft a vision of how we'll work together in the future.



Ian Harvey, the founder of Kimbilio, Gill Venton, who works with the sewing trade schools, Ellen, and Bishop Bertin posed for this photo in the Manchester Kimbilio office.

Kisanga is the Lubumbashi community in which Kimbilio and First Step Initiative opened our second sewing trade school. The school is in a spare classroom in a school on Anglican Diocese property. The land around the school has unused space which Bishop Bertin would like to see put to good use. He has invited First Step

Initiative to use it.

The needs of the Kisanga community are vast. Kimbilio has many client families in the area. First Step Initiative is very interested in finding ways to help women in the Kisanga community through growth of our sewing program as well as grants and other services for women in business.

I'm very pleased to tell you that First Step Initiative is embarking on plans to build our future in Kisanga! The coming months have many exciting changes in store. First, we'll launch a new name and look for our organization. We hope you'll love it as much as we do! Also, in collaboration with Kimbilio, we will survey the Kisanga community to ensure that in our path forward, our plans address the desires of the people we serve. Ultimately, after careful planning, we will launch a comprehensive fundraising campaign to convert our vision into reality. Watch for updates in future newsletters as we move forward!

Ellen Wolaner
Board Chair

Update of Sewing Trade School

Our measure of success for the sewing trade school is that the graduates are able to increase their monthly income by \$50. That is happening! With a year's experience, we are able to report that the graduates are working steadily and maintaining

steady profit levels. The average profit over the last 6 months has risen slightly and now stands at \$52.40. That is success!

When students graduate, they receive a manual sewing machine, fabric and a starter kit with basic supplies. In the photo below, taken on their graduation day, they are receiving these materials. To foster success, their teachers remain in contact with the graduates, providing additional guidance.



Eight more women currently are in training at the Luowoshi and Kisanga schools. The women at Luowoshi are mothers with young children. They have basic educations and are looking for ways to enhance their family income and combat the constant threat of poverty. The Kisanga women are older and living in intense poverty. They were identified as candidates for the sewing trade school because they recently welcomed back into their home an

adolescent family member (ages 10-14) who had run away and was living on the streets. Our hope is that as these women acquire marketable skills and increase their family income, they will be able to feed, clothe, and educate the family.

Young Mums Project Launched!



On March 12, FSI in partnership with Kimbilio, opened a trade school for impoverished adolescent girls. These girls have been living on the streets of Lubumbashi, supporting themselves however possible and too frequently in the sex trade. Each of the five young women who are enrolled is the mother of a toddler. The students are between 15 to 17 years old. They ended up in the street for various reasons – an accusation of witchcraft, the death of one or both parents, not enough food at home to feed everyone.

This school will capitalize on the young women's interest in fashion and beauty. It will provide training in hair and nail care and then financial support and encouragement to graduates as they launch their own business. The school is located in one of

Kimbilio's transit houses, which has been outfitted for this purpose. FSI staff members Bea and Nancy will handle the business practices training.

Young Mums staff members Carine and Fannie sent a tremendously satisfying first report. The engagement of these young women with their training is palpable.

The First Week

All five girls attended as planned and there was a lot of excitement and happy faces. Carine and Fannie started with the basics of how to wash and brush hair. Carine's ethos for the lessons are to really appeal to the girl's excitement and enthusiasm to do the styles and practice their skills, and then begin to weave in the business skills a few weeks later. The plan is to commence the business lessons with Beatrice and Nancy next month. We have already learnt so much in this first week that will inform our future practice into the next cohort of young moms for the training.



The Second Week

We are now in the second week of training. All five moms continue to attend with their babies. They are starting to learn more intricate styles and the Afro style which is very popular locally. The transformation to the moms, even in such a short time, is already evident in the photos that Carine is sending. The project is not only giving them skills to help them build or contribute to a business, but it also is improving their self-esteem. These results are hard to capture and quantify but will affect the long-term engagement of these young moms.



Project Reports

Carrots Project

These carrot-selling moms have expanded their operations to include selling cucumbers, eggplant and spices in the Kenya market. They now sell 180 bags of their goods each the month. They continue to work to reach their objectives, with a particular challenge being the volatility of the DRC currency. However, when our Democratic Republic of Congo staff, Bea and Nancy, visited them in January, they wanted to be sure to convey their appreciation for their grant.



More War in the DRC?

“No conflict since the 1940s has been bloodier, yet few have been more completely ignored.” Thus begins The Economist [February 15, 2018 article](#) about conflict in the DRC. In this succinct, clearly written article, the colonial and tribal underpinnings of the DRC’s bloody and continued political turbulence are described. A [linked briefing](#) is particularly informative. The authors hold out hope for a better future, citing South Africa’s election of Cyril Ramaphosa.

Social Media Assistance, Please

A nudge – Do you Facebook, Tweet, use Instagram? If so, we want you to “like” us. Research shows that building a vibrant social media platform is one of the best ways to build support for a program. Help us leverage your social media connections by connecting them to First Step. Take a moment now to link us via your Facebook, Twitter or Instagram account.



Volunteer Opportunities

Would you like to connect more deeply to the work of FSI? Do you have web or grant-writing skills? If so, check out our [idealist postings](#).

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