



A PLACE TO CALL “HOME” IN ARUSHA:

Mkombozi’s new group home is for girls like Hamisa

In keeping with its mission to help vulnerable youth attain self-reliance, Mkombozi opened a small group home for young women in Arusha in late 2007. This group home, made possible by a grant from the Woman of the Year Foundation, is in addition to the residential centre for boys in Moshi and the other group housing arrangements that Mkombozi currently sponsors. Via the new Arusha girl’s house, Mkombozi is specifically targeting assistance to young women who have lived on the streets, in residential care, or in precarious situations and are preparing for self-sufficient living.

The home is designed as a short-term intervention. Members of the group house develop their own norms and rules for living together and within the community. Social Workers visit once a week to offer support and advice whilst respecting the young women’s need for space to be independent. Mkombozi supplies weekly groceries, bedding, mattresses and cooking equipment (which remain the property of the Mkombozi house) and pay for water and electricity. Similarly, the house members’ education or employment progress is monitored. After six months of stability in employment, each girl moves out of the home and into her own accommodation.

Currently, the Mkombozi girl’s group home provides shelter to five young women, ranging in age from 17 years old upward. Each youth has a story to tell and dreams to realise. This is Hamisa’s story, in her own words...

My name is Hamisa Malima. I was born in Kilimanjaro region, Sanya Juu District. My mother died when I was six months old. My aunt took me to live with her, we were depending on my father and had many problems. My father was bringing us money for our basic needs. When I reached the age of four, my aunt got into trouble and was in the police station for two weeks. At the police station my aunt had bad stomach pains because she had a wound in her stomach. My father came and got my aunt out of the police station, he helped her to get treatment and finally she got well and left the hospital. My aunt tried hard - every day she went to the market to get food so that we could survive. Eventually, in 1998, I started my first year of school.

PHOTO: Hamisa resides in Mkombozi’s girls group housing in Arusha and is taking a six month course in Hotel Management. She recently attended an Empowerment Workshop at the Global Alliance for African Vijana Center where she received "life skills training". In fact, out of approximately 50 other girls at the workshop, Hamisa was awarded the prize for "Best Female Participant"!

I studied until class three, when my father told me I should move to live with my stepmother. He told me my aunt was having an operation for the second time and there was no other relative that could take me so that I could study in the same school. So I transferred to Burka Primary School which is next to Azimio la Arusha. Life was not bad because I was going to school, except my stepmother was not agreeing with me, I don't know why.

I remember in sixth grade, I was coming from school and I met my father, and he told me that he was ill. I told him not to worry, that God will help him and he will get better. After two months, my father was still sick, but he wanted to go back to work. One day he was brought from work, dead. I cried a lot because my father was the one I was depending on for my whole life. When he died, I lost all of my plans because there was no other relative who could take care of me and put me through school.

After looking for a place to move I moved to Musoma to live with my aunts. When I was living with my aunts, after school I had to sell oranges by the side of the road or at the stand. I went on living like this. When I finished standard seven, I found out I had passed and got accepted to go to a secondary school in Tarime. But when I was waiting to go to secondary school, I found out that my name had been stolen and sold. I went to the police to complain about this issue, but they did not take any action. I asked my aunts for fare to go and see my guardians, and they said they had no money.

So, I ran away from Musoma because my relatives were showing me they did not want me to return to Arusha but to keep living in Musoma with nothing to do, and my plan was to become a manager for a tourist hotel. I came to Arusha and I asked my Mama (guardian) to help me study, she had no money. I read in the paper about centres who help orphans in Dar es Salaam, but I had no money for bus fare. Then, one sister brought me to Mkombozi and I asked for help. They listened to my story about my life and now they have taken me in.

Now I'm in Mkombozi and, the way I see it, I am reaching my goals.

