

# Mkombozi

Empower. Engage. Enable.



## 2011: A Year of Transition

### Restructuring Our Care

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**Mkombozi has gone through many changes this year in strategic vision, leadership, and most strikingly, a physical restructuring of our Transition Home...**

For the past 14 years, Mkombozi operated a residential care facility for children who had previously been living on the streets. Initially, this care centre accommodated both short and longer term stays for children. However, over the years, Mkombozi came to realise that the best place for children to grow up is in a loving and safe family environment, not in institutional care. Therefore, we have shifted our focus to empowering families to better care for children and have restructured our residential facility into a Transition Home more equipped to help children to successfully transition from life on the streets into more supportive and caring communities and families.

This process began officially in January 2011 as our social workers intensified their work with older youth at the Transition Home to help them progress transition into adulthood through group housing, vocational training and independent living. Simultaneously, our street teams shifted their focus to younger children living on the streets and encouraged them to come to the Transition Home and start working towards reunification with their families. Over the last year, the population of our Transition Home has changed dramatically as the older youth moved out to independent living and over 50 new younger children moved in.

Due to the changing population of children living at the Transition Home, we began reflecting on the most effective way to work with these children and, in partnership with EveryChild UK, decided to restructure our Transition Home to provide a more nurturing environment for our children. Guided by EveryChild's research "Scaling down: Reducing, reshaping and improving residential care around the world," we decided that it was important to create nurturing physical spaces that would more closely simulate familial living for children in transition.



**NEXT PAGE >>> Nelson, one of Mkombozi's 12 year old youth tells how his life has changed and benefitted from living in the Transition Home... >>>**

Starting in September, we overhauled our Transition Home. Children and staff alike helped as we cleaned out, reorganized, repainted and restructured. We started with three large dormitories each able to house more than 15 children and ended with four dormitories each housing no more than 10 children and each with their own family dining space. Children in each dorm, as well as their assigned caretakers, will now eat all meals like a family unit in their dorms.

Additionally, we built a gate at the front of the Transition Home in order to create a more private living space. Now any visitors to the home will pass through the renovated Children's Programmes office before entering any residential space. We also created a new office just for counseling and repainted all the dormitories in brighter, more child-friendly colors.

In addition to the physical restructuring, we have also intensified psychosocial support to children by assigning two primary caretakers to each dormitory. This helps children create stronger bonds with their caregivers and helps them learn how to build familial bonds.

Thus far, the reaction to this restructuring has been very positive. Staff have reported improved behaviour from children which they attribute to the restructuring. One staff who has been working at Mkombozi for three years noted:

*"Yes, I have seen some changes. Especially in the way the children own the dormitories as their own small house where by now they know how to keep their belongings and stay as children of the same family although they come from different backgrounds. They feel very proud and happy about the changes."*

**– Martha, Day Supervisor**

The children themselves have also expressed positivity about the changes:

*"Staying very few in a dorm creates love from each other. That is what I like the most"*

**– Francis, 14**

*"The new dorms give us space especially for the older kids like me since we are very few in the dormitories and we have everything which we need in our dorm. I also like eating as a small family which most of us miss. This makes me very happy."*

**– Philemon, 17**

As we move forward, we acknowledge that there will be challenges for staff and children to adjust to the new structure. We feel confident though that the changes we have made are for the better and will provide our children with the life skills and support they need as they transition from life on streets back to life with their families. We will continue to closely monitor progress and use qualitative and quantitative means to measure our progress and the impacts of this restructuring.



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

### A story written by a child living at the Transition Home

"I got to know Mkombozi through Mama Nurse when we met in town and she asked where I sleep. I told her I don't have a place to sleep; I sleep on the verandah at night. She also wanted to know where I came from and I told her Marangu. She told me about Mkombozi and I agreed to come and live here for a while.

I have benefited in many ways, especially I like the food, a comfortable place to sleep, playing and studying too. I am very happy staying at Mkombozi because they don't beat children here. I also get clothes and I take a bath everyday. Another thing I get is love. We are not given very difficult jobs that we can't do. But I don't like when I am provoked by my friends.

I am very happy to get my caregiver, sister Anastella who took me home where I was able to see my parents and my younger brothers again who I had not seen for a long time. It is also significant to me because I have received education."

**- Nelson, 12**