



## Organization Overview

heshima, n. (*Swahili*). respect; honor; dignity.

### **Vision Statement:**

The children we serve today become tomorrow's advocates and mentors creating social change, individually and collectively.

**Heshima Kenya** is a 501(c)(3) US nonprofit and registered Kenyan charity based in Nairobi, Kenya. *We are the first organization in Kenya to specialize in identifying and protecting separated and orphaned refugee children and youth living in Nairobi.* Our innovative shelter, education and community outreach services enable and empower unaccompanied refugee children, especially adolescent girls, to live healthy lives. Heshima Kenya creates change by addressing the root causes of forced displacement and neglect by ensuring holistic care to the children we assist and by strengthening the capacity of the refugee community, both in Nairobi and in the United States, to provide mentorship, care, and advocacy.

Heshima Kenya was founded in 2007 by Anne Sweeney and Talyn Good, two American aid workers who share over 20 years assisting refugee populations in Africa and the United States. Through their work with smaller community-based organizations and larger agencies such as the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR, they were continuously dismayed by the absence in services and community support for unaccompanied refugee children and youth living in Nairobi. In turn, they devoted themselves to creating a shift in long-term care and protection for this invisible population.

Heshima Kenya began operating in January 2008. In this time, we have built working partnerships with more than ten organizations in Nairobi, including UNHCR and the Population Councils' Brain Trust, an initiative that promotes girls rights, and have reached more than 150 members of the refugee community about our programs. Additionally, Heshima Kenya developed an *advisory council* of Somali women living in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a community of over 60,000 Somalis. The council works to strengthen our impact through advocacy, provides program development insight, and creates outreach to support networks based in Nairobi.

Our innovative model of care has been applauded by the United Nations and US Department of State (DOS) and in turn, we were invited to share best practices at a DOS sponsored conference on unaccompanied refugee children in October 2008. In one year, we have established a global network of donors, become a grantee partner of The Global Fund for Children and were awarded funding from the US Embassy in Nairobi. Additionally, we have built a diverse and dedicated Board of Directors to include a Rwandese human rights activist and genocide survivor, a refugee policy analyst, among others.

## **BACKGROUND**

More than 400,000 refugees reside in Kenya today. The dismal nature and extreme insecurity of the camps in which the majority of refugees live has forced more than 175,000 refugees to seek alternate refuge in Nairobi. As the Government of Kenya's camp confinement policy limits humanitarian aid and legal recognition for refugees living outside the camps, the majority of urban refugees live in chronic poverty and without legal documentation or adequate access to basic resources in Nairobi. UNHCR estimates there are more than 5,000 refugee unaccompanied children and youth living in Nairobi. They have fled persecution in the nearby countries of Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo and are now living in the streets or with strangers in the capital. Without being provided the urgent care and protection they deserve, unaccompanied refugee children and youth are exceptionally vulnerable to child abuse, rape, HIV/AIDS, forced marriage, and malnutrition. Ongoing displacement has also weakened support structures within the refugee community, hindering children and youth from receiving long-term and safe shelter, adult encouragement and community support.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Heshima Kenya strives to achieve the following objectives in order to remedy the lack of services and support for unaccompanied refugee children and youth:

- To ensure healthy development by providing unaccompanied refugee children and youth with a continuum of holistic care to address issues of physical and mental health, shelter, education, legal documentation and family tracing;
- To promote long-term self-sufficiency among unaccompanied adolescent girls by providing them with the skills, resources and economic support to make a healthy transition to adulthood;
- To work in tandem with partner organizations and local churches, mosques, schools and clinics to identify and protect additional children and create awareness about their special needs;
- To strengthen the capacity of the refugee community to provide effective care to unaccompanied refugee children and engage their active participation to serve as caregivers, volunteers and mentors.

## **WHO WE SERVE**

While we serve children of all ages, we focus on the special needs of adolescent girls from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, as these nationalities represent the majority of refugees in Nairobi and an age group most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Since January 2008, we have provided comprehensive care to 35 unaccompanied refugee children and youth, including two young mothers and their children. Our programs provide more intensive services to a smaller number of beneficiaries due to the various emotional and physical issues experienced by this population, including survivors of torture and rape, those experiencing outstanding medical ailments, and often times threats from the community.

## **OUR PROGRAMS**

All children and youth enrolled in our programs receive comprehensive case management services, including assistance with medical care, clothing, mental health counseling, clothing, referrals for formal refugee registration and family tracing with the Red Cross, and transport assistance to and from all appointments.

### **The Heshima Safe House.**

Our Safe House provides temporary shelter to unaccompanied refugee children with significant protection concerns, special psychological and development needs, and for those awaiting placement in our Foster Care Program. Many of the children residing at the Safe House are referred due to homelessness, threats of forced marriage, rape, or other forms of abuse.

### **The Children's Empowerment Project.**

The Children's Empowerment Project is a multi-phase program that offers services to adolescent refugee girls, 13 to 19 years of age from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Our five program components include: case management; basic education; life-skills training and discussion; sponsorship of vocational skills courses; and small business loans through participation in the Maisha Initiative. Heshima Kenya recognizes that a structured system of support and a peaceful environment to learn greatly impacts how and when a child copes with trauma and their current conditions, which enables them to secure a future for themselves.

### **The Foster Care Program.**

We work to strengthen community-based care networks by working in tandem with the refugee community – especially mothers – to identify new and pre-existing caregivers and mentors, and create dialogue about child protection, health education and community resources. In addition, we assess new foster care parents and provide monitoring to children placed in those homes. Food and other resources, if necessary, are provided to families to prevent additional financial hardship, in addition to connecting caregivers with income generating projects to enhance the quality of care provided to foster children and their own families. All foster children and youth placed by Heshima Kenya are eligible to receive ongoing case management support and participate in our Children's Empowerment Project.