

Overview



WHO WE ARE

We work in the Kibera slum, the largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya, home to over 500,000 people living in extreme poverty, more than half under age 18. In addition to poor housing, residents lack toilets and access to running water, proper sanitation and quality healthcare.

Focused on meeting their basic needs, with inadequate resources and support, many smart, talented young people end up engaging in harmful behaviors and activities that have the potential to negatively alter their entire lives.

Uweza recognizes that Kibera residents are creative, resilient and resourceful and that sustainable change requires a future generation that is more educated, motivated and empowered.

Founded in 2008, today we provide 300-400 Kenyan children and youth with unique opportunities to pursue a path to a better future through the discovery and development of their talents and abilities – gaining education and ultimately earning incomes that utilize their own inherent strengths.

We seek and nurture long-term relationships with individual children and youth to have a more lasting and impactful effect, versus a short-term emergency response to young peoples' needs.

All 12 of our staff live in Kibera. We know the community well, and we work out of the Uweza Community Center, which opened in 2011. We developed our programs in response to needs expressed by Kibera community members, and our work evolves in response to both formal and informal feedback collected from program participants and their parents/guardians.

We achieve a lot with a very small budget (approximately \$150,000) and an American board of directors, both of which we are looking to grow.

WHAT WE DO

Uweza Soccer Academy

Soccer is very popular among youth in Kibera and our largest and most well-known program in Kenya making it possible to reach vulnerable children and youth in ways that might not have otherwise been possible. We use soccer as a vehicle to promote life skills and the importance of education. Coaches act as mentors and learn each child's personality and background, enabling Uweza to connect them to other resources. 120 children and young adults participate in our award-winning, age-specific teams for both boys/men and girls/women. The Uweza Soccer Academy is pioneering girls' participation in sports in Kibera. Women's soccer still suffers from lack of interest and investment, and we continue to push for more resources, funding and attention for women's sports. Several former soccer players are now in college/university and current careers/occupations of former soccer players include artist, comedian, teacher, referee, coach, professional soccer player and business owner. Nine former and current soccer players are currently employed by Uweza.



Sponsorship/Scholarship Program

Education is extremely important to Kibera families, who recognize its potential to lift students out of poverty. Although both primary and high school have been declared free by the Kenyan government, there are fees associated with attending school that many families can't afford. In this community, the Sponsorship Program is Uweza's most frequently requested program/service. Currently, we provide 66 scholarships to primary students attending local schools; secondary students most of whom attend boarding schools outside of Kibera; and post-secondary students who attend vocational schools and colleges. Scholarships cover the costs of school fees, school uniforms, school supplies, mentorship and guidance and life skills workshops.

Art Program

There are no opportunities for creative expression or development of artistic talent in most Kenyan schools, and opportunities to participate in art for Kibera children and youth are extremely limited, despite a plethora of artistic talent. The Uweza Art Gallery opened in 2013 to provide art students with their own space and materials to paint and market their artwork, which is sold online, at the gallery and through events and exhibitions. 60% of all sales goes to the artist and/or to his/her school fees if the artist is under 18. 40% of sales goes back into the gallery to pay rent and purchase supplies. As of 2018, the gallery is currently self-sustaining through sales of artwork. Several of the artists have been able to pay the entirety of their primary, high school and post-secondary education through the sales of their artwork, and many of the older artists are able to fully support themselves through their sales. Uweza Art Gallery also hosts art classes for children from Kibera twice a week.

Golden Girls Power

Insecurity in Kibera and the risk of assault and sexual harassment makes it more difficult for girls to be able to gather and meet in public spaces, whereas young men and boys commonly spend their days at "bases" scattered throughout the slum. Our girls' empowerment club provides Kibera girls with a safe space to meet, socialize, discuss and learn about topics that are relevant to improving their mental, emotional and physical well-being.

The club is divided into two groups by age, and each group meets once a week. Led by a female facilitator who teaches through drama, group work, song, dance, debate, audiovisual materials and discussion groups, club members also take trips outside of Kibera and are visited by guest facilitators. In addition, the club provides an opportunity to provide individualized attention and assistance to girls who are going through challenges and are in need of advice and support from caring peers and adults.

Bright Futures

The goal of this young women's economic empowerment group is to help women become financially independent. Activities are developed and implemented by the members themselves and are communal in nature, with all members participating and benefiting. Current group activities include group savings and making and selling of liquid soap products. The group also discusses one life skills topic at each meeting related to motherhood and womanhood. Group members have also taken on jobs at the Uweza Community Center such as washing uniforms for the soccer team and cleaning the center to earn a small amount of income for themselves and their families. We have just launched a program to provide business loans to twenty young women from Kibera. The loan application process includes a written application, interview, home visit and individualized business and finance training. Loan applicants are proposed by the group and funded in groups of five to promote accountability.



Success Stories

UWEZA
Foundation



LILLIAN

Although she was an excellent student, Lilian was forced to drop out of school during her fourth and final year of high school when her uncle, who had been paying her school fees, died in a car accident.

She stayed home from school for more than six months, but never became discouraged.

She began studying using textbooks at the Uweza Community Center, so that she wouldn't fall too far behind. When Uweza learned about her situation, we offered her a scholarship to cover the costs of completing her high school education. She happily restarted her fourth year and finished the year first in her class on the national secondary school exams. Lilian then set out to achieve her next goal: becoming a nurse. Once again, she had to wait as it took more than a year to find an affordable school and secure resources. During this time, Lilian kept herself busy by volunteering with Uweza's girls' empowerment program. She is now in her second year at Kenya Medical Training Centre's Community Health Nursing Program.

STEVEN

Steven first joined our soccer program in 2010. While he was extremely committed to the team, his coaches began to notice that he was struggling with some significant challenges at home. They learned that he was frequently sent out of school due to non-payment of school fees. Uweza decided to sponsor him to school but he struggled with attendance and almost dropped out several times. He often missed school to work in construction to help provide for his mom and younger siblings. With Uweza's encouragement, he was able to successfully complete his high school education and, now married with a son, has continued to work any odd job that he can find to earn a living.

Steven recently approached Uweza with a business proposal. He wanted a loan to buy a mkokoteni (handcart) to start his own business transporting water. He would repay by providing free water to the Uweza center in Kibera twice a week for seven months until the loan was repaid in full. He received the loan, is steadily repaying, and his water business is thriving. While he was still playing soccer, Steven offered his time to referee matches for younger players in Uweza. Along the way, he gained experience and advice from more experienced referees and coaches. Last year, he officially earned a position as a referee for the Football Kenya Federation and he referees league matches every weekend.



WESLEY

Wesley was playing for the Uweza soccer team when Uweza first launched our art program in 2011 and advertised it to all our program participants. He started attending art classes twice a week. Despite never having painted before, it was clear right away that he was very talented. He has continued to develop his talent and discover his own artistic style over the past seven years. After finishing high school, he started dedicating all his time to painting and is Uweza Art Gallery's best-selling artist.

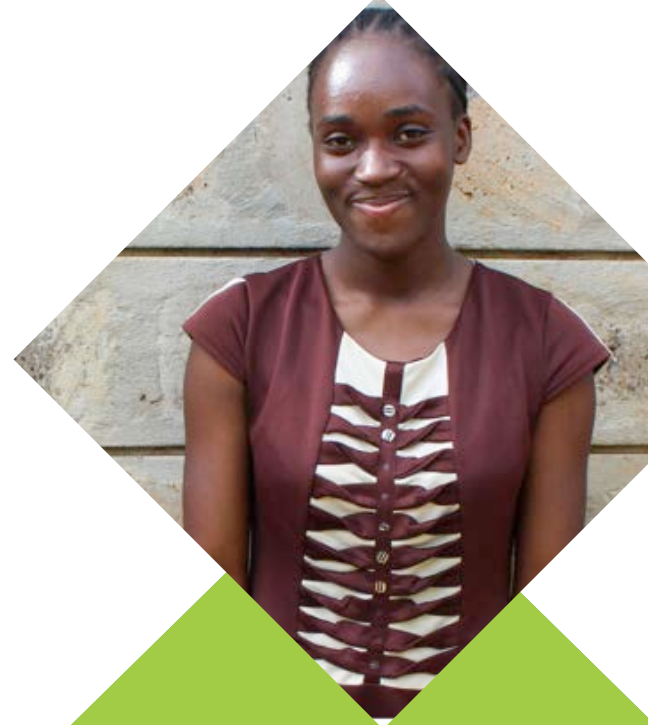
Now well known for his abstract animals, detailed landscapes and realistic street scenes, Wesley has sold every painting that he has created this year. Thanks to his sales, he has been able to join university. With Uweza's help through the application process, he gained admission to Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi and is paying his university education in its entirety with sales from his artwork. He also now helps to teach the art classes for younger artists at the Uweza Art Gallery.

MERCY

Mercy was about to start Class 4 (fourth grade) and living in a children's home when she first joined Uweza's Sponsorship Program. When she took the entrance exams to transfer from her informal school to a government primary school, she found out that she failed and would have to repeat third grade. She was on the verge of giving up on herself and her education, but with Uweza's encouragement successfully made it through third grade.

When she started fourth grade, Uweza decided to sponsor her to one of the best boarding primary schools in the area, where she would receive better care and a better quality of education. At her new school, Mercy thrived. She consistently ranked number one in her class on exams and studied around the clock, even during school breaks. She excelled on the national primary school exams at the end of Class 8 (eighth grade) and gained entrance to Alliance Girls High School, one of the best girls' high schools in the country.

Now in her third year at Alliance, she has hopes of attending university in the USA and dreams of becoming a Medical Scientist.



GENTI

Genti is a talented soccer player and a single-mother. When she first joined Uweza's women's soccer team, she and her daughter were living with her aunt as she had no source of income to pay rent or provide for herself or her daughter. This caused a strain on her aunt, who also had her own children to take care of. Her aunt started urging Genti to go live with relatives in rural Kenya. Recognizing her talent and commitment to the program, Uweza offered Genti a job as assistant coach for the girls soccer teams. She and her daughter moved out of her aunt's house and are now staying on their own – and Genti is able to afford all of their expenses, including her daughter's school fees.

She is well loved by all of the younger girl players, who now have a female role model and mentor to look up to and seek advice from. She also continues to develop her athletic talent and pursue a career as a professional soccer player by playing for Uweza Queens, the Uweza women's team.

ALPHONCE

Alphonce was frequently sent home from his public primary school when his single mom was unable to pay school fees. After hearing about the Uweza Sponsorship Program from a friend, he came to the Uweza office in Kibera and personally requested sponsorship. After conducting a home visit and verifying his academic performance, Uweza offered Alphonce a scholarship, and he was able to attend school without having to worry about fees.

As time went on, Alphonce began to struggle academically. Despite being very well-spoken with a talent in acting, drama and comedy, he found reading and writing challenging and started to fall behind. He was also facing significant challenges at home, as his mother was unable to find steady work. He was, however, committed to his education, and his positive attitude motivated Uweza to continue supporting him. When he reached his second year of high school, despite perfect attendance at school, he was failing all his exams and clearly not gaining anything from his education. Both he and Uweza decided that it might be better to seek alternative educational opportunities.

He found a two-year vocational course in electrical installation, and Uweza transferred his sponsorship. Now in his second year, he is a favorite among his instructors, has been able to find small jobs to start earning income, and recently installed a sensor controlled nighttime lighting system at the Uweza Community Center.

