

# *Sponsorship of Congolese Children*



Jolly Mbenga  
12 years old

Jolly is a gorgeous young girl with a big smile who at the age of 12 already knows more about being a sex-worker than she should. Her mother would often leave her vulnerable and alone while she went to the discos or up to Sudan to sell herself. Jolly tells us, "Many of the men were drunkards. They would do bad things to me." Even the community of women around her would accuse her of trying to take their men and told Jolly she had to learn the sex industry so she could pull her weight. When we found Jolly she was alone, at risk, and moving with a group of boys who would use her at will. She has never been to school. Now Jolly has a different life. In her own words she says, "Now I am safe and no one can harm me." She doesn't have to grow up to follow in her mother's footsteps. She has a chance to become what she dreams of being....a nurse.



Dorrine  
11 years old

“I don't know how I came to exist in the family I am in and I don't know where my mother is,” says Dorrine softly. She was brought to Uganda from Congo as a baby by a soldier who used her for protection from enemy fire. One day Dorrine was playing and a group of women in the community told her she did not belong with them because she was not one of them. Dorrine says that no one wanted her. Men used to mock her and say they were her father and she should let them in so they could sleep with her. When Dorrine heard about Zion she begged her foster parents to let her come so she would no more be abused or at risk. When Dorrine grows up she wants to help take care of children just like Mama Miriam.



Charlotte  
8 yrs old

At such a young age, Charlotte already knows her fair share of hard work. Her mother did not have a place to stay so she used to leave Charlotte with other people who would make her take care of their babies, cook their food, and do their laundry. In exchange, Charlotte would sometimes get food, but most of the time she was starving. One time she accidentally dropped a jerry can she was carrying for a woman and she was beaten severely. Even her own mother would not protect her and told her she didn't want her. When I asked Charlotte what was the most difficult thing for her, she begins to cry and says that people used to make fun of her because when she was a baby no one was watching and she fell into a pot of boiling water and her face was burned. But Charlotte says that now she is not afraid anymore because no one in Zion beats her. She says she wants to be a doctor, but has never been to school. She smiles when I tell her that this year she will.





Naomi  
7 years old

Naomi used to stay for days at a time without eating, trying to care for her little brother. Eventually she was given to another woman by her mother because she felt she could not take care of her. But this woman abused Naomi and so she ran away. She says that she used to stay in a group of “bad children” because they used to force her to have sex with them and when she said she didn't want to they would beat her. We found Naomi's mother searching for her and so she agreed to let us take her in because she was afraid Naomi would run away again. Now Naomi dreams of being a teacher and when asked what the biggest difference is in her life now, she smiles and answers, “There is love.”



Esperanza

8 years old

Espy (as we call her) used to be left alone by her mother who is an alcoholic and goes to the disco to dance. She was forced to cook for herself and was often too afraid at night that she couldn't sleep. One night her hut caught fire while she was cooking, and a neighbor had to come rescue her. People started telling her that because she was alone she would be stolen and used in a child sacrifice, so Espy started hanging out with other children in groups. But she says, they had bad habits. Esperanza looks down and traces the ground with her finger. Then she says, "Some boys would come in groups at night and would sleep with me and it would hurt so I would cry and would tell my mom but she would only beat me." Espy begged her mother to come to Zion so she could be safe. She says she is happy now and someday wants to be on the radio.



Vanessa  
7 yrs old

Vanessa pulls her orange skirt over her feet. Her shirt is covered with red hearts. She traces the dirt on the ground as she cries. Her step father used to call men over to rape her. Used to pimp her and laugh as she cried behind the curtain. Too small. Legs, too small for her age. She is only seven. The tears gather in the middle of her pupils and spill down her face like drops of rain collecting on a window. Started with the small boys and then later, the bigger boys. Used to sleep on a mat in the kitchen, knees to chest in protection but there is no protection for her. Her mother doesn't see her. Her mother beats her when she says it hurts.

Later that day, I see Vanessa in a green dress smiling, laughing as she skips jump rope and tells me she wants to be a lawyer someday. I ask her why...and she says.... "for justice."



Mercy  
7 years old

Mercy's mother used to bring men home with her, so Mercy learned how to have sex early. Because she was alone at night, she used to move around with a group of kids, even dancing in the disco. But mostly Mercy was just hungry. She says she and her friend used to steal sugar from neighbors and mix it with water because they had no food to eat. She says boys used to threaten to rape her all the time because she was Congolese and that was “what she was for.” Mercy says all of these things so matter of factly that it makes me sad to realize how normal these things have become. When I ask Mercy what she wants to be when she grows up, she tells me, “I want to be an engineer.” I've never heard a little girl say this before. When I ask if she knows what they do she says “No, but they drive big cars and have lots of money.”



Jackie  
8 years old



Jackie never knew her father, and her mother died of AIDS this year. When Jackie's mother was sick, she would have to take care of her, and try to beg for food so she could cook for her. Once, while preparing dinner, the fire became too hot and the boiling oil spilled on Jackie's head, where she has a large scar. When her mother was in the hospital she was sent to stay with an older lady in the village and the woman used to use her as a slave to do all her work for her. When Jackie's mother died, she gave her to us to protect her. Because Jackie spent so much time taking care of herself, she is still learning to get along with the other children, but her fiery spirit keeps us laughing. Jackie says the thing she like most about Zion is that she isn't beaten anymore and she gets to sleep on a mattress. Because Jackie asked us to pray for her little sister, Gloria, we were able to get Gloria out of a bad situation. She said when she grows up she wants to "Be Africa," but we later realized she meant to wants to be a leader. We can see her potential.



Agnes  
8 yrs old

Agnes is only 8 years old but she knows about responsibility. While her mother would get drunk every day Agnes would have to care for her younger brother and sister. The children would often sleep hungry because their mother was at the disco and did not leave them anything to eat. Often, she brings men home with her and has sex in the same room where her children are. Agnes cries as she tells her story. Sometimes a boy in the neighborhood would come and rape her and bring his younger friend to do the same to her sister Angela who is only six. Sometimes he would come with two friends. "I would cry and shout, but no one would come," Agnes says softly. "I want you to pray for my mother that she will get saved and stop these bad things." Agnes has a different life now that she is in Zion and she says she likes the studying the best because she wants to grow up to become a nurse.



Angela  
6 yrs old

Angela is young but she remembers how one day their hut caught fire, while her older sister Agnes was trying to cook because their mother was gone doing prostitution. She remembers being so scared until some neighbors came to rescue them. When we found her, she was sick, starving, and had no clothes to wear, but we were able to nurse her back to health. It seems unthinkable, but Angela's older sister Agnes told us that when boys would come to rape her, they would also use Angela. Being in Zion has saved her from the terrible abuse she was suffering at such a young age. Angela is small girl with a shy smile who loves to help take care of our younger children.





Gloria  
4 years old

Gloria is the newest addition to our family and is the little sister to one of our girls, Jackie. At four, she has already lost her mother, and has been abandoned by her father. She was staying with the mother of one of our other girls, but Jackie asked us to pray for her because she was worried about her little sister. We were determined to get Gloria because we did not want her to grow up in such an unprotected environment where she could be used as a child prostitute or for slave labor. We trudged through mud for hours in the rain to find Gloria and bring her home. When we brought her, the girls surrounded her with hugs and shrieks of laughter. Everyone wanted Gloria to sleep in their bed with them and to give her their toys to play with. She is already adjusting to her new life and is following the example of her new sisters.



Daniel  
3 years old

Daniel is our only boy in a house full of girls, but somehow he still manages to smile his brilliant semi-toothless grin at it all. Daniel's mother Jane was staying in our home with us, as one of the women who was trying to escape sex-work and start a new life. She was with us for 8 months, without any problems. Recently, she had some kind of spiritual attack coupled with what we believe might be a mental illness and she became too violent for us to keep her in our home with our children. Daniel has survived nights where he was stuck out in the cold with his mother, and being thrown to the ground when she has an attack. Daniel has been through traumatizing experiences and yet he still runs up to hug my legs whenever I visit. We were able to convince Jane to let us take care of Daniel while we help her get the support she needs. He is now healthy and running around happily, with his only trauma being that he is surrounded by a bunch of girls who like to love on him.