



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM: Youth Stories

Microsoft®

KENYA

Veronica Indimuli Malala, Age 32, Nairobi (ACWICT)

The determination of Veronica Indimuli's father to see all 14 of his children complete school must have rubbed off on her. Now married and with children of her own, she still has the determination to acquire more skills to improve her life.

Veronica, 32, is excited about how far she's been able to come. "I now own a cyber café back in Mumias, my rural home area", she says. But her path has not been easy. She had completed her diploma course after her O' levels but felt she needed to gain marketable skills. That's why she joined the Youth Empowerment Program at the African Center for Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT).

"A friend of mine told me about the program at church and I decided to check it out for myself," she said.

Veronica lives in Kawangware, one of the informal settlements in the capital city of Nairobi. She says that in her neighborhood, young people are looking for jobs, but none of them are looking at entrepreneurship as an alternative for making a living. "This is the difference the Youth Empowerment program at ACWICT taught me. The entrepreneurship course really opened my eyes to many possibilities." Veronica attributes her newly acquired skills, including business plan writing, to her being able to own her cyber café. "The challenge I had was putting the plan into practice and I found myself having to make some adjustments," she explains.

The setting up of her new company at her rural home has opened other avenues for Veronica to earn a living. Now residents in her rural area have asked her to set up a computer college there. "This program has helped me a lot. I thought that after the training I would go and look for a job, but now I know I can start a business and I did." Her advice to other young people? That they should not allow their circumstances to dictate their future. "I wish that everyone could have an opportunity to enroll in this program," she says.



Monica Wanjiku Njau, Age 20, Nairobi (ACWICT)

Monica Wanjiku Njau is a jack of all trades. Although her story begins with a humble background in Nairobi's Githurai settlement, Monica says the sky is the limit for her. The fifth born of six siblings, she had a strong desire since childhood to be a fashion designer. She simply did not know how to get there.

Monica hoped that the completion of her secondary school in 2006 would open the doors for her to enter the world of fashion and design. She even went ahead and identified an institution that she hoped would shape her dream into reality. Unfortunately she soon realized that the cost of the course was beyond her parents' financial ability. The bright lights had suddenly turned dim for her. She stayed home for the next year, planning her next step.

In June 2008, Monica learned about the Youth Empowerment Program through the ACWICT website and enrolled into the program, "I was most interested in Entrepreneurship because it best tackles the problem of unemployment," she says. She believed the course could be a stepping stone to greater opportunities in line with her dream to be a designer.

Through the entrepreneurship class, Monica developed a business plan based on the fashion and design business. Lack of capital, however, kept her from implementing her business plan immediately. This setback did not deter her. Rather, she took it as a challenge and sought other ways of generating money which she would later use as capital for her own company.

With some three hundred shillings (four U.S dollars) as capital and advice from a friend, she ventured into the business of selling deodorants locally. With no place to operate from, she carried her goods with her wherever she went. Gradually, her business picked up, and soon she was able to expand her orders. From the profits accrued from selling the deodorants, she bought two pop-corn roasting machines that she strategically set up in one of Nairobi's informal settlements. She also benefitted from a donated sewing machine as well as the support from her friends, who helped her market her products. Today, working from her home, Monica not only markets her elegant African design wear in Kenya, but also overseas, with help from relatives in Dubai.

To further realize her dream, she recently took up a project planning and management course at a local college in Nairobi. Besides her chain of small businesses, she landed a job as a sales executive with an insurance company in the city – which she attributes to her YEP life skills training. She also had the opportunity to participate in a youth forum in France through the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs.

Monica is not leaving anything to chance. She hopes to put the computer knowledge acquired from the Youth Empowerment Program to use, and will soon enroll in a computer-based design course so as to be able to better her designs as well as increase her profits. She also plans to buy an embroidery machine and rent out a shop. In addition, she is helping others to get a good start. Monica has already created an employment opportunity for her younger sister who now manages the deodorants business for her, the two people hired to run the popcorn machines and a tailor for the design business. In the years ahead, this increasingly successful young entrepreneur hopes to continue to expand her businesses and create even more jobs for people in the community.



Bernice Waithera, Age 24, Nairobi (ACWICT)

At 24, Bernice is a recipient of a prestigious presidential award. She is also an icon among her peers. As a result of her three month job as a volunteer trainer in ICT at ACWICT, she has seen hundreds of households from informal settlements within Nairobi transformed. An introvert by nature, she nurtured her desire of becoming an IT professional through the years. It was this passion that landed her a place at ACWICT in 2008. Although she had prior knowledge in ICT, the life skills and entrepreneurship curriculum drew her attention, prompting her to enroll in the Youth Empowerment Program.

Bernice volunteered to be an ICT trainer for the program soon after the training, putting to use the skills she had acquired to impact the lives of other young women. Her decision was motivated by her desire to give back to the society by empowering her peers who like herself, were mainly from low-income backgrounds who had limited access to computers.

At the time, Bernice's main challenge was to accommodate the needs of women with varying abilities to grasp ICT skills. Despite this challenge, she found it fulfilling to share knowledge with other women to help improve their lives. Through her volunteer work,

she not only built her confidence but also gradually lost her shyness. It is this role that earned her a presidential award for young achievers in 2009.

Following her experience as a volunteer trainer, Bernice began a job with a freight company, where she offers technical support in the IT department. Grateful for the soft skills she acquired at ACWICT, she says: "The training makes me stand out from the rest. It was exceptional."

Brenda Aluoch, Age 20, Nairobi (ACWICT)

A firstborn in a family of four siblings, 20-year-old Brenda has always held on to her dream to be the next most sought after architect of her generation. Having finished high school in 2006, she planned to join the University for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Architecture. This next step, however, was blocked – due to the financial constraints of her large family. Deeply disappointed, she settled for a less expensive course in marketing management. “I took it as a typical situation where life hands you a lemon, and you have no choice but to make lemonade”, she says, and resolved to find another way. During this time, she was introduced to the Youth Empowerment Program where she began to take ICT, entrepreneurship and life skills classes. As a result, she not only improved her computer skills but also learned how to prepare a business plan and write compelling curriculum vitae. She also picked up useful tips on job search methods, and most importantly, how to handle job interviews. She began to apply for every job opportunity for which she saw a fit.

Brenda found her first job opportunity through ACWICT, which referred her to the Mercantile Insurance Company in Nairobi. With the skills she had gained at her finger tips, Brenda got the job. “For all the interpersonal skills I apply on the job, I derived most of them from the YEP training. It was incredible”, she says.

Today, she is a sales executive with a leading commercial bank in Nairobi. Yet Brenda still aspires to implement her fashion and design business plan. “Never give up on your dream,” she says.



Alexander Baraza Kimakwa, Age 23, Nairobi (ISBI)

Alexander Baraza Kimakwa grew up in a rural farming community in the Rift Valley. His mother still struggles to support her large family after her husband passed away. Alexander describes his family life: “It is not poor, it is not very good. It is just average.”



Alexander says that lack of access to affordable education and the problem of unemployment are two of the greatest issues facing young people his age. The YEP program, which he heard about from a friend, changed all of that. When he enrolled in the program, he joined the IT course. “In my life, my greatest desire was to know how to use a computer.” In addition to gaining knowledge about computers, he also learned to express himself before an audience as a result of taking the life skills course. Talking about how he has changed personally as the result of his classes, Alexander says: “Maybe physically I have not changed a lot but intellectually I am far ahead”. He is now able to access any information he needs and use technology. His dream is to get quality education

and to be able to serve society and be self-reliant by working in the IT field. Attending YEP resulted in his getting a job as a cashier in a local company. “I am very optimistic. I will achieve. Things at the moment are moving.”

Alexander’s advice to young people like himself: “In life they should be ever optimistic and hardworking. They should not be deterred by challenges and hurdles. They should be focused and patient. As the Chinese say, ‘a thousand mile journey starts with one step.’”

George Gitahi Njuru, Age 21, Nairobi (ISBI)

George Gitahi Njuru, 21, was born and raised in the Eastlands area of Nairobi, along with his nine sisters and brothers. Over the years, his family has faced significant financial difficulties, with none of his family members having jobs in the formal economy, and their small business often not turning a profit. According to George, unemployment and a lack of creativity are the biggest issues affecting young people. “Many young people in the estates do nothing. They do not want to work for themselves but expect hand-outs from other people.” He also says that drug abuse is another issue affecting young people.

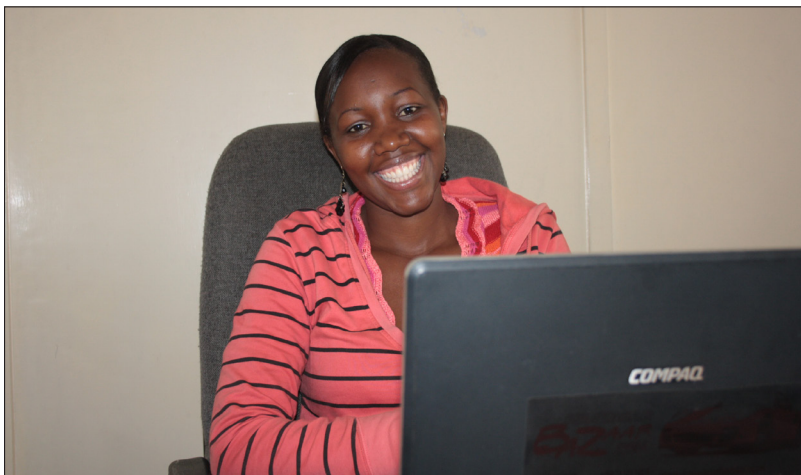
George learned about the Youth Empowerment Program during his visits to cultural activities organized by the local youth center. He enrolled after finishing school, gaining social skills, business ethics, and how to deal with clients. As a result, he believes he has changed as an individual. “I have gained responsibility in my family and at work.” He has also gained greater self confidence, especially in dealing with people.



George is currently working in an electronics workshop where he is getting valuable work experience, and plans to open an electronics repair business in the future. He also wants to help other people achieve their goals. “I feel I need to be a better person and help others be better.” In summing up his experience in the training and his current outlook on life, he says: “Don’t give me a fish. Teach me how to fish. The life skills will help me achieve my goals because it is not always what you have but how you relate that makes people succeed.”

Emily Wanjiru, Age 20, Nairobi (NairoBits)

Emily Wanjiru grew up in the outskirts of Nairobi as the youngest of seven children. Having lived in a one-bedroom flat for most of her young life, she now lives alone, finally able to support herself. Emily learned about the Microsoft Youth Empowerment Program through her community-based youth group. She knew some of the young people who had participated, and could see that they were doing better economically and socially. “They had become very good role models in my community, and I wanted to do this as well.”



As a result of her participation in YEP, her life took a positive turn. “I have become more dedicated, responsible, educated, accountable, motivated and self sufficient. My biggest challenge,” she said, “was learning how to use existing technologies in a way that was not familiar to me.” Through the program, she said she learned that knowledge is power and that a person needs the knowledge before it is can be turned into skills. “I also learned that to overcome my challenges, I have to be creative and have an open mind.”

Emily has plans to go to University in order to study Information Architecture. Her biggest dream: to open an NGO that helps educate young girls.

The most important lesson she learned from the YEP program, and the message she wants to share with other young people is to not give in when you still have something to give. “Nothing is really over until the moment we stop trying. Do not be afraid to encounter risk; we are still young and there is hope for us.”

Duncan Onyango, Age 25, Nairobi (NairoBits)

Duncan Onyango Adera, now 25, was raised in Dandora with his seven siblings. He learned about the YEP program through his cousin, who had already gone through the training. Duncan saw how the program had changed his cousin's life, so he wanted to give it a try.

The list of how the YEP training changed him is long. Through the training, he learned computer skills, as well as graphic design and animations. He's also learned how to present himself and maintain a professional image. In addition, Duncan says not only his character but also his view of the world has changed. "Since I now have access to the internet, my knowledge base has grown in leaps and bounds. I can relate to a wide group of people, which has increased my confidence. I am now having a firsthand experience of the notion that with great power comes great responsibility." Duncan says his family now looks up to him for solutions. "I guess you could say that I get a glimpse of what superman goes through!"

Because of his new skills, he has gained the confidence that he can achieve his goals, and is proud of who he is as a person and as an employee. "I believe that it can only get better from here." His advice to young people like himself is to follow your own path. "Each person is unique in a way, and we should use that to our advantage. Do something you like. I think the feeling you get from that is far greater than going to the moon or being the president."



SENEGAL

Aloïse Georges Boubacar Awouele, Age 29, Dakar (Synapse)



Aloïse Georges Boubacar Awouele was born in the Medina quarter of Dakar. He learned about the YEP program through the newspaper and then submitted his resume to the Synapse Center. "I wanted to join the program in order to acquire technological knowledge, which was a field I did not know much about," he explained.

As a result, he gained practical experience in business planning, and learned about the importance of building professional relationships. He also learned the importance of teamwork, information sharing and learning to work with people from different backgrounds.

"Thanks to the Impacto (YEP) program, I have acquired theoretical and practical knowledge that will help me contribute to the sustainable development of Senegal," says Aloïse. He also hopes to start an organization that will help young entrepreneurs learn and understand what they need to do to be successful in the rural areas of Senegal. Currently, he works for a micro-credit organization and is using the skills he acquired to be successful. What is his message to other young people? "Have conviction, courage and patience in order to contribute to the success of your communities. I believe that those qualities are the tools to being successful."



Ibrahim Sane, Age 35, Dakar (Synapse Center)

Ibrahim Sane, was born in Bignona, and learned about YEP's Impacto program from a friend. As a result of his participation, Ibrahim learned to evaluate a project's strengths and weaknesses, and gained the technical tools he needed to apply in any organization he worked for. The program also helped him learn about challenges that he would face in the workplace and how to address them.

Ibrahim learned that if he knows what he wants, he has to acquire the knowledge necessary to reach his goal. Then things will fall into place. Through the program, he was taught that he did not need a lot of money to start a program, just the motivation and self confidence to carry it through. He was also able to develop better relationships with his classmates so that they could help each other overcome problems.

Ibrahim's advice to the youth is that they should believe in themselves and understand that Senegal is developing as a country. "Each person has the power to make a difference and impact the development process. I believe that the future is in the hands of the youth."

TANZANIA

Adelphina Melkiory, Age 19, Dar es Salaam (VETA)

Adelphina Melkiory was born in Moshi, a village located at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro. An orphan who lost both of her parents when she was a child, she struggled to survive in a harsh world. "I had no relatives or friends who showed concern. Everybody treated me like rubbish. I had no hope."

One day a woman from Dar es Salaam visited her village, heard her story, and promised Adelphina she would pay for her schooling if she went with her. This "angel," however, made her life even worse, forcing Adelphina to work and offering her no food. "I was miserable," she said.



After a series of similarly abusive relationships, Adelphina heard about a program at her church in Magomeni which cared for orphans and other vulnerable children. "I was among the youth who given this golden chance, and I thought that I was dreaming." Having joined the YEP program, she enrolled in the Tailoring short course and participated in entrepreneurship, life skills and computer programs. "The training has been the key towards my wish of being a unique tailor and a fashion designer," she said.

Recognizing the major problem of youth unemployment in Tanzania, as well as the high incidence of drug abuse and prostitution among her feels, Adelphina feels fortunate to have found an alternative. "The International Youth Foundation and the YEP program have added value to my life. I am now very active and confident and now help to support other youth in the church...I hope that the YEP program will continue to rescue my fellow youth from this dangerous life."

Catherine Anthony, Age 19, Dar es Salaam (VETA)

Catherine Anthony, who was born in the Dar es Salaam area, lost her father in her early teens. Living with her mother and grandmother, the family faced significant challenges and were unable to support Catherine's education past Standard Seven. She used to assist her mother selling sweets on the street. "It was not very profitable, but it helped us live.... I wished very much to go to school, but had no one to help me. I had a life with little hope."

Catherine learned about the YEP program from her church, and enrolled in the hairdressing short course.

Through the program, she says she gained "a lot of support for my future because I now know what I want." As a result, she now has found part time employment, and hopes one day to earn enough money to purchase tools and equipment to establish her own hair salon. "I now have hope of a successful future because I have gained confidence through entrepreneurship training, life skills training and basic skills in hairdressing." Catherine credits the YEP program for helping to change her life, and has a message for her peers as well. Don't be discouraged, she says. "Through this program, my life got direction and I was able to set goals for myself. The program has added value to my life and with the work that I have now, I am geared towards success."



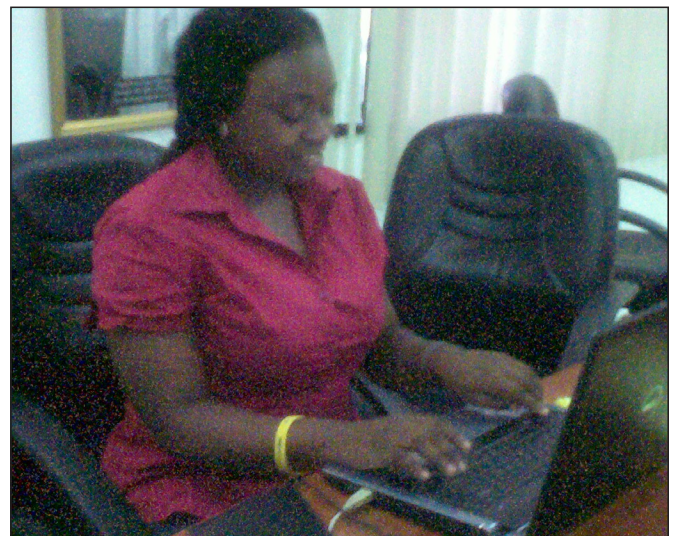
Betina Mwambapa, Age 23, Dar es Salaam (VETA)

Betina Mwambapa was born in Mbeya as the youngest of seven children. Her family was very poor, and her older sister, who took responsibility for supporting the family, died when Betina was in primary school. Her aunt took her in, but, she says, "she turned me into her house girl." Hearing about the YEP program from her team counselor, she immediately joined the program and enrolled in the catering program. "Through the program, I have gained a lot of support for my future in such a way that I know what I want to do and what I need."

NIGERIA

Olayona Feyikemi Seun, Age 24, Lagos (LEAP)

At the age of 24, Olayona had completed her university degree and admits she stayed at home doing nothing for five months, simply waiting for a job to come to her. Unable to secure a job, she applied for the Microsoft Youth Empowerment Program. Her friend said that she couldn't promise it would get her a job, but she emphasized that Olayona was going to acquire knowledge and insight that would help her move forward. "The YEP program was the beginning of my turning point and value re-orientation," she says. Within a week, she says, "I learned a lot about myself, the labor market, skills that are required for the corporate world and most importantly, I had a re-orientation about job placement." As a result of this experience, Olayona developed her skills so she could be an asset to any organization. "I stopped waiting for the job to come but I went out to render my services and developed myself in the process... I started thinking outside the box." Olayona first took a volunteer job as an event coordinator to sharpen her organizational skills, ability to multitask, and her interpersonal skills.



During this period she received her first invitation for an interview through the YEP program for the position of a Special Assistant to the CEO of a local food store. As a result of the YEP training, she says, “I was fully prepared and confident. I was able to effectively market my skills during the interviews and was able to secure the job.”

The skills and knowledge that Olayona acquired during the YEP program has helped her to effectively and efficiently carry out her job duties. One aspect of the program that helped her the most was SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Bound). She also learned how to set short term goals that would then help her to reach her long term aspirations.

There are a lot of issues facing young people in Nigeria, she said, including lack of knowledge and a negative mindset. “The YEP program helped me change my mindset, which eventually reflected in my attitude and approach to issues.” When thinking about what message she wanted to give to other young people, she refers to a quote by Nelson Mandela, “There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountain top of our desires.” Olayana now knows that whatever the vision may be, she will never give up.

Salmuanu Umar, Age 30, Bauchi State (LEAP)

Salmuanu Umar heard about the Microsoft program from his brother. “I decided to enroll because of the opportunities I believed it would bring me,” he said, adding that he hoped it would help him become gainfully employed and serve as a positive agent of change in his community.

During the life skills training, he learned how to adopt positive values, how to be ethical in his dealings with others, and how to improve his time management skills. The ICT training provided him with a good understanding of Microsoft office and applications.

“One of the biggest challenges I faced during training, was time management. Before I entered the program, I was not in the habit of being time conscious,” he said. “I had to start arriving early to class so that I would not be turned away. Through this, I learned better time management.”

Salmuanu also learned how to cope with challenges and deal with conflicts while also gaining self confidence and a better outlook for the future. “I now realize that I can do anything.”

After completing the five-day employment skills training in Bauchi, he was able to proceed to the ICT training at the Community Resource Center, where he expanded his knowledge in Microsoft Excel, Word and PowerPoint software packages. The result of his hard work? Salmuanu was offered a job at the community center as an Assistant in the Administration Office.

“I look back and appreciate the opportunity provided to me through the YEP program and my new desire to engage myself to further improve my ICT skills. The skills I have learned through the program serve as a good platform for me to build on,” he says. “They are the first steps towards more accomplishments that will lead me to my desired future.”





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