

COLORS OF CONNECTION



2021

ANNUAL
REPORT

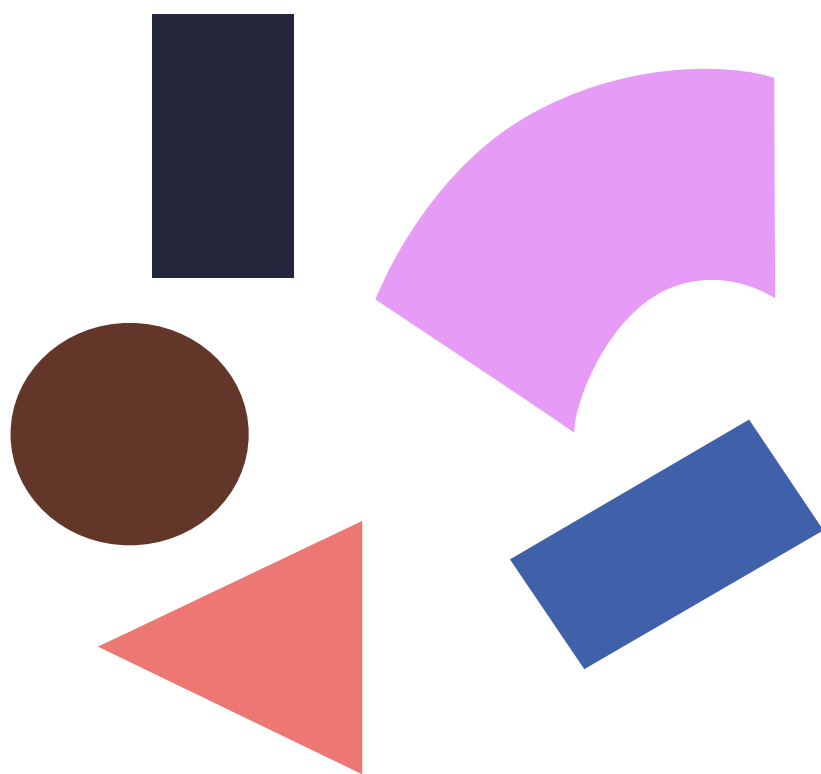



Table of Contents



Note from the Executive Director.....	4
The Organization	
I. Who We Are	6
II. What We Do	7
III. Why We Engage Through Art	9
IV. Our Impact	10
2021 Accomplishments	
I. Program	
a. Completed Programs	12
b. Current Programs	24
c. Programs in Development	25
2. Organizational	
a. Communications	27
b. Human Resources	28
c. Fundraising	29
d. Partnerships	31
2021 Challenges	32
Lessons learned and strategies going forward	33
Thank you	34
Funding and finances	35
Looking forward to 2022	36
Leadership and Board	37

Note from the Executive Director

This year bore the fruits of our sharpened focus on adolescent girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Investing in partner relationships, research, and tools, we were able to launch our new scalable and sustainable program model — Girl Awakening — in Goma, DRC. Girl Awakening, (Musichana Hamuka in Swahili) is the first program of its kind, bringing together arts-based and trauma-informed activities with globally vetted best practices for girl-centered programming. The program strengthens girls' and communities' inner resources and provides critical skills and knowledge to help them thrive. A highlight was our continued partnership with a Congolese non-profit founded by young women community builders and artists – les Étoiles Messagères, founded by former staff members of our previous programs. We worked alongside them, building their capacity in delivering girl's programming, improved program management, and planting the seeds for long term sustainability and growth. The pilot ran from September 2021 through February 2022, and engaged 84 new girls, 8 young women mentors, and approximately 15,000 community members. We will be expanding on this pilot in 2022.

On an organizational level CC continues to refine our place within the broader scope of humanitarian aid, development and global public health. We are at the forefront of new approaches for providing support in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and are excited to be able to help to shape an emerging field and also marshalling existing research about how art supports mental health. In 2021 we contributed to and were informed by emerging research on how arts supports mental health. We made progress in identifying the value of arts-based interventions to meet mental health



needs, particularly for girls in low and middle income countries, and we developed potential ways that these can be integrated in larger health delivery systems for greater accessibility and broader impact. We strengthened partnerships in 2021 to bring this work to fruition and will be expanding on this effort to integrate arts into health delivery systems in 2022. We are excited to contribute to innovation on this urgent issue.

We cultivated new relationships and funding from foundations and built meaningful partnerships with several community-based and international NGO's for joint projects. While maintaining a base of loyal individual donors, we shifted our fundraising strategy away from heavily-crowdsourced fundraising, looking instead to foundations with the potential to invest larger sums on a long-term basis. As a result we have several funding relationships and partner relationships in development, including 2022 and 2023 partnerships with the UN Mission in the DRC, and the School of Leadership Afghanistan (SOLA) in Kigali, Rwanda, and the University of Global Health Equity in Kigali Rwanda.

In February of 2021 Co-Founder Laurie Reyman departed from the staff team, a fundamental change for the organization that meant shifting from co-leadership to an executive director format. This has resulted in more streamlined decision-making for the organization, but did require time to create and adjust to a new leadership format.

Last year also brought the unexpected challenge of a volcanic eruption that impacted our community in Goma, DRC. We took an adaptive approach, shifting our focus to ensure that our community there was stabilized, and doing everything we could to support them and offer resources during a time when their lives were upended by natural disaster.

We faced our ongoing challenges in securing funds to fully support our organizational operating costs. This meant reducing our staff from 2 –1 mid-year, and an increased workload for the executive director and board.

This annual report provides an overview of our successes and challenges in 2021. It conveys the passion and integrity of our partners, the life-changing potential of the work, and traces the development of new mental health approaches. I am immensely grateful to the supporters and partners that make our work possible and am excited for the work we have in store this year.

In solidarity,



Christina Mallie

The Organization

I. Who We Are

Colors of Connection (CC) is a US based 501(c)(3) non-profit focused on arts engagement, public mural making, and community building in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, we work with adolescent girls and young women with the goal of promoting health and wellbeing, mitigating trauma, and preventing violence.

Our Mission: We work creatively with youth during post-conflict recovery and rebuilding to inspire hope, support well-being, overcome trauma, and encourage self-determination.

Through the medium of art, we invest in building knowledge, skill sets and resources that strengthen people's mental and emotional capacities, allowing them to move beyond the mindset of basic survival brought on by living through

conflict. At the heart of our work is the knowledge that art is a powerful catalyst that can help people heal and rebuild their lives and communities.

Our accomplishments demonstrate the powerful impacts of this innovative field. Colors of Connection has completed nine projects in various refugee camps and post-war areas in fragile and conflict-affected sub-Saharan Africa, directly benefiting 340 young people and reaching an estimated 215,000 residents through a public mural making process. We have partnered with the International Rescue Committee, the Population Council, the Danish Refugee Council, Save the Children, and IEDA-Relief. Our regional experience includes the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Mali. Colors of Connection is currently running a girls' arts and life-skills program in Goma, DR Congo in partnership with the Congolese non-profit organization.



II. What We do

We work in partnership with communities hurt by inequalities and the violence of war, honoring their lived experiences and knowledge to realize their collective vision of a better future.



Creative Activities:

We use both group and individual activities, including painting, dance, drawing, music,

photography, and theater. Activities are low-cost, draw from local resources and knowledge, and are focused on transferable skillsets and competencies, features that ensure our approach is sustainable in places with scarce resources. The creative nature of the activities enables participants to focus on developing their capabilities (assets such as knowledge, skillsets and resources), thus sidestepping the stigma associated with traditional mental health solutions. This strategy allows youth to participate and benefit from the program in a place where stigma around mental health, and lack of mental health services prevent the majority of youth from receiving any mental health care at all.

Girls constantly face adversity and are often survivors of various traumas, including early marriage, domestic violence, dropping out of school, or having children. On any given day they are likely to struggle with mental health. These creative activities provide opportunities for **holistic healing, relationship building, and identity expression** outside of harmful gender norms.



Public-art making:

Our public art-making model builds social cohesion and resilience. Adaptable to a range of

settings, our model has been implemented in refugee camps and post-war urban environments in Sub-Saharan Africa. We bring together community leadership councils to engage in a series of discussions around critical issues and potential solutions. Youth design and produce murals and posters based on these discussions, and they are displayed in highly visible public spaces in their community. Through large-scale collaborative public art, marginalized adolescents have a platform to engage with their community leaders and represent the issues and values that are important to them. While creating murals and posters, participants exercise and strengthen the skills they have learned during the program including **leadership and creative expression**. The artwork expresses what the community desires to promote in society as opposed to what they desire to prevent. This approach promotes local strength, resilience, leadership, and **assets-focused thinking**.

In our work with girls, the public art created generates new perspectives on girls and women that shows their capabilities and identity beyond vulnerability and victimhood. This challenges perceptions and harmful social norms that contribute to gender-based violence.



Build partnerships and models of cascading leadership:

We work with local partners, mentors and community leaders to build local capacity and ownership and increase the sustainability of our work. Program activities are led by a locally-based partner organization and mentors recruited from the same community. In this way **our work is co-led and informed by the lived experiences of the people within the community.**



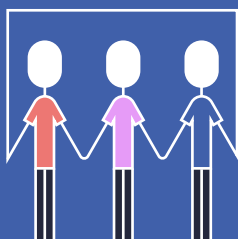
Connect participants to academic opportunity:

We provide participants with **scholarships for school tuition and associated school fees.** Education supports youth development and increases lifetime earnings. For girls in particular, secondary education supports lower rates of child marriage, child mortality, and maternal mortality and increased lifetime earnings and national growth rates. For program participants, support from CC often makes or breaks their ability to access education.



III. Why We Engage Through Art

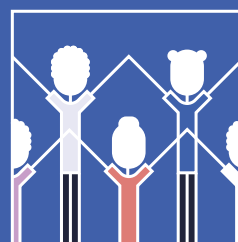
Since the beginning of human existence, art has been used as a form of personal and collective expression. It is a primal skill enabling us to express ourselves and connect to others in ways that surpass cultural, linguistic, and even psychological barriers. A growing body of research now confirms that art has the power to effectuate:



Relationship Building



Expression and Communication



Personal and Community Agency



Holistic Healing



Self and Social Analysis

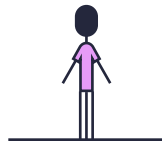


IV. Our Impact

IMPACT AMPLIFIED

At a time when conflict and crisis have increased in intensity and scale around the globe, there is a need for innovative solutions to help people to heal and rebuild their lives. Investing in the psychosocial wellbeing of those who have experienced conflict is a crucial component of restoring societies, yet it is often overlooked. We are filling this gap.

Our programs engage individuals, relationships, local organizations and society in a variety of ways that lead to positive change.



INDIVIDUAL

We work directly with program participants using the expressive arts to create the following outcomes:

Self-efficacy: People are more resilient, motivated to effect change, and able to handle hardship and imagine new possibilities.

Healing: People process and represent their emotions and thoughts, and reconnect with their bodies.

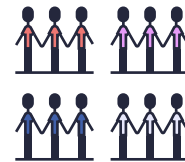


RELATIONSHIPS

Our programs focus on the importance of connecting with others for well-being and result in the following outcomes for participants:

Social Capital & Competence: People learn how to build and manage relationships, and navigate social situations in constructive ways.

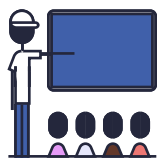
Solidarity: People feel connected to others and experience a sense of belonging through shared values, responsibilities and interests.



ORGANIZATION

Colors of Connection engages staff from the communities we work with and partners with **local agencies** to build strong relationships and share skills that will allow our impact to be **sustainable**.

Each individual that is changed through our program creates a ripple effect of positive change that has an even richer and further-reaching impact on her community. Just one opportunity can make all the difference for that girl and her community, and you have the power to give it.



COMMUNITY

Our programs work at the community level through engaging with local leaders in the form of a **community arts council**, which guides the program, and by engaging with community members during the process of creating the murals in a public space. This results in the following outcome:

Representation: People advocate for themselves and others through public art.



SOCIETY

The benefits experienced by individuals and communities benefit societies as a whole by **shifting perspectives**. The imagery in the art itself, as well as the public creation of the art by the community's own youth:

- 1) **Shifts dominant narratives related to issues such as gender, racial and ethnic equality, and valuing local knowledge and identity.**
- 2) **Portrays hope for a different reality.**
- 3) **Reinforces the value of youth's contribution in society**



INTERNATIONAL

Colors of Connection aims to foster a connection between our friends, supporters and donors and the youth and communities that we work with by sharing stories that shed a light on the connection we all share.

Accomplishments

2021 accomplishments in program implementation and development, organizational growth, and fundraising

I. Program

A. Completed Programs

Orange the World Mural

In partnership with les Étoiles Messagères and the World Food Program
Goma, DRC
October 2021

To celebrate the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women CC, in partnership with les Étoiles Messagères, created a mural in front of the World Food Program (WFP) office in Goma, DRC. The mural expressed how WFP programs support women and girls and was themed on “Orange the World,” UN Women’s Generation Equality Campaign. The mural was accomplished over an intensive 4-day period, created by former and current girl and young women participants.



Girl Awakening Pilot Program

In partnership with les Étoiles Messagères
Goma, DRC

January – December 2021

Girl Awakening (Musichana Hamuka in Swahili) is a sustainable, scalable program working with adolescent girls and community to promote gender equality and fight gender-based violence. Girl Awakening brings together arts-based and trauma-informed activities with girl-centered programming practices that are based in evidence and best practices.

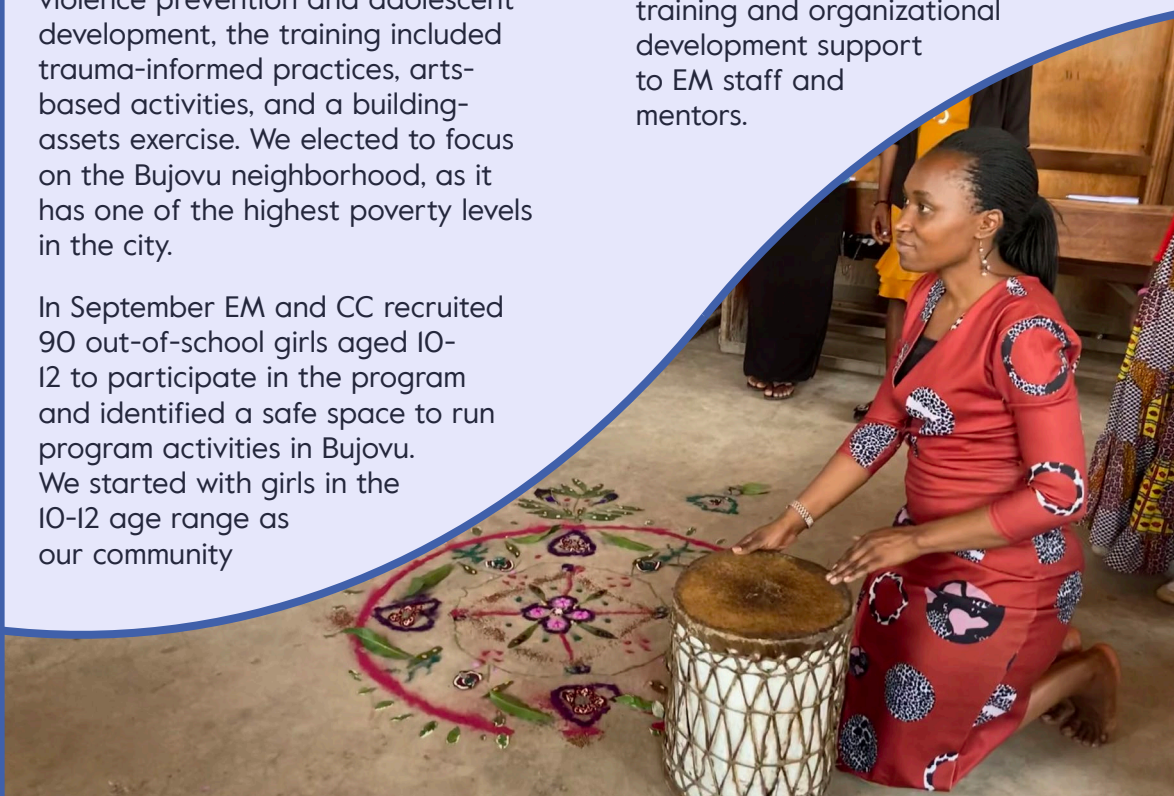
In 2021 we built on work conducted in 2020, expanding program design and development with our community partner les Étoiles Messagères (EM).

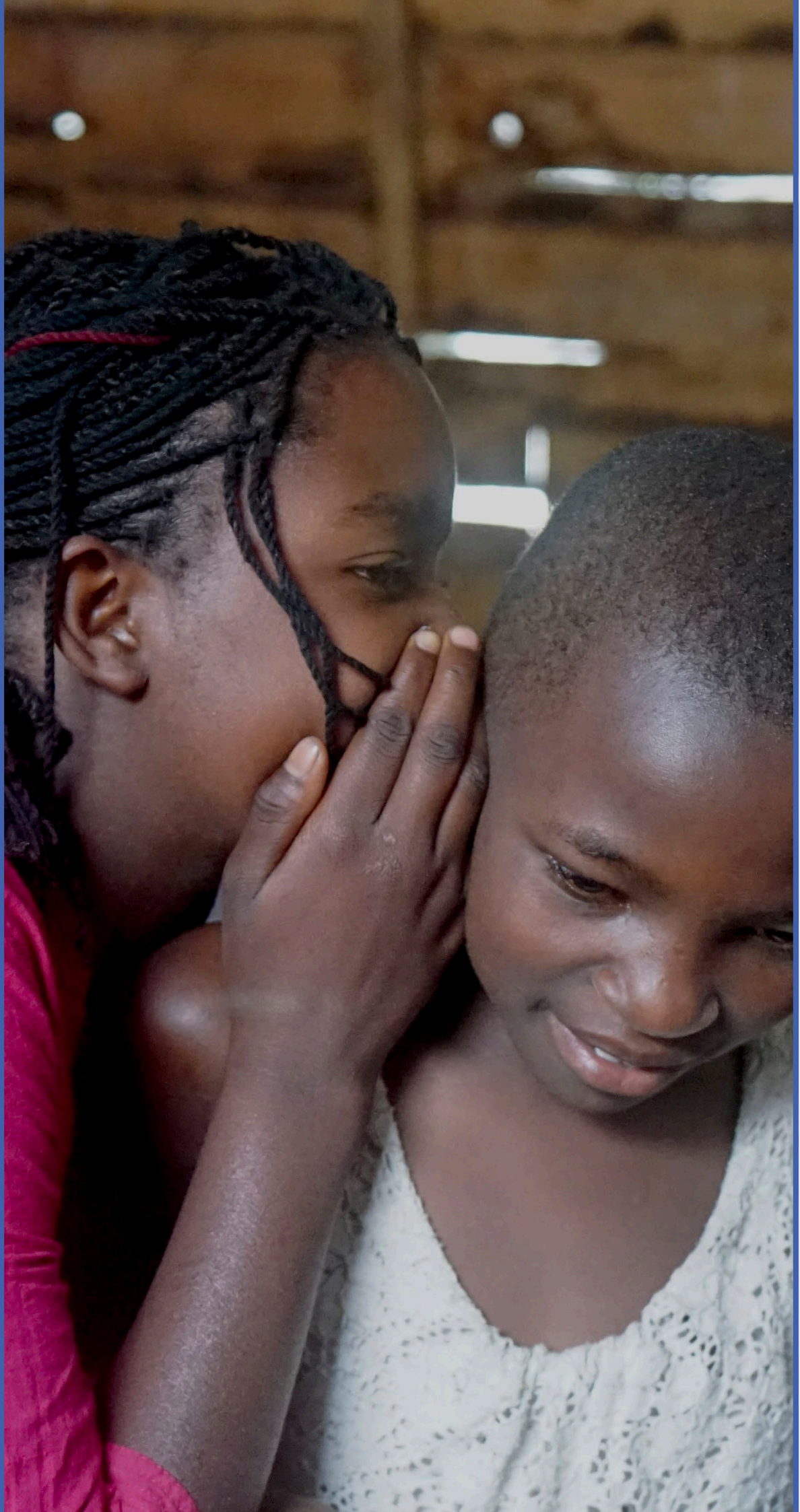
January to August was dedicated to fundraising and development. From August to September 2021, CC conducted a 7-day training for EM staff and 10 young women mentors, building their capacity in delivering girls programming and program management. The training was run with support from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and specialists from their Girl Shine program model and resource package. In addition to Girl Shine sessions on gender-based violence prevention and adolescent development, the training included trauma-informed practices, arts-based activities, and a building-assets exercise. We elected to focus on the Bujovu neighborhood, as it has one of the highest poverty levels in the city.

In September EM and CC recruited 90 out-of-school girls aged 10-12 to participate in the program and identified a safe space to run program activities in Bujovu. We started with girls in the 10-12 age range as our community

survey showed that by this age 64% of girls in the neighborhood were already missing basic protections and guarantees – such as living with one or no parents, or being out of school. Working with this age group, we knew we were reaching girls at a pivotal moment in which supporting them could make a life changing difference. At this age it is possible to prevent some of the worst outcomes a girl can face such as child marriage and teen pregnancy, and to help them to develop agency and the skillsets and resources to advocate for their rights.

From October 2021 – February 2022 CC and EM collaboratively conducted Girl Awakening program activities including bi-weekly art and life-skills sessions with 90 participants completed the program) community engagement (forums and community arts council meetings), and public art creation that reached approximately 15,000 community members. 83 of the girl participants were enrolled in our school scholarship program in December 2021. Throughout this phase CC provided ongoing training and organizational development support to EM staff and mentors.







Key Pilot Successes:

I. Supporting locally led women's and girls' scalable programming:

We provided training and leadership development for our local partner les Étoiles Messagères, and young women mentors from the Bujovu community:

1. EM staff and mentors were trained in and utilized evidenced-based adolescent girl tools and resources including the Building Assets Toolkit, the Girl Roster, and the Community resource and risk scan from the Population Council, as well as the Girl Shine Resource Package from the International Rescue Committee. EM can now utilize knowledge and practical experience in some of the best practices in girls programming as they continue their work.
2. Mentors from the same community as the girl participants were recruited and trained to run the life-skills program sessions, establishing a cascading leadership model for the

program.

3. EM staff, with supervision from CC, implemented the Girl Awakening program, learning a comprehensive spectrum of skillsets and knowledge enabling them to run a girls' program. This lays the groundwork for them to lead the program in the future and to grow it to scale.

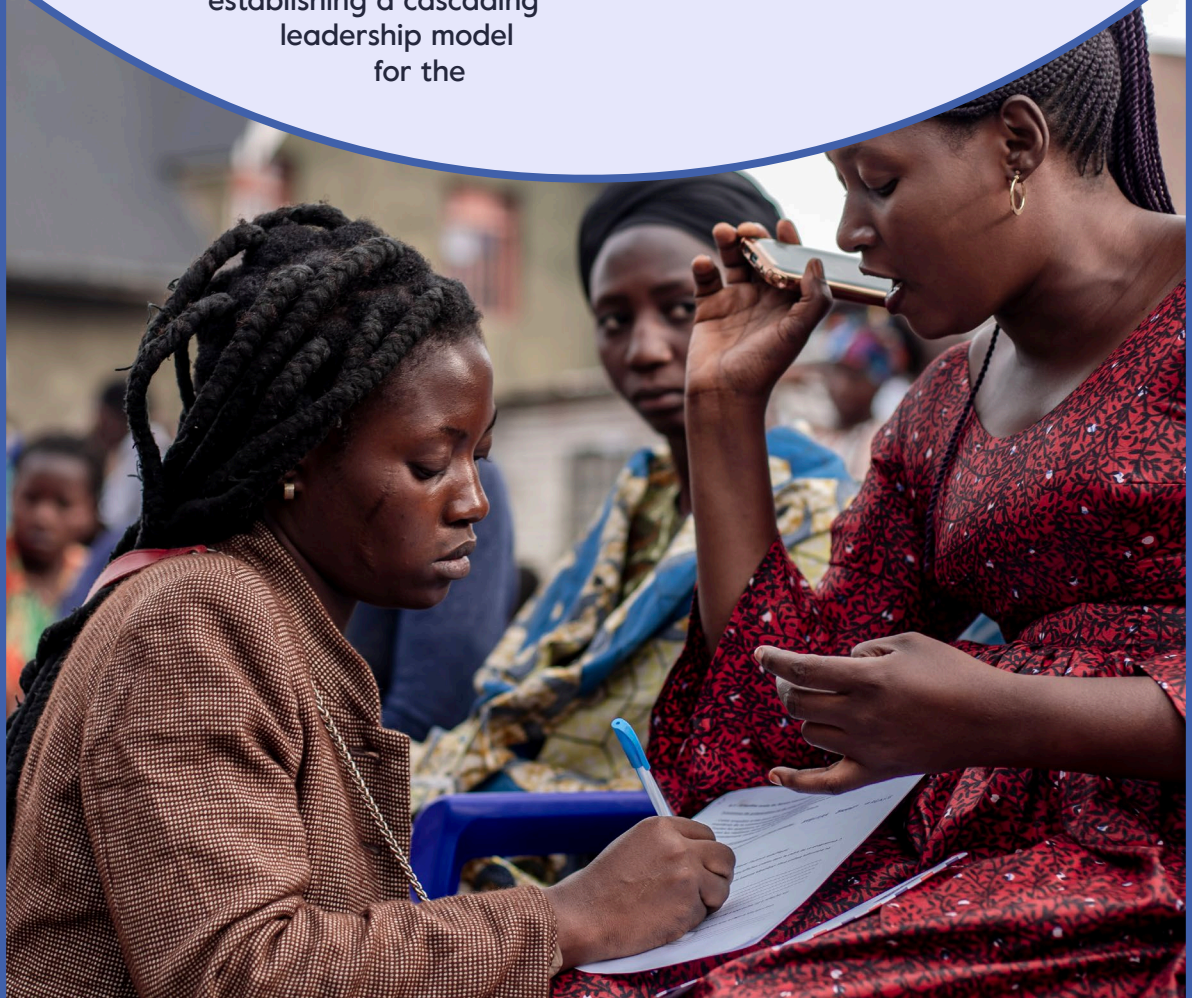
"The training helped me understand that there are many types of violence and also where to refer a survivor for support."

- Staff member of les Étoiles Messagères

Many mentors reflected on how learning about adolescent development helped them understand and relate to younger girls in a more positive way.

"Now I know how to interact with my younger siblings"

-Mentor





2. Furthering innovative arts-based and trauma-informed programming for girls to support mental health and mitigate trauma:

The Girl Awakening pilot combined our arts-based and trauma-informed practices with globally utilized life-skills curriculums, and program design. We leveraged the unique advantages of arts activities, providing crucial innovation for girls' programs that serve low resource and conflict-affected contexts. Creative activities were paired with life skill sessions from IRC's Girl Shine Resource Package, and the Population Council's Building Assets Toolkit, cascading leadership model, and community resource and risk scan. **Both group and individual creative activities were utilized, and they included a range of creative mediums: dance, drawing, music, theater, and collaborative mural painting in public spaces.** Many of the creative activities were developed by Colors of Connection in collaboration with other organizations and individuals, including the [Creative Assets and Program Content Guide: to Build Social and Emotional Learning and Promote Trauma Mitigation and Healing](#) (Adolescent Girl Creativity Network, 2020).

With this arts-based approach girls developed assets supporting their mental health and well-being, essential things that might not otherwise be prioritized in a life skill curriculum, such as: Knowing how to recognize emotions in herself and others; knowing how to self soothe; and being able to imagine and express herself in a different role than what is socially assigned, knowing what beauty means to her, and knowing how to occupy and defend space physically, socially and psychologically.

Because the activities were designed for low-resource settings, they can be utilized in similar settings across low- and middle-income countries. There is a critical gap in mental health and well-being services for girls in these regions. According to the World Health Organization and the Mariwala Institute, 80% of people living with mental health illnesses live in low- and middle-income countries, and 75% of these do not receive any treatment. We know that girls and women experience pervasive gender-based violence and discrimination. A study in the Lancet found that girls in low- and middle-income countries were one-and-a-half to two times more likely

than boys to be diagnosed with clinical depression in adolescence. **To ensure activities worked in low-resource environments we prioritized activities that were: low cost, transferable, non-stigmatizing, accessible, trauma-informed, and contextually adaptable.** Some activities were practiced for the first time in this setting in which girls and women (mentors and staff from our partner EM) from the community were the facilitators. It was a key opportunity to evaluate and learn which activities mentors, staff and girls found most valuable.

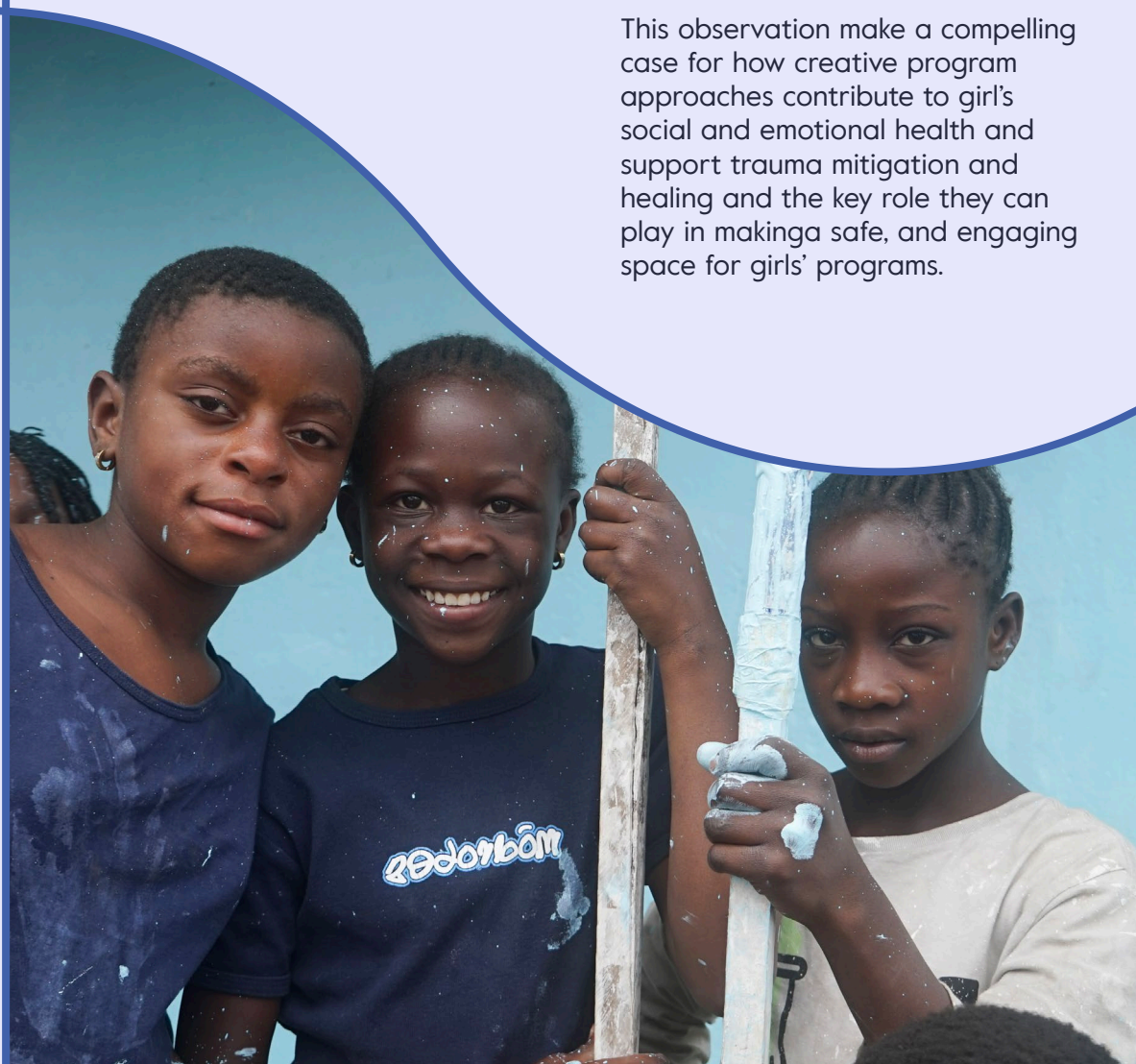
Our monitoring and evaluation is still underway, but qualitative data gathered thus far supports research showing that art is an especially effective tool for addressing trauma and investing in mental health.

One mother commented on her daughters' social and emotional transformation during the program:

"My daughters were afraid of life and people. They were very shy, and they couldn't express themselves. They were very closed in on themselves. But since they started attending the Musichana Hamuka program they have become more outgoing than before, I have seen my daughters get closer and confide in me, something that had not happened before. When they come back, they share with me what they have learned, and we have time to discuss it... I also think that it's the games (icebreakers and arts activities) that they play at the space that has helped them a lot to grow and be open."

-Mother of two participants

This observation make a compelling case for how creative program approaches contribute to girl's social and emotional health and support trauma mitigation and healing and the key role they can play in making a safe, and engaging space for girls' programs.



3. Shifting the narrative locally and internationally about women and girls in conflict/fragile contexts

Public art can change how individuals or groups creating the artwork are seen by their communities. In this case, **when girls and young women mentors and staff of EM took center stage in transforming buildings in the Bujovu community, girls' and women's leadership, skills and assets were made visible to their community.** Community feedback collected during community forums provides evidence of this positive impact.

"Girls and boys do not have the same rights, with the forum I just understood that they [should] have the same rights and they can benefit from the same privilege."

- Community participant in forum

One girl participant shared about her experience of presenting in the forums:

"I am very proud of myself, the fact of being in front of many people, especially community leaders, men and women who are like my parents talking, explaining about the menstrual cycle, reproductive health still gives me confidence and strength."

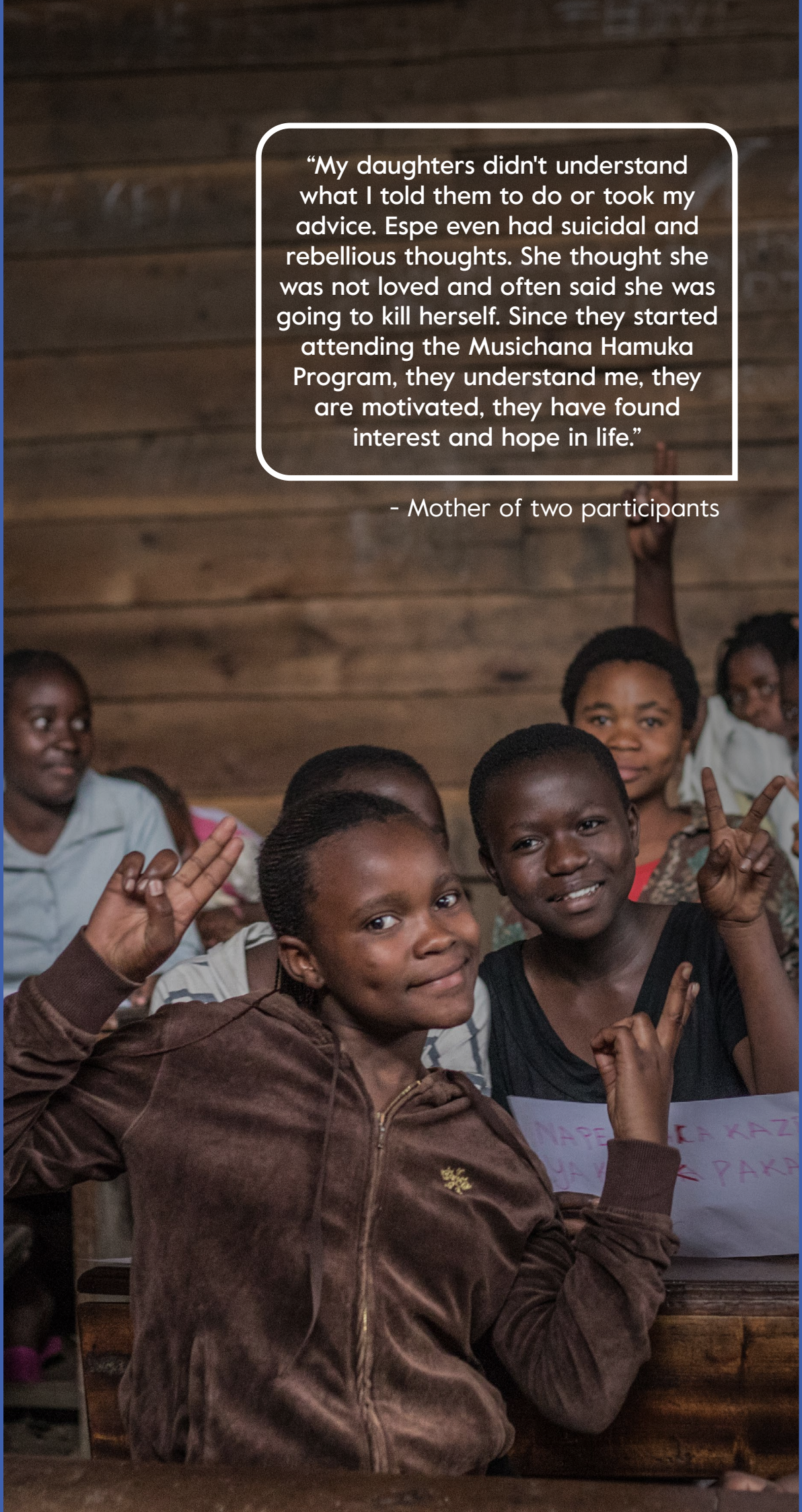
- Girl participant in forum

This feedback suggests that through participating in the program, girls and women participants were successfully transcending harmful and limiting norms about their abilities due to gender discrimination. It suggests a positive change in social norms, one of the main anticipated outcomes of the program.



“My daughters didn't understand what I told them to do or took my advice. Espe even had suicidal and rebellious thoughts. She thought she was not loved and often said she was going to kill herself. Since they started attending the Musichana Hamuka Program, they understand me, they are motivated, they have found interest and hope in life.”

- Mother of two participants





"We thought that children cannot give their opinion on this or that aspect, because they are still children, we understood that they also have the right to express themselves, to choose and to say no. From now on, I will privilege the communication with the children to listen to their motivations and their choices and afterwards enlighten them about it."

- Community participant in forum

Significantly, the program is recasting the perception of women and girls in conflict/fragile contexts. We are sharing our work with our local and international community and helping to change the narrative about women and girls—locally and internationally—by demonstrating that women and girls in conflict/fragile contexts are more than victims, but instead have high capability, resilience and passion for self-sufficiency.

Next steps: To extend the pilot to a year-round program and bring it to scale, we

are applying for grants, developing partnerships, and connecting with donors so that we can launch the next phase of the program in June 2022. We will begin scaling the program, bringing in two new cohorts of girls, and the original cohort of 84 girls will complete their first year of programming. The addition of two new cohorts and the completion of our first year-round program are will be pivotal steps in our push to achieve greater impact and reach.





Volcano Relief Fund

In May, the Nyiragongo Volcano, 12 miles (15.5 km) from Goma, erupted unexpectedly for the first time in nearly 20 years with lava flows reaching 17 villages outside of Goma and hitting neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. It upended the lives of people in Goma, who received no warning and in many cases fled for their lives, leaving behind homes, and belongings in a bid to survive. Already devastated by the eruption, Goma residents faced further damage wrought by a series of earthquakes following in the wake of the eruption, sometimes as frequent as every 20 min.

Over 3,000 homes were destroyed, leaving 20,000 people homeless. An estimated 400,000 people had to evacuate the city, leaving their possessions exposed to further damage and theft. 31 people were killed. Nearly every CC participant and all of our local partner's staff were displaced by the eruption, with four losing their homes and all possessions.

We raised \$1,500 for 3 CC current scholarship program participants, and 1 staff member from our partner les Étoiles Messagères, to support them in replacing the essentials they lost.

B. Current Programs

Scholarship Program

Our goal is to provide all girls in our programs with financial support to complete their secondary education. Since 2015, 7 young women have graduated with their high school diplomas. We are also providing support for school uniforms, supplies, and exam fees.

In 2021 we continued to support young women already in our scholarship program, as well as welcoming a new cohort.

There are currently 3 young women, two in 5th grade and one in 6th grade who have been in our scholarship program since we began it in 2015.

83 new girls entered the scholarship program who participated in the Girl Awakening pilot program.

The 83 new girls are in the following grade levels:

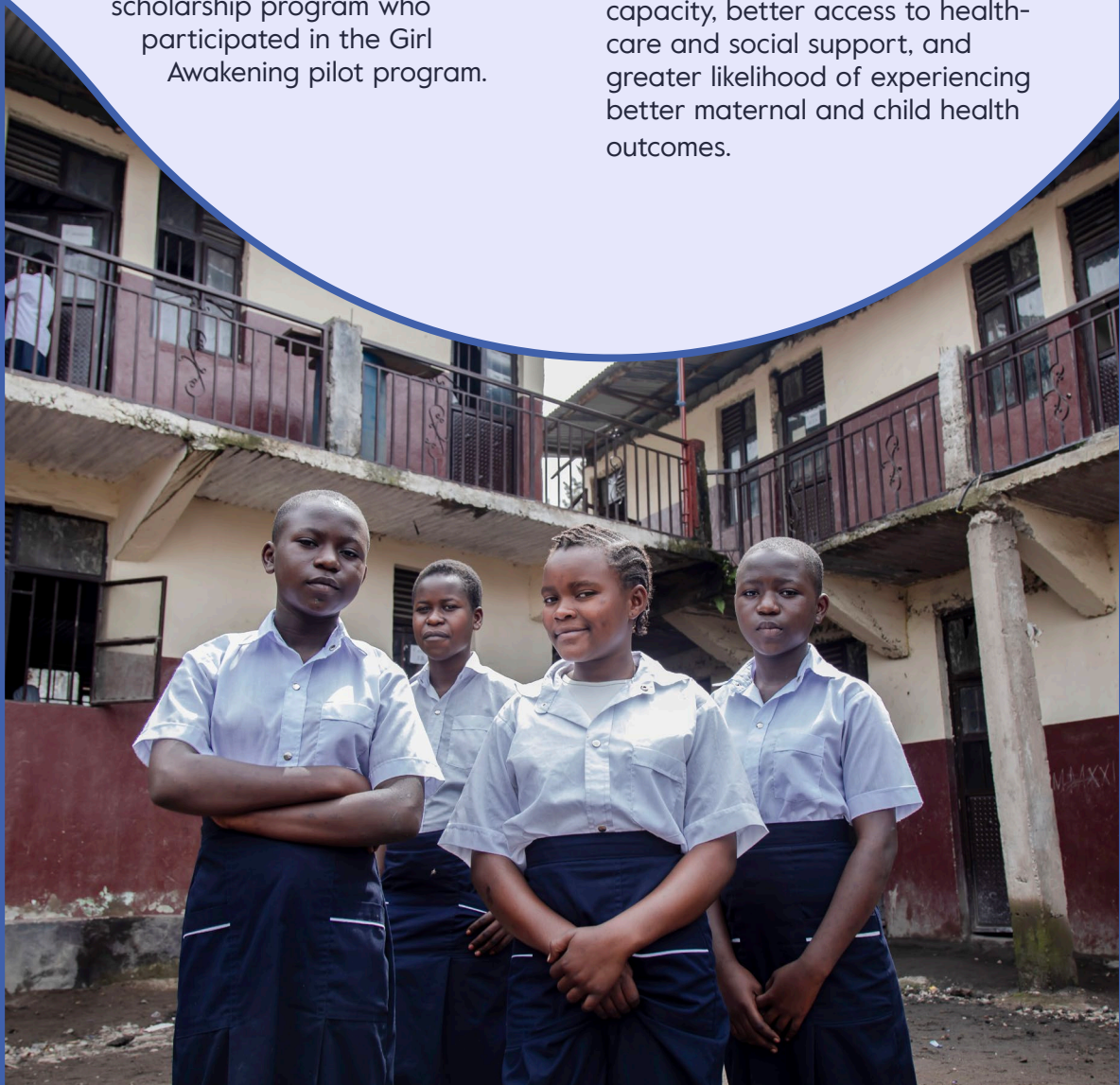
- **64 in remedial education**

- o 32 in primary level
- o 19 in secondary level
- o 13 in third level

- **19 in regular education**

- o 13 in elementary school
- o 6 in secondary school

It is a significant achievement for girls in the DRC to get their high school diplomas: only 30% of girls even attend secondary school, let alone graduate. Education is linked to other positive outcomes for girls including improved income earning capacity, better access to health-care and social support, and greater likelihood of experiencing better maternal and child health outcomes.



C. Programs in Development

Collaborative Painting Project

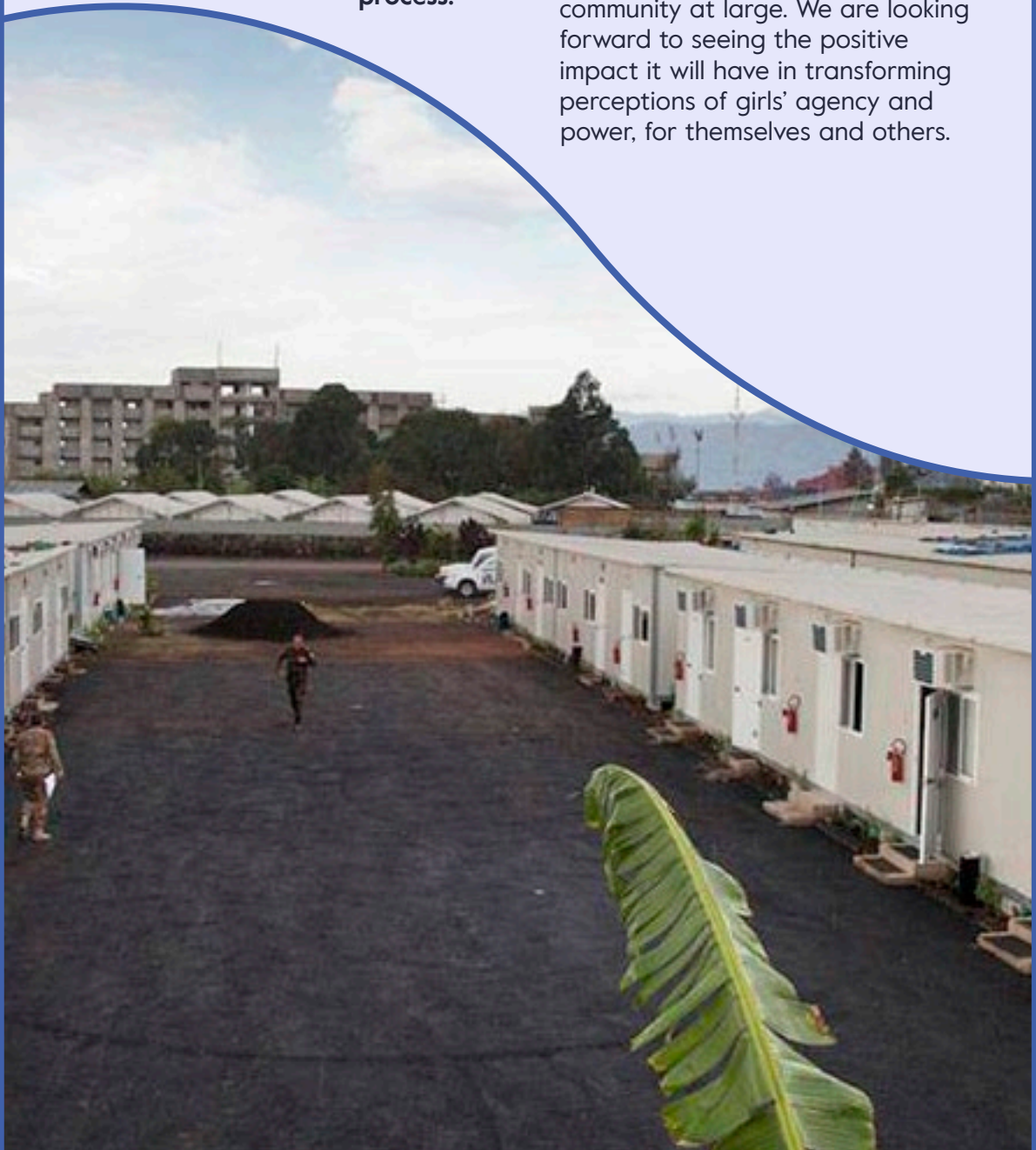
In partnership with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Goma, DRC

August 2022

Girls and young women of our programs (current and previous) in Goma, have been invited to work together with MONUSCO (UN Mission in DRC) on an environmental transformation project of their headquarters in Goma. We will be painting the exteriors of their office containers (temporary building structures) and engaging UN staff as volunteers in the process.

MONUSCO is looking to establish stronger connections with the communities they protect, and have identified this as an opportunity to build a better relationship with the community.

The project amplifies our vision that girls and young women should have opportunities to shine and be seen in a different, positive and empowered light by not only their community but the international community at large. We are looking forward to seeing the positive impact it will have in transforming perceptions of girls' agency and power, for themselves and others.



Art and Mural Painting Program

In partnership with School of Leadership Afghanistan (SOLA) in Kigali Rwanda

September 2022

We are thrilled to be working with SOLA on an arts-based program to welcome their new cohort of girls to their recently established center in Kigali Rwanda. When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in 2021, the Afghan-led boarding school for Afghan girls relocated to Kigali. Colors of Connection will be supporting SOLA at this transitional moment for the girls and the school. Public art will create a sense of place, culture and identity in their new home, and arts activities will support the girls building relationships between each other, and developing their personal voice and expression.

Participatory Arts Series at the Rwanda Museum

In partnership with the University of Global Health Equity's (UGHE) Department of Arts and Culture Kigali Rwanda

Spring 2023

We will be collaborating with UGHE's Department of Arts and Culture in Kigali, Rwanda on a participatory arts project at the Rwanda Museum. It will be a mandala arts activity/social sculpture supporting mental health and community and public engagement. The Department of Arts and Culture is investing in the field of the arts in global health, and alongside their annual Hamwe Festival they conduct research projects and community engagement activities. The activity will support shifting community perspectives about the museum and enable community members to feel more connected to the cultural space. It will create an artistic piece that reflects collective and individual aspects of the Rwandan identity, and it will provide an experience that is meditative and reflective, boosting mental health for visitors. We are excited to be working with them, for the first time bringing our participatory arts activities into a museum space.

Adolescent Resilience through Creativity and Peer Support

With Health Education Action Leadership (HEAL) Africa Mental Health Program Fundraising Phase

We developed a program with HEAL Africa to support girls' mental health and psychosocial support in Kitchanga, a town in the conflict-affected province of North Kivu, DRC. The program will provide psychological support with an established group-based therapy model from HEAL Africa, and an arts-based framework for building creative assets to support girls' social and emotional development and manage trauma sequelae. It aims to address the large mental health gap – lack of services and support, and stigma around accessing services that exist for girls experiencing mental health challenges, including trauma from gender-based violence. This program design is a step for CC to integrate our work with established mental health services of the group therapy model. Our ambition once the program is funded is to scale the program to similar settings in the DRC following a yearlong pilot.

Fundraising efforts included: research and identification of donors funding mental health innovations, and leveraging existing funders of HEAL Africa programs.

Girl-Focused Programs and Youth Peacebuilding Programs

In partnership with the International Rescue Committee, Cordaid, and Search for Common Ground

Exploration Phase

We held introductory conversations with the International Rescue Committee's Women's Protection and Empowerment Program, Cordaid, and Search for Common Ground to explore potential collaborations with their programs in the DRC.

II. Organizational

A. Communications

Presentations



Mental Health is Foundational: How Community of Practice Organizations are Supporting Girls During COVID-19 and Beyond



In May 2021 ED and Co-Founder **Christina Mallie** spoke at the Adolescent Girls' Community of Practice Webinar, sharing insights on her work with adolescent girls in Goma, DRC in a presentation called "**Mental Health is Foundational: A discussion about how Community of Practice organizations are supporting girls during COVID-19 and beyond.**" This learning exchange featured partners of the Community of Practice, who discussed the mental health challenges the girls they work with

are facing and shared their insights and strategies for supporting girls' mental health. A recording is available [here](#): Webinar: Mental Health is Foundational. For a summary of these insights, a [follow-up brief](#) is also available for download.

Publications

Christina Mallie published a piece on [prioritizing Mental Health for Adolescent Girls with the Community of Practice Field Experiences](#).

Two thought pieces on Medium published by Christina share insights on why we are focused on supporting women and girls in the DRC and the importance of working through a trauma-informed approach. [Why Addressing Trauma Has to Be the First Step, A Model for the Future Lies in DRC: Invest in Girls and Women](#).

Strategy

Volunteer consultant in e-commerce, business, and content strategy **Soumountha Keophilavong** developed a content strategy to strengthen our public profile. She focused on **brand identity development, researching consumer personas, conducting research on tone and voice and compiling brand guidelines.** These building blocks supported our content strategy for social media and website in the fall of 2021 and will be further implemented in 2022.



Soumountha Keophilavong

Website

Spearheaded by CC volunteer **Vivian Xiao** from Microsoft, an expert in product and user experience and interactive design, **the website was made more user friendly, aesthetics were improved to support brand identity, and the design was made more accessible and responsive.** This work was completed in December 2021.



Vivian Xiao

B. Human Resources

Dr. Anita Babonangenda joined our team in August 2021 as **Operations Director for the Girl Awakening Program.** Anita is a specialist in health and community protection, working with adolescent girls and women to prevent and respond to violence. With Colors of Connection she runs the daily operations of the program in Goma, DRC, working in with our local partners. Her leadership as a Congolese women supports our efforts to support equity and shift decision-making into the hands of the community.

We contracted an accountant to do monthly book keeping. Originally a staff responsibility, reassigning this

important fiscal management task to a qualified professional helps streamline our work and frees staff to work on other essential tasks.



Dr. Anita Babonangenda

Leveraging support from interns and volunteers

Staff were supported by interns from January – July 2021:

Spring: We engaged 3 interns in social media and marketing, administration and fundraising, and graphic design. Interns contributed to running Colors of Connection social media channels and daily administrative tasks, campaigns and fundraisers, and developed report templates and a pitch deck.

Summer: We engaged one intern in administration and fundraising. She supported securing in kind-supplies for the Girl Awakening program and other daily administrative tasks. Read more about her

experience here on our [blog](#).



Kristin Earnest

We engaged volunteers in several key roles to support our operations: **website development, website maintenance, strategic planning, document translation from English to French,** and **graphic design.**

C. Fundraising

1. Charitable foundations, businesses and individual donors

We secured a total of **\$117,496** from **charitable foundations and individual donors** for 2021, and were successful in gathering funding from both old and new sources over the last 12 months. We received **\$68,457** from **foundations**, and **\$48,503** in **gifts from individual donors**, 14 of whom were new donors, 41 previous donors, of which 34 were recurring donors. We received our **largest individual funder donation of \$20,000**. Our **average donation amount from individual donors** was **\$901**.

2. The Artist Circle

a **recurring donor program** brought in **\$300 monthly** with 8 donors.

3. In-kind support

To complement our fundraising efforts, we garnered in-kind support in technology with the donation of **6 laptops** from **the Electronic Access Foundation** which we donated to our partner in Goma, DRC. We were supported by **the International Rescue Committee in Goma, DRC** with **free office space** from September through December 2021. We received in-kind support in a variety of service areas and successfully accomplished the following through our efforts:

- **Communications and Website development:** our website was improved by a volunteer in product and user experience and interactive design, and our communications strategy

was developed by a volunteer. (Mentioned above in section C, Organization).

- **Legal:** A volunteer lawyer regularly provided services to advise on legal matters of the organization including review of contracts and memorandums of understanding.
- **Graphic Design:** An intern graphic designer has worked with us to design our annual report and a pitch deck (Mentioned above in section C, Organization).
- **Human Resources:** a board member with expertise in

human resources supported the executive director in creating a staffing structure, job descriptions for roles, and partnership agreements for the Girl Awakening Program.

- **Grant management:** The Boost Midwest, a consultancy agency supported us from February – May with pro-bono services of approximately 60 hours. They provided: a grant readiness assessment, writing and revisions for funding opportunities, and editing and proposal scoring of submissions.



D. Partnerships

We made significant progress in our plans to pursue long term substantive collaboration with like-minded larger organizations.

This will support the long-term viability of CC's arts-based work.

In September 2021 a consultant, **Judithe Registre**, began working with the executive director to **develop the products necessary for this objective.** These include:

1. helping to create a communications and networking strategy to raise interest in target organizations
2. Preparing detailed strategies for the top 5 organizations and support with move managements.
3. Helping to create shared language, processes, and practices for decision-making related to the transition
4. Assisting with the creation of a partnership master plan.

The executive director held partner meetings with the International Rescue Committee, Cordaid and Search for Common Ground. We identified areas for potential future collaboration in IRC's Cordaid's and SFCG's programs in the DRC. We developed a joint proposal with HEAL Africa for DRC and collaborative projects with the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE) in Rwanda, School of Leadership Afghanistan in Rwanda, and the UN Mission in the DRC.



Judithe Registre



Challenges



Shrinking board and limited board member engagement:

Two board members resigned in 2021 and several other board members were less active this year and found it challenging to commit the 8-10 hours per month required. Board members also faced difficulties mobilizing their constituents to donate to the organization.



Reduced staff capacity and navigating new leadership:

In February 2021 Organizational Development Director and Co-Founder Laurie Reyman resigned from her role co-leading the organization to take a new direction in her professional career. Christina Mallie, the Program Director and other Co-Founder stepped into the role of Executive Director. Given our limited budget the organization has opted for the time being to have the executive director as the sole US-based staff member. Laurie's departure meant reduced staff support in administrative, communications, and governance tasks. This has put more responsibilities on the Executive Director, making it challenging to adequately dedicate time to all areas of her role.



Securing larger funders: This year we increased staff time dedicated to research, outreach, and submission of applications to foundations. However, we were unable to secure larger funders necessary to diversify our funding base for stability and enable us to increase our operations and program capacity.

Lessons Learned and Strategies Going Forward

1. Key Learning: A lack of common practice around art-based engagement for marginalized and conflict affected populations has created barriers to funding. We anticipate this will change as the role of mental health, and art as a cultivator of it, are increasingly recognized as effective approaches to peace, stability and overall health.

Strategy: Identifying ways to integrate our programming into broader health delivery systems with mental health priorities is a promising space for us to explore. There is growing interest and funding for mental health. We will explore ways to partner with other organizations and funders working in this space.

2. Key Learning: Finding a long-term collaborator will be better for our long term stability helping us to secure funding, build on existing program infrastructure and offset administrative costs.

Strategy: Engage a consultant and have executive director prioritize and fast track this process. We will improve our communications (social media, website and other) to attract partners.

3. Key Learning: While there are multiple fundraising strategies for nonprofits, we do not have the capacity to successfully pursue more than a select few.

Strategy: We will focus more on targeted outreach to high net worth individuals and foundations and less on individual crowdfunding and low and mid-level donors.

Thank You!

- We thank our foundation funders **the Tides Foundation, the Girls Rights Project, the Belacqua Charitable Trust, and the Electronic Access Foundation** for sustaining our vision.



- With deep appreciation, a thank you to our partners: **Les Étoiles Messagères, The Adolescent Girls Community of Practice at the Population Council, and the Community Arts Council in Goma, DRC** whose partnership and collaborative efforts make our work a reality.
- We are forever grateful to the individuals who have supported our work over the last year, and appreciate your efforts more than you know. Right now, we'd like to individually thank those who went above and beyond in supporting us:

Sarah Astwood
Elodie-Olivia Bonazzi
Diana Casas
Kate Charles
Ray Choy
Susan Choy
Rebecca del Rio and Numa Marlborough
Betty & Michael Eigen
Evvy Eisen
Gayle Embrey
Susan Etscovitz
Donna Fong
Joann Fong
Paul Fong
Sierra Gallager
Zahreen Ghaznavi
Judy Gillespie

Nick Glomb
Michael Hauenstein
Audrey Hawkins
Susan Heinmann
Laura Hoffman
Dennis Hull
Eunice Jordan
Starry Krueger
Moreen Libet & Frank Fox
Georgina Loveland
Anna Lynch
Diana Lyon & Kevin Walters
David & Jennifer Mallie
John & Jody Mallie
Leo & Rosie Mallie
Jane Mcpherson
Tehreem Mohsin
Miranda Pildes
Laurie Reyman
Bruce and Carol Rodda
Larry and Margo Spillane
Joan Snyder
Carla Soracco
Viviane Tabar
Bob Young
Carol Zukin

- A special thank you to our volunteers and interns:

Diana Casas, Kirsten Earnest, Soumountha Keophilavong, Piper McDaniel, Kathryn Maloney, Tatiana Provalova, Aryn Rajan, Alex Studer, Vijay Ved, and Vivian Xiao.

Funding and finances

Financial Overview

A **\$60,000** yearly capacity-building grant from **Tides Foundation** enabled CC to deploy our programs and continue expanding them. The funding paid for general operating expenses, including full-time salaries for the executive director and the Goma-based operations director. Through fundraising efforts, we secured additional funds from charitable foundations and individual donors to support our programs. Our biggest program expense of 2021 was the implementation of the **Girl Awakening Pilot Program** which totaled **\$47,437**.

Total revenue for 2021 was **\$117,496** and **total expenses** were **\$136,327**. The **net revenue** of **\$18,830**.

I. Funding sources:

Our **total revenue** for 2021 was **\$117,496**. In addition to the **\$60,000** in total, received from the **Tides Foundation** we were successful in securing funding from both **old and new sources** that provided an additional **\$57,496**.

We received a total of **\$48,503** from **individual donors**, who gave in response to our monthly giving campaign, fundraising appeals sent throughout the year, and an end-of-the-year crowd funder.

Gifts from individual donors can be broken down as follows from 55 individual donors:

- **14 new donors**
- **34 consecutive year donors**
- **7 recaptured donors**

Our **average donation amount** from individual donors was **\$881**.

In addition, we leveraged the following free or low-cost services to offset our operating expenses: website development, legal counsel, Google Ads, marketing, graphic design, and our internship program.

II. Expenses

Our total expenses for 2021 were **\$136,327**

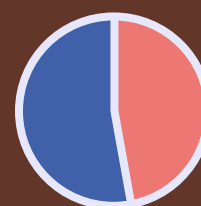
- **Program expenses**, a total of **\$69,687**, included the **cost of implementing \$47,437**, as well as **program development costs, \$22,250** which includes the executive director's time allocated to developing new programs and partnerships.
- **Operational expenses**, in 2021, a total of **\$66,640**, included general operating expenses and the executive directors and part-time administrative assistant's time allocated to administrative duties and fundraising efforts.

2021 Funding Sources



Foundations
Individuals

2021 Expense Breakdown



Program
Operational

Looking Forward to 2022!

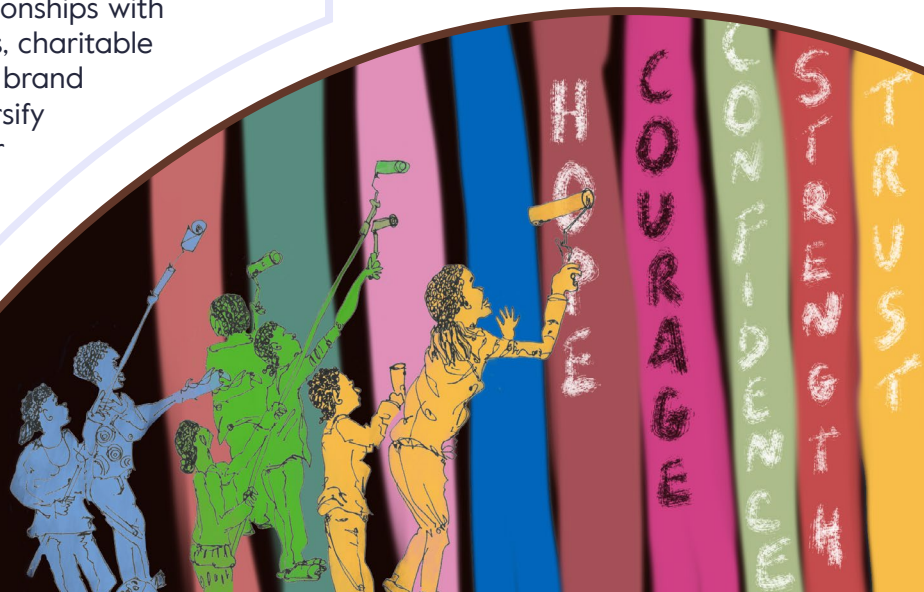
We are incredibly excited for what lays ahead for us in 2022! Here's what we'll be focusing on:

1. Scaling and developing Girl Awakening in Goma, DR Congo. We will continue working with the first cohort of 84 girls and expand the program to bring in two more cohorts, reaching a total of 250 girls. In addition we will reach 40 community leaders, 219 parents, and through public art approximately 30,000 community members. Alongside the arts and life-skills sessions we will also be working with community leaders to increase girls access to resources in their community such as health clinics, savings accounts, and recreational spaces. We will continue supporting our local partner, building their capacity in delivering girl's programming, and improved program management.

2. Implementing new projects with the School of Leadership Afghanistan in Rwanda supporting Afghanistan refugee girls, the University of Global Health Equity in Rwanda supporting mental health and community and public engagement and an environmental transformation project with the UN Mission in the DRC that will transform perceptions of girls' agency and power, for themselves and others.

3. Building partnerships with like-minded organizations to further our mission and grow our impact. This will include fundraising and development for our mental health program with HEAL Africa and research and development of potential partnerships with other organizations.

4. Securing increased operational and program funding: focusing on building relationships with individual donors, charitable foundations and brand partners to diversify and broaden our funding.



Leadership and Board



Executive Director & Co-Founder Christina Mallie

Christina is an artist and humanitarian. Her core interests lie in supporting underrepresented groups, and the arts as a source of healing, inspiration and strength. She was awarded her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Hunter College and her Master of Science in International Affairs from the New School with a focus on conflict and security. In her work with Colors of Connection she has served as a program director from 2011 - 2020 and transitioned to her current role as Executive director at the end of 2020. Some of the innovative work she has done with Colors of Connection is developing and implementing artistic content that has therapeutic value, conducting arts trainings, and working with adolescent girls from an arts-based approach.

Board of Advisors

Dominique Koffy Kouacou
Humanitarian Program Manager

Gayle Embrey
Filmmaker and Licensed Professional Counselor

Kathy Eldon
Founder & Chairman, Creative Visions Foundation

Joan Snyder
Artist & MacArthur Fellow 2007

Awet Andemichael
Musician, Writer, Consultant and Educator

John Hummel
Deschutes County District Attorney

Lynn Sanders-Bustle
Associate Professor & Art Education Chair, Lamar Dodd School of Art University of Georgia

Bonnie Hirschhorn
Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Art Therapist, Expressive Psychoanalyst,

Sophie Soares
Project Manager & Staff Associate at Population Council

Amy Rajan
Innovation and Strategy Professional

Board of Directors

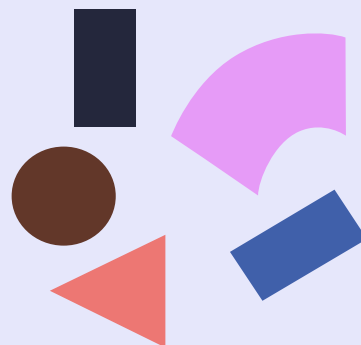
Laura Hoffman
Expressive Arts Therapist

Tehreem Mohsin
Risk Control Vice President at JP Morgan Chase

Marina Muteho Kasongo
Dean of Faculty of Theology at Univeristé Libre de Pays Des Grands Lacs

Georgina Loveland
Human Resources Professional

Christina Mallie
Co-Founder of Colors of Connection



Connect with Us

 www.colorsofconnection.org

Social Media:

 [@ColorsofConnect](https://twitter.com/ColorsofConnect)

 [@ColorsofConnection](https://www.instagram.com/ColorsofConnection)

 [ColorsofConnection](https://www.tumblr.com/ColorsofConnection)

 [company/colorsofconnection](https://www.linkedin.com/company/colorsofconnection)

 [colorsofconnection](https://www.facebook.com/colorsofconnection)

For general inquiries: info@colorsofconnection.org

Colors of Connection
PO Box 50371 Brooklyn, NY 11205

COLORS OF CONNECTION

Colors of Connection is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization.
EIN 46-4114716

