

# COLORS OF CONNECTION



2023

# ANNUAL REPORT



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Note From the Executive Director</b> .....	1
<b>The Organization</b>	
I. Who We Are.....	3
II. What We Do.....	6
III. Why We Engage Through Art.....	7
IV. Our Impact.....	9
<b>2023 Accomplishments</b>	
I. Program.....	10
a. Current Program.....	10
b. Theory of Change.....	11
c. Programs in Development.....	23
II. Organizational.....	24
a. Communications.....	24
b. Human Resources.....	25
c. Fundraising.....	25
d. Partnerships.....	26
<b>2023 Challenges</b>	
a. Program.....	27
b. Organization.....	28
<b>Lessons Learned and Strategies Going Forward</b>	
a. Program.....	29
b. Organization.....	30
<b>Thank You</b> .....	31
<b>Funding and Finances</b>	
a. Financial Overview.....	33
b. Funding Sources.....	33
<b>Looking Forward to 2024</b>	
1. Scaling and Developing Girl Awakening.....	34
2. Implementing New Projects.....	35
3. Building Partnerships with Like-Minded Organizations to Further Our Mission and Grow Our Impact.....	35
4. Securing Increased Operational and Program Funding.....	35
<b>Leadership and Board</b> .....	36

Cover photo: During a quarterly evaluation and reflection day, staff and mentors created and discussed self portraits expressing what they saw inside themselves versus how others see them. Photo by Pamela Tulizo, 2023.





# NOTE



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are proud to have been able to provide safe healing spaces for girls and young women in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) this year, growing our locally rooted program **Girl Awakening**. It is no small achievement that in this highly challenging and insecure conflict-affected environment, girls and women have been able to come together and be in solidarity with each other, creating and reimagining a reality that truly nourishes and supports them.

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 and outer resources and provides critical skills and knowledge to help them thrive. It has been a remarkable opportunity to nurture girls' wellbeing while building foundational life skills and a supportive community eco-system.

In 2023 we directly reached 278 girls, 8 young women mentors, and worked with 16 community leaders. Beyond this direct engagement, girls and mentors in the program shared their knowledge, new perspectives and resources with their family members reaching an estimated 228 households, 412 other girls living in their household, and 865 other household members. A triumphant milestone reached this year was the initiation of a cascading leadership model in which 64 girls aged 12-14 graduated from our program and became junior mentors, leading the current cohort with support from their mentors. Stepping into this new role is enabling them to consolidate their learnings and develop leadership skills. It also sets a strong foundation of locally rooted young female leadership to support scaling and expansion of the program planned for 2024.

On an organizational level CC continued to be an innovative contributor to both practitioner and academic spaces, developing and articulating the value-added of creative activities for young populations facing high levels of conflict and trauma. We refined and expanded our arts-based activities curriculum and published a book chapter on Public Art Making as an Activating Force for Community Art Education. We are thrilled to contribute to innovation and learning in this space.

We cultivated new relationships and funding from foundations and built meaningful partnerships. A joint proposal with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), will integrate our approach into a larger program responding to the increasing protection crisis in eastern DRC. We received the support from two new funders: the Girls' Opportunity Alliance of the Obama Foundation, and the With and For Girls Fund at Purposeful.





The year was not without its challenges. We faced ongoing difficulties in securing sufficient funds to fully support our organizational operating costs. This meant continuing to operate with reduced staff and a high workload for the executive director, operations director, and board. It also interrupted programming for girl participants, resulting in several months of no activities.

This annual report offers a comprehensive look at our successes and challenges in 2023. It charts our progress, reflects the dedication and commitment of our partners and staff, and shares the transformative impact of this work.

With gratitude and excitement for what lies ahead,



**Christina Mallie**



Workshop on identity informed perspectives on trauma and self care with Colors of Connection staff, our local partner Tulizo Elle Space and young women mentors in Goma, DRC, October 2023. Photo by Julie Calame.



# THE ORGANIZATION

## I. Who We Are

**Colors of Connection (CC)** is an NGO specialized in creative engagement with young people and communities. We utilize a confluence of expressive tools including drawing, painting, movement, music, theater, and public mural making. Our approach strengthens young people's social and emotional health and supports them in building relationships, mitigating trauma, and developing visibility and voice. The creation of large-scale public murals and posters by youth is integral to our approach in which young people are afforded an expressive platform to project their perspectives and vision for the future to the public. This process of public art creation supports social norms change as communities witness and dialogue with youth and their public artworks.

### MISSION

To work creatively with young people and communities impacted by violence to overcome trauma, inspire hope, support well-being, and encourage self-determination.

### VISION

For young people in places that have been devastated by conflict and intergenerational trauma to be in solidarity with each other, creating and reimagining a reality that truly nourishes and supports them.



## VALUES

- ▼ **Collaboration:** We harness the power of creative collaboration as a positive tool for collective action for recovery at both the personal and community level.
- **Joy:** Joy can be a game changer when trying to overcome trauma. It supports mental health and builds resilience. We cultivate joyful exploration and expression of the imagination through both personal and public art.
- ◐ **Optimism:** Our vision is to help young people shape their future despite the adversity of their current circumstances. To do so, we invest in helping them articulate their aspirations, and visions as a driver for creating their future and that of their communities.
- **Community:** Community is a resource in and of itself. We support resilient conflict-affected communities in their rebuilding because we know individuals are only as resilient as their communities are.
- **Creativity:** We catalyze the creativity of young people through art, to guide and build personal growth and transform their circumstances.
- ▲ **Dignity:** Young people, especially survivors of war, conflict, rape, and violence, who are emerging from trauma deserve full and kind consideration. We engage with dignity and respect to ensure that human dignity in our services always remains fully intact.
- **Belonging:** Belonging translates into inclusion and generates confidence. We emphasize connection to others and the feeling of belonging to discover something larger through shared values, responsibilities, and interests.



Mentors, girls and staff participate in a warm up activity before a session at their safe space, Goma, DRC. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.



## CURRENT FOCUS

**We are committed to working where resources are few and traumatic events are great. Since 2015 CC has focused on the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo** where we support young adolescent girls in a dense, poor, insecure urban neighborhood in the city of Goma in collaboration with local partners. This fast-growing capital city of the conflict-ridden North Kivu Province experiences multiple development challenges including extreme poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to healthcare, reduced education, and high unemployment rates.

The decades long violent conflict has created a uniquely challenging situation, elevating levels of gender-based violence and pushing communities' needs to catastrophic levels. In this context, girls and women bear the brunt of development challenges and conflict, while being a seminal force for change and resilience in their communities.

In Goma that we are systematically building a locally led, scalable program called Girl Awakening, Musichana Hamuka in Swahili. This program is the first of its kind to utilize a combination of the Population Council's girl-centered evidenced based program tools, and our unique arts-based approaches for social change, trauma mitigation, and individual and community asset-building. We are supporting a rising generation of girls with essential knowledge and skills sets, and tools for wellbeing so that they can safely navigate through adolescence and help build resilient communities that work for all who live there, including girls.





## II. What We Do

**We utilize group and individual arts-based trauma-informed activities** including dance, music, drawing and public mural-making that support **self-regulation, mitigate trauma, and cultivate relationship building, and self-esteem for adolescent girls.**

**With collaborative public mural making, we amplify girls' participation** and leadership in social norms change and **build social cohesion.**

**We build scalable and sustainable programs** utilizing the Population Council's **girl centered evidence-based** programming tools and best practices.

**We work with local and international NGO partners** to integrate our approaches into existing programming in child protection, sexual and reproductive health, and 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, and self and social analysis. Notably the WHO put out its first report in 2019 on the evidence of arts in improving health, referencing over 990 publications.



Girl participants creating a “Danmala,” a collaborative mandala. Each girl brings an everyday material from her home. To create the Danmala girls take turns placing the assorted materials and building it out, starting from the center, often with calming music playing. Goma, DRC. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.



Creativity is fundamentally underutilized in resource-poor areas where the rate of traumatic incidents and mental health needs are high and largely unaddressed. Here, we cite some of the attributes of creativity and its potential to boost mental health in these spaces:

- **Appropriate to all geographical contexts:** indigenous creative practices exist everywhere.
- **Less stigmatizing than traditional mental health interventions** as it is focused on participant’s capabilities to be creative rather than on their illness.
- **Effective for traumatized populations:** its engagement of the five senses, focus on meaning making, and ability to overcome language limitations.
- **Innovative:** Often group-based, somatic, moving beyond the limitations of talk therapy and high-cost individual treatments.
- **Scalable, and sustainable:** Some creative activities can be easily learned and taught to others and are low-resource friendly.



Girl practice connecting with and expressing their emotions through music in an activity called “Musical Emotions,” Goma, DRC 2022. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.



## IV. Our Impact



Mentors participate in a team building activity during a quarterly day of collective evaluation and reflection in Goma DRC, 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

**With the support of our programs, young people are better able to protect themselves and heal from violence.** Through positive relationships and connections forged, they develop confidence, leadership visibility, and a voice in their communities. Youth experience a healing process, and joy to envision their future. The effects of these impacts are boundless.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) we have engaged 335 girls, 8 young women mentors, 150 parents, 62 community leaders and 8 staff of our local partners. Through the collaborative creation of 36 public posters and mural making this work has reached approximately 180,000 community members in the city of Goma. Beyond direct engagement with girls, girls and mentors in the program share their knowledge, new perspectives and resources with their family members reaching an estimated 228 households, 412 other girls, and 865 other household members. A triumphant milestone reached this year was the initiation of a cascading leadership model in which 64 girls aged 12-14 graduated from our program and became junior mentors, leading the current cohort with support from their mentors.

Beyond the DRC we have engaged 170 young citizens and 83 community leaders creating 24 large scale public murals to reach 232,000 community members in refugee camps and conflict-affected urban communities in Burkina Faso, and Liberia.





# 2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## I. Program

### a. Current program



Participants in a warm up activity called Kangé outside before starting an art and life-skills session in Goma, DRC, 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

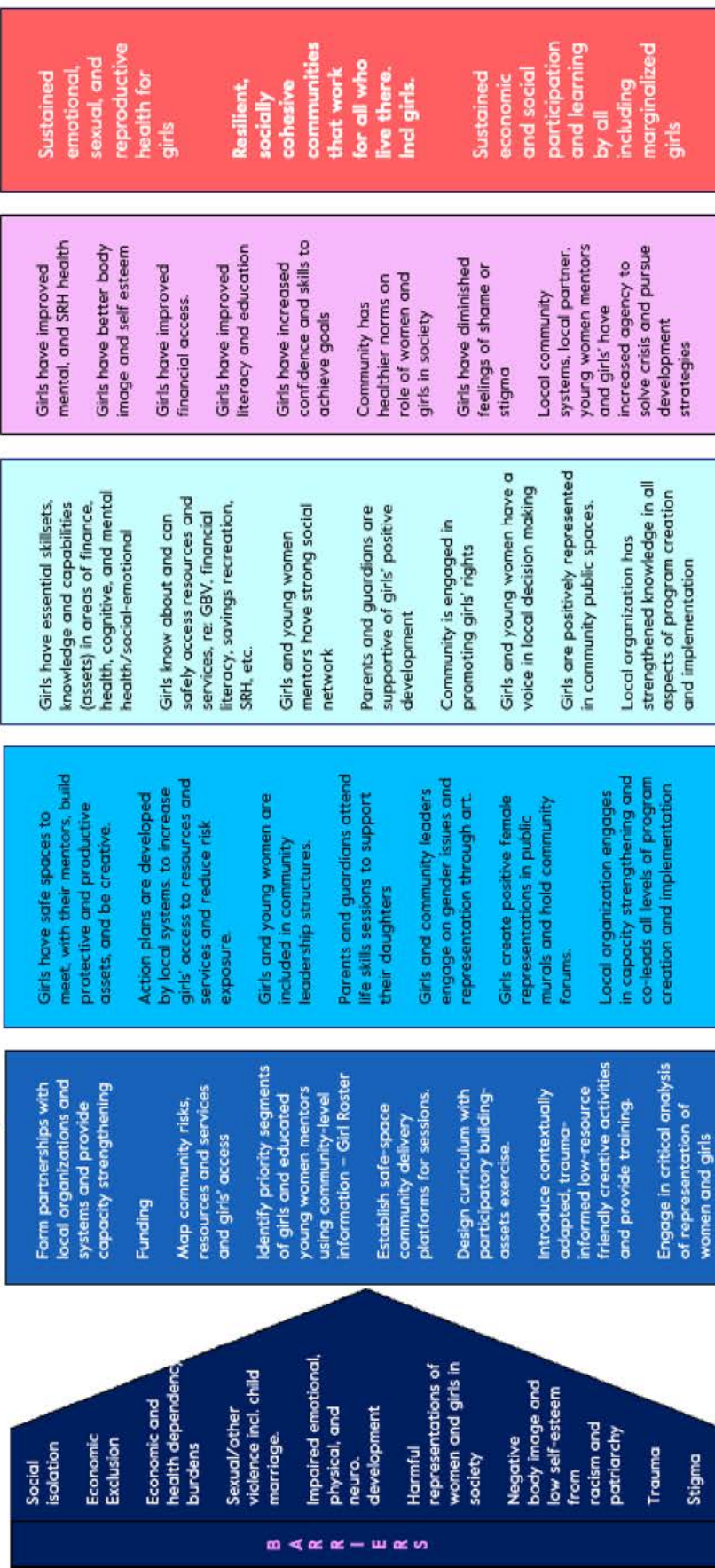
**The Girl Awakening Program in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo is our flagship program supporting highly marginalized adolescent girls, young women and community.** Established in 2020, we have been steadily growing this program with our local partner Tulizo Elle Space, creating resilient, socially cohesive communities that work for all who live there including girls.

The core elements of the program are: 1) Life skills and creative sessions for girls, 2) Public art engagement, 3) Community advocacy, 4) Knowledge sharing and local capacity strengthening, and 5) School scholarship.



# THEORY OF CHANGE

Poorest girls aged 10-14 in hot-spot areas in the DRC





## IMPACTS

We highlight a few of the most significant and notable impacts. Our programming takes a holistic approach to change, with impacts at individual, community, and systems levels. Highlights are pulled from these three levels.

### INDIVIDUAL IMPACT

**Highly marginalized girls at the pivotal age of 10-12 built critical assets:** We continued to work in geographic zones with high concentrations of off-track girls, segmenting girls by age to best address their specific needs and interests. Our diagnostic work with the Girl Roster Community Survey, and global research demonstrate that the vital tipping point in a girls' life is age 10-14. This is when it is possible to prevent a rapid succession of negative life events. We engaged 214 girls aged 10-12 in 14 art and life-skills sessions led by 8 young women mentors in 2023. Girl participants built 33 protective and productive essential assets (knowledge-base, resources, and skillsets) based on their real lived experiences and needs and interests and determined in consultation with them and their mentors. *Note lower numbers of girls, junior mentors and young women mentors reached than planned is explained in Section III: Challenges.*

Among critical assets girls built during this period: 1) Know when to wash her hands and how to do it properly in daily life including after using the bathroom, before and after eating, and before and after using a menstrual pad; 2) Know about female genital mutilation including how and when it is practiced in this community, how to help someone threatened by it, and that it is illegal; 3) Have a network of trusted peers and older female mentors; 4) Be able to describe something unique or special about herself and identify a skill she can teach others; 5) Know that violence isn't just perpetrated by strangers - it often happens within families; and 6) Know that she is as smart as the next person.





**"My mother had asked me to start stretching my labia minora without telling me why. I've just realized that it's bad, there's no advantage, it's a bad practice."**

- **Participant** undergoing FGM who convinced her mother to stop.

Girl participants in a life skills session role play how to negotiate with parents, Goma, DRC, 2023. Photo credit Pamela Tulizo.



**Girls aged 10-12 learned new low-resource friendly creative activities to support social and emotional health and mitigate trauma:** We are committed to delivering vital social and emotional support to girls in conflict-ridden communities. The introduction of 18 new

drawing activities from the [Draw Together Classroom Resources](#) expanded our curriculum that aims to make trauma-informed, creative activities accessible in low-resource environments. Staff observed that girl participants are increasingly engaged and spontaneous during the artistic activities. Instead of working directly with trained artists to facilitate the creative sessions this year we were also able to train mentors to facilitate. This is an important step in our goal to ensure that the curriculum is feasible in low resource environments.



A completed five finger breathing and drawing exercise in which participants inhale and exhale while tracing a pencil up and down their hand, Goma, DRC. Photo by Christina Mallie.

The skillsets and knowledge girls built during this grant period provide protection and support at the critical age of early adolescence, as they begin to face increasing risks and pressures including being pulled out of school, child marriage, social isolation, physical assault and shrinking access to community spaces. These assets help them to navigate a highly challenging adolescence and position them for a more resilient and healthy future.



**Girls aged 12-14 graduated into role of junior mentors initiating a cascading leadership model:** 64 girls who first joined the program in 2021 graduated into the role of junior mentors, joining their 8 mentors to deliver program sessions to our latest cohort. This enables them to consolidate their learnings and develop leadership skills. It is a significant step in our cascading leadership model to grow locally led female leadership, building sustainability, and positions the program to scale.

To prepare them for this role, junior mentors received a 5-day training, engaged in weekly practice, and were supervised and supported during sessions. One staff member observed that junior mentors were even able to facilitate sensitive sessions such as ones about reproductive health (shared in a quarterly evaluation and reflection day). This indicates a high level of confidence and solid understanding of the material.

Portrait of a junior mentor, Goma, DRC 2023, Photo by Pamela Tulizo.







Training for mentors in female leadership at the Tulizo Elle Space Center, Goma, DRC 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

**Growth in locally rooted young female leadership to strengthen community-level systems:** 8 educated and talented young women mentors who live in the same community as the girls, delivered life-skills and creative sessions to girl participants. Throughout the year mentors also made monthly house visits to check on girls' well-being and safety, linked girls to referral services, and provided support and accompaniment for GBV cases. All 8 mentors received ongoing training and support to strengthen their roles as young female leaders in their community. They participated in trainings in: 1) Identity informed understandings of trauma, and self-care; 2) Female leadership to identify the challenges and opportunities they face in being female leaders in their community; 3) An introductory workshop on entrepreneurship; 4) Conducting community resource and risk GPS mapping in their community; and 5) Identifying priority assets for their girl mentees.

Mentor trainings are a critical investment in locally rooted female leadership, one of the most effective ways to strengthen community level systems and promote community resilience. Through trainings and experience this year mentors are better positioned to be resource points for women and girls in their community, and role models for younger girls.



Mentor training in female leadership at the Tulizo Elle Space Center, Goma, DRC 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.





Girl participants playing a warm up game before starting their art and life skills session, Goma, DRC 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

**School scholarship:** 64 out-of-school girl participants were provided with scholarship support, uniforms, and school supplies to attend school. Among them 35 passed their exams and progressed to the next level of their education.

**Creating clusters of change:** We have been working within a 1.75 square mile area of Goma, reaching approximately 95% of girls aged 10 in and out of school and 32% of girls aged 10-12 out of school. There are benefits of working in a concentrated area and this is our first project utilizing this strategy which builds a dense female network. Some of the positive results observed by staff and mentors: 1) Girls and mentors can easily arrange to meet each other, thus reducing barriers to support – both for every day needs and emergencies. For example, one girl participant was raped at night and was able to walk to her mentor for help first thing in the early morning. 2) Girls and mentors easily run into each other while going about daily life naturally strengthening the social network. 3) Given the saturation levels, most other younger and older females in the select geographic area have a high likelihood of being a sibling of a participant and/or having friends who are in the program, increasing the likelihood that they will also learn about information, practices, and resources shared in the program – amplifying impact (approximately 453 other girls reached with an estimate 2.8 girls per household).





Mentor training in female leadership at the Tulizo Elle Space Center, Goma, DRC 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

**Our commitment to building a supportive eco system for girls and women** means working not only with individual girls but with community to transform the harmful norms and systems that discriminate and abuse girls and women. The following accomplishments advanced this work.



**Community safe-scaping and an updated community resource and risk map:** Mentors and staff updated an existing community resource and risk map that took inventory with GPS points of services, resources, facilities, and risks within the walkable community. It had been 3 years since the last mapping exercise was conducted so updates were needed as well as correcting previous inaccuracies with GPS points. One notable concerning change: there was a reduction in primary schools from 22 to 16, though the population has grown from 48,000 to 63,000. In positive news there was a reduction in brothels identified from 23 in 2020 to 11 in 2023.

With the updated mapping of community resources and risks, we conducted a safe scaping exercise with girls and mentors to understand the reality of girls' access to existing resources and gain awareness of safety issues. Key places including water pumps, churches, schools, and health centers were rated from safe to dangerous, to determine collective perceptions of safety and access. It is notable that there were no spaces considered safe in the community, highlighting the reality that women and girls are facing high levels of daily discrimination and abuse in this community.

### Safe scaping exercise:

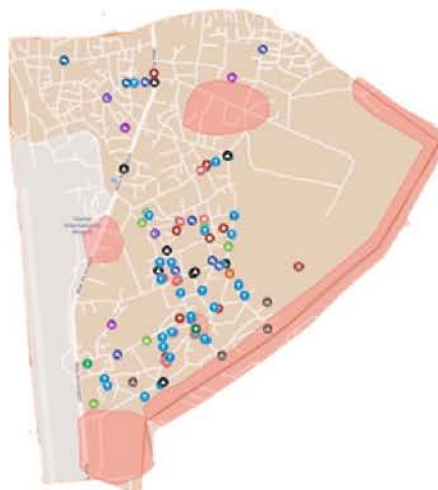
Perception of safety and risk levels in public places in Bujovu, Goma according to girls aged 10 to 14.

Safety levels are indicated as "safe" for green, "dangerous" for red.

	Church	School	Market	Water pump	Football field	Health services
Time of day			Days and evenings		Days and evenings	Daytime
Used by	Girls, boys, women, and men	Girls and boys	Girls and women	Girls and women	Boys and men	Girls, boys, women, and men
Security level						
Details on security level	Pickpocketing Poisoning during greetings Rape during prayer vigil Harassment to gain a position of responsibility in the choir	Toilets are a high-risk area for infections Corporal punishment Kidnapping Bribery for school grades Psychological violence in the form of threats	Motorcycle traffic jams Theft Fighting Rape	Theft of water containers Accidents and fights GBV (male privilege) abuse and intimidation. Traveling long distances to find a working water source	Rape Road accident theft Fear of encountering ghosts	Judgement No referral Do not receive the care requested (no access to contraception) Payment for care in case of rape Stigmatization

LEGEND

- Primary School (16)
- Secondary School (6)
- Market (5)
- Mosque (2)
- Church (25)
- Health Center (7)
- Wood Collection (1)
- Water Pump (9)
- Military Camp (4)
- Brothel (11)
- Danger areas: Rwanda/DRC border, airport, football field and cemeteries



## Resource and Risk Mapping Bujovu, Goma 2023



**Collaboratively created Community Action Plan to improve girls' and women's safety and equitable access to resources:** Key to our work is to instigate a transformation of the very power structures that have created the current situation of extreme marginalization for adolescent girls in the community. Community stakeholder engagement to make transformative shifts is critical. We engaged 16 community members (50% women and 50% men) who play diverse leadership roles in the community in 5 workshop sessions. With 100% participation rate, they collaboratively created a community action plan. Members included: a neighborhood chef, head of neighborhood child protection, school principal, head of youth committee, parents of participants, young women mentors, and nurses of the health clinic.

These sessions sensitized stakeholders on what gender-based violence is, how it is perpetuated in the community and its ramifications. Stakeholders examined the imbalance of power in their community between men and women, (see assessment of female to male ratio in community institutions of decision-making on following page), defined their role within the power structures, and ways they could act both individually and collectively to ensure the safety of girls and women.



Workshop with community stakeholders to create a Community Action Plan Goma, DRC, 2023. Photos by Pamela Tulizo.

## Individual stakeholder commitments

**“From now on, I'm going to involve my wife in the family's decisions, both big and small.”**

- Bujovu Leader

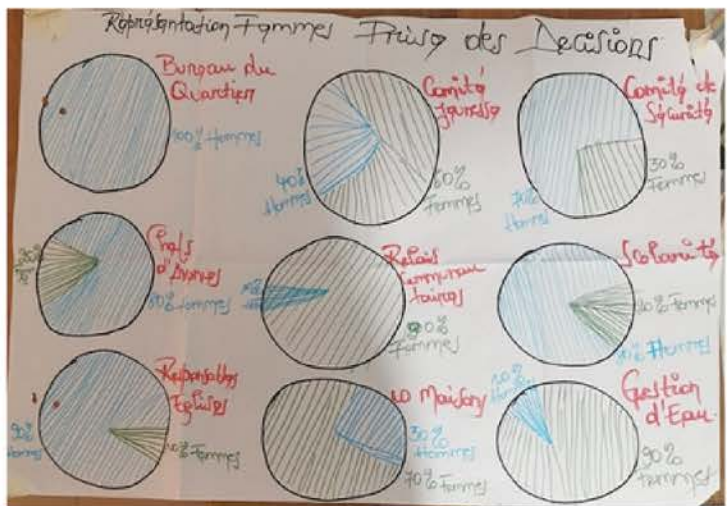
**“From now on I'll say no to my husband if I don't feel comfortable having sex.”**

- Mother of a participant

The safescaping exercise done by girls and mentors was shared with the stakeholders. It was presented by girl participants of the program to ensure that their daily safety risks and experiences of exclusion were communicated to stakeholders.



Stakeholders developed 30 action points. Some action points fall under shared responsibility, for example all stakeholders agreed to educate the community to travel in groups of 3 after dark, while other action points are the responsibility of a certain stakeholder. For example, the head of neighborhood child protection committed to speak with health center personnel to ensure that they are offering free services to girls and women seeking contraception and survivors of sexual assault. We are supporting specific community-led actions determined from these meetings going forward into 2024.



Female and male representation in Bujovu's leadership mapped out during workshop

Decision-making institutions	% men	% women
Neighborhood leader's office (local government)	100%	0%
Head of avenues	80%	20%
Head of churches	90%	10%
Head of neighborhood blocks	30%	70%
Community liaison	10%	90%
Youth Committee	40%	60%
Security Committee	70%	30%
School leadership	80%	20%
Water Management	10%	90%



## LOCAL PARTNER ORGANIZATION IMPACT

We continued investing in our local partner Tulizo Elle Space (TES) and young women mentors embedded in the community so that they could effectively deliver sustainable, locally valued programming for girls. Note: We broadened the definition of this goal to “local systems impact” to include not only working with local organizational partners, but community stakeholders, and young women leaders who are also instrumental in carrying locally led work forward.

**Staff and mentor trainings:** We provided staff and mentor trainings in trauma-informed practices, arts-based practices, and girl-centered practices contextualized to Goma. The trauma-informed training (mentioned above in individual impact for mentors) drew from tools from Amna (formerly the Refugee Trauma Initiative RTI) focused on identity informed understandings of trauma and staff self-care. In addition, Colors of Connection supported two TES staff to attend a 5-day intensive train the trainer’s program at the Street Business School in Uganda. The two staff members will train mentors in 2024 to manage their finances and launch their own entrepreneurial projects.



TES staff Nathalie Milambo and Gracy Kliese celebrating their graduation from the Street Business School in Kamala, Uganda, 2023.

**Shared decision-making:** To ensure that the program is locally led and to strengthen local systems, CC worked in close collaboration on programmatic decisions with girls, mentors, and staff of our partner TES.

We created a work plan in 2023-2024 that aligns with localization values and approaches and defines specific steps we can take to move resources, decision-making power to local systems and to build local capabilities. This work plan was informed by the [Network for Empowered Aid Response \(NEAR\)’s policy note](#). NEAR is a movement of local and national civil society organizations (CSOs) from the Global South rooted in our communities who share a common goal of a fair, equitable and dignified aid system.





A portrait collage activity defining how you see yourself vs. how others see you in process during a quarterly evaluation and reflection session. Goma, DRC 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

**Quarterly evaluation and reflection to enhance collaborative leadership and staff wellbeing:** We now institute one day at the end of each quarter for staff and mentor reflection and evaluation. During this time, they identify highs and lows, lessons learned, ways to support staff wellbeing, and strategies to meet goals in the next quarter. Food, games, and arts activities are also part of the day to make the experience rejuvenating. These quarterly evaluation and reflection days promote adaptive management and foster collective participation in shaping the program.

**Regranting:** CC provided funding for all program activities and directly regranted \$12,700 USD to TES to implement program activities.

**“Working with Colors of Connection as a local partner, has been and remains for a great experience, very interesting in the cultural sector. We have realized an extraordinary project in my community with the girls and the mentors. We have learned a lot from the staff of Colors of Connection especially in capacity building with our team and for me personally on the side of fundraising research and networking.”**

- Pamela Tulizo, Coordinator, TES





## b. Program in Development

### The Mwangaza Program

**The Mwangaza Program (Mwangaza meaning light in Swahili) will be jointly led by CC and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and take place in the Goma area, North Kivu Province in the DRC.** The program will pilot CC arts-based approaches for social and emotional health, and trauma-mitigation, and our repertoire of evidence-based tools developed by the Population Council to reach and protect the most marginalized adolescent girls – integrating these into the larger youth and community support project of IRC. Over a 12-month period the project will engage 600 direct beneficiaries and 16,000 indirect beneficiaries. The humanitarian situation in eastern DRC has been progressively worsening, with displaced people living in extremely precarious conditions. As a result, adolescents are regularly exposed to violence and sexual abuse, with devastating immediate and long-term repercussions for their mental health and well-being, as well as those of the entire community.

The Mwangaza Program will strengthen the resilience of adolescents (both boys and girls) aged 10 to 19 facing severe and prolonged crisis situations through an approach combining artistic activities, life-skills, and psychosocial support to promote social and emotional health. Livelihood support for adolescents and their families, as well as activities to improve the attitudes of service providers and communities (including advocacy at local and provincial level) will be offered to ensure the sustainability of the project. Finally, government institutions, community leaders and local authorities, community-based child and girl protection structures and other organizations working to protect adolescents will also be engaged. By working on multiple levels of the socio-economic model from adolescents to families, to government structures, the Mwangaza Program seeks to establish a shared understanding of and approach to protecting and ensuring the well-being of highly marginalized adolescents.

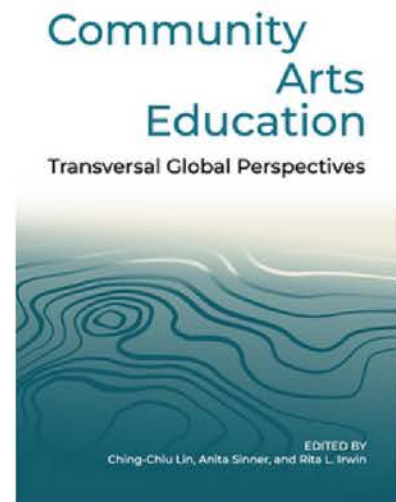


## II. Organization

### a. Communications

CC co-founders Christina Mallie, and Laurie Reyman, and Advisor Lynn Sanders-Bustle authored a chapter in **Community Arts Education: Transversal Global Perspectives** published in 2023. The book is a dive into global perspectives on art education as a distinctive practice that emerges from community relationships. In their chapter, **Public Art Making as an Activating Force for Community Art Education** Christina, Laurie and Lynn reflect on the capabilities and limitations of CC's public art-making

practice as a force for social change. They present research and their experiences on how community art education can be relational, responsive to culture and context, and generative of new ideas, and democratic when collaborative. It supports youth participants to be agents of change in their communities. The authors also recognize certain power dynamics in play including CC's identity as a Global North entity working in the Global South, and community internal power dynamics that are discriminatory against marginalized groups. The authors share CC's strategies to mitigate harmful power dynamics so that public artmaking practices can realize their full positive impact of inclusive expression in a world that continues to pose life-altering challenges for so many. The chapter moves Colors of Connection forward in our strategic learning and growth objectives to contribute to the interdisciplinary space of art as social practice.



**We invested in strengthening our public profile through developing a new and improved website.**

Website improvements include:

- Less text heavy and more user friendly content.
- Improved aesthetics supporting the brand identity (brand personality: transformative, resilient, accountable, cutting edge, creative, and compassionate) moving away from a conservative and pessimistic outlook, often dominant in the nonprofit sector, to a high energy and positive outlook. Since the website launched there has been a 2.2% increase in average click rate indicating better page health, new branding, and web design.
- An improved search engine optimization. As one indicator of impact, our website is now in position number one for the keyword Colors of Connection.
- Improved navigation and conversion points for key targeted audiences: project partners and sponsors, general audience, volunteers.



## b. Human Resources



We developed additional policies and procedures to strengthen our safe programming including an updated business continuity plan, an employee code of conduct, an employee human resources manual, and an anti-fraud and bribery policy. We also improved our procedures for project-related budget tracking.

This year CC also saw leadership growth for the ED who was accepted into How Women Lead's Women Leaders of the World 2023 Global Cohort. This fellowship for executive social impact leaders runs from May 2023 through April 2024 and is providing the ED with leadership development, expanding the organization's network and accelerating impact. The fellowship has been a key resource for the ED as she works on strategic planning, and building network, and has been a supportive community of fellow women leaders, mentors, and coaches.

## c. Fundraising

To grow and diversify our funding base we submitted funding applications to 5 foundations including a 3-year scaling plan of the Girl Awakening Program to USAID. We also cultivated relationships with the USAID team in the U.S. and D.R.C.



We secured two new foundation supporters: The Girls' Opportunity Alliance of the Obama Foundation receiving a grant in the amount of \$50,000 USD, and the With and For Girls Fund of Purposeful in the amount of \$10,000. Both support the Girl Awakening Program in 2023 and 2024. We also garnered \$ 30,000 USD from individual donors.





#### d. Partnerships



We made significant progress in our plans to collaborate with like-minded larger organizations, to support the long-term viability of CC's arts-based work and expand our reach. We developed a concept note with the International Rescue Committee for a yearlong project supporting internally displaced young people and communities in Eastern Congo (see above: Programs in Development).

The DRC has one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons in the world due to increased activity of armed groups. Our arts-based approaches for social and emotional health, and trauma-mitigation, and our repertoire of evidence-based tools developed by the Population Council to reach and protect the most marginalized adolescent girls are integrated into a larger youth and community support project. This concept note advances our partnership goal as it is the most detailed concept to date on our value added a larger INGO's program, and thus provides a potential road map for how our approach could be used to collaborate with a larger organization. We hope that this project will be funded by IRC private donors in 2024.



Left: Girl Shine session facilitated by the IRC team in Ituri Province, DRC, April 2023. Right: Mural in process of being created in Goma, DRC by Colors of Connection where 14 human rights identified by girls have been written in Swahili. Photo credit: Pamela Tulizo.



# 2023 CHALLENGES



## a. Program



**Our primary program objective was to sustain and expand the operations of our flagship program Girl Awakening, Musichana Hamuka in Swahili, in Goma, DRC. We faced the following challenges in program implementation:**

**Limited local partner capacity:** Our local partner Tulizo Elle Space (TES) remains a good match for the project in terms of mission and values alignment, openness to collaboration, and quality work. However, we have noted some challenges primarily in TES's progress in organizational development that is disruptive to our partnership. The organization was founded in 2021 and has several key milestones it needs to reach but has made little progress on including developing a board and strategic plan, and securing operational funding. The coordinator and founder divides her time between multiple responsibilities and jobs, making it difficult to advance these goals. We are concerned that without progress on these milestones TES will continue to be reliant on CC, including for support on organizational development and fundraising. This is unsustainable for CC as we have limited time and resources. This challenge will also create a roadblock to reaching our goal in the coming years of transferring ownership of the program to our local partner.

**Program numbers did not increase:** Because of lack of sufficient funding, we did not proceed with a scale expansion as planned. We fell short of our projected numbers of girl participants (a new cohort of 300 girls and adding 6 mentors to the team.), keeping the same cohorts. In this grant period we reached 214 instead of 505 girl participants, 64 instead of 90 junior mentors, and 8 instead of 14 mentors.

**A break in weekly and year-round activities and reduced activities:** We were unable to sustain year-round programming due to limited funding. Our program activities were paused for 4 months during the 12-month grant period and sessions were run bi-monthly instead of weekly. This posed a threat to the safety and protection of the girls and young women in our program, as consistent meetings and the relationship-building that results from it are necessary to create the solidarity that protect girls and women from violence. It also meant that we did not create a public mural or engage parents/guardians of girls in sessions to build essential parenting assets. These two activities will be implemented in 2024.

**Poor performance from monitoring and evaluation consultant:** We hired a local consultant in Goma, DRC to collect and analyze data working with a monitoring and evaluation toolkit designed by our research liaison Dr. Nadia Fazal. While the data was successfully collected it became clear in the consultant's mid project report that she was unable to conduct qualitative analysis though her experience and background had indicated she had the skillset. We unfortunately were unable to find another local consultant within our budget constraints to complete the work. As a result, our monitoring and evaluation of this program phase is on hold.





## b. Organization

**Our primary organizational objective was to develop partnerships and implement collaborative projects with partners.** Here we note the challenges we faced in partnership development as well as organizational challenges:

**Lack of opportunity to test drive compatibility:** We encountered multiple challenges in developing partnerships and implementing projects with partners. Specifically, we aimed to implement 1-2 partnerships to determine compatibility, alignment, and future collaborative growth. All three of the partnerships we had cultivated in 2022, with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Concern International, and Purposeful, did not move forward in 2023. In the case of IRC and Concern International this was because the concept notes developed were not picked up by funders and we are continuing to work with these organizations towards this goal.

Unfortunately Purposeful, with whom we had invested significant time to develop a long-term partnership changed their strategic direction.

**Limited resources to pursue partnerships:** We were challenged in finding adequate time to conduct analysis and exploration of organizations beyond the three partners mentioned above. Because of our limited staff capacity, the ED, who is also managing all other aspects of operations and programming found it difficult to dedicate adequate time to this goal.

**Limited staff capacity:** The organization's staffing remained limited putting an extremely high task load on the ED (US-based staff member) and the DRC-based operations director who manages 3 partner staff and 8 mentors. Limited staff capacity also meant that we fell short on achieving all planned organizational activities including establishing a girls' and young women's advisory council.

**Insufficient funding:** While we garnered new support from the Girls' Opportunity Alliance of the Obama Foundation, and the With and For Girls Fund at Purposeful, and have been cultivating a relationship with USAID in DRC, we were unable to reach our goal of raising \$330,700 USD for the annual budget instead raising \$176,500 USD.

**Small board and limited board engagement:** Our board remained small with three members in 2023. Board members faced difficulties mobilizing their constituents to donate to the organization and acting in their capacity as fundraisers. One board member also had limited availability and was not able to fulfill her board duties.





# LESSONS LEARNED AND STRATEGIES GOING FORWARD

## a. Program

**Enhance local partnership capacity:** We will institute clear partnership expectations through a partnership evaluation tool to keep our partner accountable to their commitments to organizational development and project engagement. We will explore alternative partners in the case that the partnership does not improve. We will re-evaluate our current partner in eleven months to determine whether to continue or terminate the partnership and engage a new partner. We will continue providing trainings and mentorship to the partner as well as quarterly evaluation and reflection sessions.



**Secure additional funding:** We will work to secure longer term funding by identifying and cultivating donors who can commit to multi-year and larger sums (beyond 50-60k which is our largest donation size). Note that with our pending application to USAID we are making progress on this goal.

**Close the school scholarship program:** As the cost of education per girl is high (estimated \$125 per girl per year) and we are not able to offer it to all who are eligible, we will stop offering school scholarships in fall 2024. The value for money will be better spent on increasing numbers of girls reached, establishing social networks of support and weekly learning opportunities for girls in life skills and creativity. In addition, without scholarship expenses the program will have a lower bottom line to run activities, which will be helpful if we aren't able to meet our fundraising goals.



**Budget for an international monitoring and evaluation consultant:** We now know that it will be difficult to find local qualified consultant to do the qualitative level of analysis we require. Going forward we will budget in monitoring and evaluation costs for an international consultant.



## b. Organization



Participants of the Girl Awakening Program engaging in a collaborative doodle activity, Goma, DRC. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

**Our primary organizational objective was to develop partnerships and implement collaborative projects with partners.** We have identified the following lessons learned and strategies going forward:

**Push forward partnerships to test compatibility:** We will remain engaged with potential partners: IRC and Concern International with consistent touch points so that we can test drive a collaborative project.

**Prioritize partnership plan for ED and board:** This is a priority as partnering with a larger organization is important to long term stability, helping us secure funding, and offset administrative costs. We will recruit new board members, delegate to current board members, and ask inactive members to step off, so that the board is more engaged in the process. To support the workload of the ED, we will consider hiring a short-term consultant to advance this process if budgeting allows.

**Increase staff capacity:** We will provide training and support for the number 2 in the organization: the operations director, empowering her program leadership. This will increase time for the ED to work on ED responsibilities including the partnership plan. Securing additional funding (noted above) will also enable hiring administrative support staff and increase staff capacity.





# THANK YOU

## *We thank our foundation funders:*

The Tides Foundation, the Girls' Opportunity Alliance of the Obama Foundation, the Adventures of the Mind Foundation, with With and For Girls Fund, and the Girls' Rights Project for sustaining our vision.



## *With deep appreciation, a thank you to our partners:*

Tulizo Elle Space, 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.





# And a special thanks

We are forever grateful to the individuals who have supported our work over the last year, and appreciate your efforts more than you know.

## We'd like to individually thank:

- Elodie Olivia Bonazzi
- Kate Charles
- Nancy Choy
- Ray Choy
- Susan Choy

- Rebecca del Rio & Numa Marlborough
- Betty & Michael Eigen
- Evvy Eisen
- Gayle Embrey
- Susan Etscovitz
- Leonard & Kim Festa
- Donna Fong
- Joann Fong
- Paul Fong
- Sierra Gallagher
- Barbara Gervis
- Judith Gillespie
- Nicolaus Glomb
- Zbigniew Gozdecki
- Michael Hauenstein
- Audrey Hawkins
- Bonnie Hirschhorn
- Susan Heinemann
- Moreen Libet & Frank Fox
- Terri Louie
- Georgina Loveland
- Anna Lynch
- Diana Lyon & Kevin Walters

- David & Jennifer Mallie
- John & Jody Mallie
- Kathryn Maloney
- Beth Meyer
- Hillary Murray
- Won Ng
- Aryn Rajan
- Laurie Reyman
- Joan Snyder
- Carla Soracco
- Larry & Margot Spillane
- Jed Wallach
- Lynda Won-Chung
- Carol Zukin





# FUNDING AND FINANCES

## a. 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 2023 was the implementation of the **Girl Awakening Program** which totaled \$85,500.

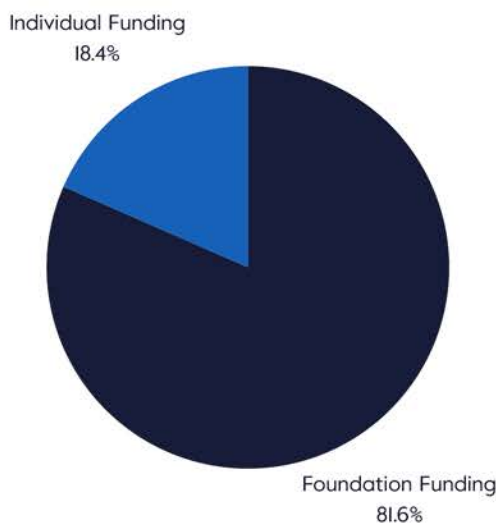
**Total revenue** for 2023 was **\$184,000** and **total expenses** were **\$122,600**. The **net revenue of \$62,350** (Note: The Tides Foundation annual grant for 2024 accounts for the net revenue).

## b. Funding Sources

Our **total revenue** for 2023 was **\$184,000**. In addition to the **\$70,000** in total, received from the Advancing Girls Fund at the **Tides Foundation** we were successful in securing funding from both **old and new sources** that provided an additional **\$114,000**.

We received a total of **\$33,930** 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 42 individual donors:

- 3 new donors
- 31 consecutive year donors
- 8 recaptured donors



Our **average donation amount** from individual donors was **\$807**.

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



# LOOKING FORWARD TO 2024

## I. Scaling and Developing Girl Awakening

We will continue our work with local partners to sustain and expand year-round programming of our flagship program Girl Awakening (Musichana Hamuka in Swahili).

In this catastrophic area of humanitarian need in densely populated Goma, we will continue to provide and grow safe spaces where girls and young women can strengthen female support networks, experience healing in solidarity, learn essential knowledge and skillsets and express themselves creatively, coming into their own as young leaders.

A few milestones we will reach in 2024: Our second cohort of 200 girls will graduate from the program in September and have the option to continue as junior mentors in the program and to meet monthly. We will welcome a new cohort of 200 girls aged 10 into the program.

As part of our work to transform community so that girls are less marginalized, we will further engage community stakeholders and systems, to enable resources and services to be more accessible to girls and reduce risk and threat factors.

We will continue to work closely with our local partner, Tulizo Elle Space (TES), to strengthen their existing capacities so that they can effectively deliver sustainable, locally valued programming. Beyond local capacity strengthening for our partner organization, we invest in local systems strengthening through our support and training of our young women mentors who are embedded in their communities.

These are progressive steps forward in a sustainable plan for creating resilient, socially cohesive communities that work for all who live there including girls.



Girl participant learning how to create secondary colors from the three primary colors, Goma, DRC. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

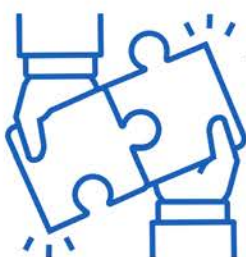


## 2. Implementing new projects



The Mwangaza Program (Mwangaza meaning light in Swahili) will be jointly led by CC and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and take place in the Goma area, North Kivu Province in the DRC (Mentioned above in programs in development). The program will pilot CC arts-based approaches for social and emotional health, and trauma-mitigation, and our repertoire of evidence-based tools developed by the Population Council to reach and protect the most marginalized adolescent girls – integrating these into the larger youth and community support project of IRC. Over a 12-month period the project will engage 600 direct beneficiaries and 16,000 indirect beneficiaries.

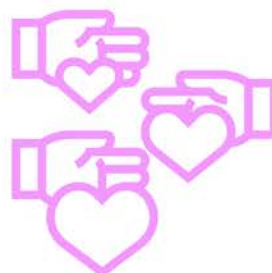
## 3. Building partnerships with the minded organizations to further our mission and grow our impact



We will continue to explore partnerships in which Colors of Connection's arts-based curriculum can be utilized by other partners in protection, sexual and reproductive health, or education.

## 4. Securing increased operational and program funding

We will focus on building relationships with individual donors, charitable foundations and brand partners to diversify and broaden our funding.





# LEADERSHIP AND BOARD



Leadership

**Christina Mallie**  
*Executive Director & Co-Founder*

**Christina is an artist and humanitarian.** She has been driven to support the creativity of youth and girls, inspired by her own experiences of utilizing the arts to work through challenges as an adolescent. 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. She has worked as a consultant with the Population Council, and Assymetrica.

With Colors of Connection, she has designed and implemented programs in Liberia, Burkina Faso and Democratic Republic of the Congo. As Co-Founder and Executive Director she is passionate about creating more space and value for collaborative arts, and artistic healing and expression in places where resources are scarce and traumatic experiences are high.



**Anita Babonangenda**  
*Operations Director*

**Anita specializes in health and community protection, working with adolescent girls and women to prevent and respond to violence.** She is passionate about providing safe spaces where girls can develop their confidence, leadership skills, and share their experiences in order to fight against gender inequality and make decisions about their futures.

She has worked as a supervisor for the International Rescue Committee's Women's Protection and Empowerment Program, as a doctor focused on GBV response, and advocate in campaigns promoting women's rights. She completed her doctoral studies at the University of Goma.

With Colors of Connection she directs operations in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, including managing the Girl Awakening Program, and training and supporting to our local partner Tulizo Elle Space.





## Board of Directors

**Laura Hoffman**  
*Creative &  
Communications  
Consultant*



**Christina Mallie**  
*Executive Director &  
Co-Founder*

**Aryn Rajan**  
*Chief Strategy Officer*



## Board of Advisors

- **Awet Andemicael** - Musician, Writer, Consultant and Educator
- **Judith Bruce** - Senior Associate and Policy Analyst at Population Council
- **Kathy Eldon** - Founder and Chairman, Creative Visions Foundation
- **Gayle Embrey** - Filmmaker and Licensed Professional Counselor
- **Bonnie Hirschhorn** - Psychoanalyst and Creative Arts Therapist
- **Dominique Koffy Kouacou** - Humanitarian Program Manager
- **Eva Roca** - Implementation Research Advisor, UCSD Center on Gender Equality and Health
- **Lynn Sanders-Bustle** - Associate Professor and Art Education Chair-Lamar Dodd School of Art, University of Georgia
- **Sophie Smalls** - Senior Non-Profit Project Manager
- **Joan Snyder** - Artist MacArthur, Fellow 2007





Mentor training in female leadership at Tulizo Elle Space Center, Goma, DRC, 2023. Photo by Pamela Tulizo.

# COLORS OF CONNECTION

## CONNECT WITH US



[www.colorsofconnection.org](http://www.colorsofconnection.org)



[info@colorsofconnection.org](mailto:info@colorsofconnection.org)



<https://www.facebook.com/colorsofconnection>



<https://twitter.com/ColorsofConnect>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/colorsofconnection/>



PO Box 50371 Brooklyn, NY 11205



<https://www.instagram.com/colorsofconnection/>