



## Teaching vulnerable young women to believe in themselves gives them the confidence to succeed

In Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare, 240 young women aged between 16 and 25 are finding comfort and success from the personalised approach being applied to their vocational training programme. This is having a positive impact, and within six months of completing the Rafiki Girls Centre's livelihoods course, supported by grassroots organisation, [Zimbabwe Educational Trust](#), 85% of graduates are in education or employment – far better than the national rates for vulnerable women. It is thought this is down to the balanced life/skills support approach being taken, alongside the development of workplace skills. The girls are turning their lives around, visualising a future for themselves, and seizing opportunities.

### Overview

Young women applying to take part in the vocational training programme funded by a [Jo Cox Memorial Grant](#), are doing so because they want to see a change to their lives. They have often been incredibly isolated, are extremely poor and vulnerable, and face immensely tough decisions on a day to day basis.

During the first three months of the programme, the girls spend time together and simply being with others who have faced similar pressures and challenges throughout their lives – they may be orphans, single mothers, or lack family networks for example - can be extremely reassuring and empowering. **The girls learn they are not alone and are not to blame for what has occurred in their lives up to that point.**

The popularity of the 'Choose Freedom' module of the course is indicative of the girls shift in their thinking and self-perception also. The unit covers topics like:

1. What is freedom?
2. What is self-image?
3. What is communication?
4. My family and I
5. Practical friendship and dating
6. Sex: delight or disaster
7. True love.

The programme also teaches the women the skills required to manage their own lives, like their finances, using computers, looking after their health, and hygiene. It offers counselling for those who want it, and HIV/AIDS information and testing too.

All of this is before the students even choose a specialism, such as a pre-school teacher, healthcare worker, beautician, hotel and catering, or interior design, which they train and qualify in before moving into a work placement in the same area.

And importantly, there is a feedback loop between the girls and the programme organisers too (using a suggestion box, as well as other methods). This helps to create a sense of ownership. Even the ability to request small changes, such as spaces for the girls without male staff members in, is likely to create a feeling of greater freedom and control than many of the girls have experienced before.

While the practicalities of employment and education are inevitably at the forefront of participants minds, there is no doubt that this broader sense of participation, respect and ability to influence change is central to the startling results participants from the programme go on to achieve.

By the time they complete the programme, funded by UK aid, these women will have learned about their own self-worth, developed confidence in their abilities to go out into the world and be a valued member of society. They know they will be able to contribute to the economy and feel empowered by this; capable of looking after themselves and those around them in their personal and working lives.