



Mary Paul - My Success Story



My name is Mary Paul. I was born to my parents as their first born in 1999, nine months later after their church wedding. That means I was conceived during their honeymoon. Our residence is called Maziwa slums between Githurai 44 and Kahawa West. My mother has two other children with my father but what glitters is not always gold because my father abandoned my mother with young children and went to stay with another woman and started another family.

Life with a Single Parent

This was not interesting at all being brought up by a single mother after she had been abandoned by a man she loved and was never given any reasons and the in-laws are not interested with you in any way. My mother was so bitter with my father and she never wanted to share anything with us about our father. She started projecting to us and any small mistake would lead to caning. This became the order of the day and we started living in fear.

I joined Kamiti Primary School in 2009. Life was not easy as my mother struggled to cater for everything. We sometimes went to school without breakfast since my mother could only afford one meal per day and she preferred we have supper. She was a tailor but washed peoples clothes to supplement her tailoring business. From class one to standard 5, I performed so well since we didn't have so many problems. At least my mother could support us alone. But when I got to class, s things changed: I started helping her in her cleaning business which never left me with time to do my studies. I also became the main cook in our house where I never had time to play like other children. All this affected my grades and I started performing poorly which put me in bad books with my class teacher and other teachers.

From Bad To Worst

Life changed drastically when I joined high school. I used to perform well in lower grades but as I grew up my grades went down; by the time I did my Kenya Certificate of Primary Education I did not acquire marks to join government institution. My mother took me to a private institution in the slums where I was a day scholar. This was the worst thing to a girl who was in her adolescence with a lot of peer pressure. It was hard for me in high school and I suffered so much since I lacked most of the basics girls need. It became a nightmare when I had my periods because I had no pads. I would use pieces of cloths and this reduced my

self-esteem. I hated relating with boys. This was a blessing in disguise because I had no boyfriend. My girlfriends had boyfriends; when they dropped out of school due to pregnancy, I remained in school. Thanks to my mother who kept reassuring me that tomorrow will be different from today and you don't need a man to survive.

I continued assisting my mother in duties which could bring an income to the family until it became a daily routine. I did love my work. I could wake up early in the morning and help my mother to prepare chapattis and cereals which she sold during the day in her tailoring business. In the evening I would come home quickly to go to the neighbor's and wash clothes before going back to our house to prepare dinner, wash utensils and clothes. This would leave me exhausted and I would get no time for my homework. I got no time to interact with my age mates or play with them which left me as an outcast.

In high school I avoided any topic where people talked about their fathers. I wished I never knew him or he was dead because I would not have been bitter with him. I completed my secondary education and I didn't perform well. I managed to get a D+ which could not take me to college.

From Frying Pan to Fire

Life out of school was frustrating, painful, and full of miseries. This is the time I realized that I rested when I went to school. I would wake up at 4 am so that I can cook all the foods before going to washing clothes and later join mother in her tailoring business and assist her in selling the foods. This life was so hard for me and I started going down emotionally and had a crashed self-esteem. I hated everything in life and didn't want people talking to me, so during my free time I would read novels so that I wouldn't feel lonely.

My mother got worried of me and kept reassuring me that all will be well but I kept asking her when. I told her God really hated us so much and there is nothing good we got from Him. My mother kept reminding me that He has given us good health and nobody in our family is sick and we always have food on our table. That never consoled me in any way and as a result I decided to start taking drugs. This way I felt good and started having other friends who were in drugs. As a result we started quarreling with my mother because I stopped doing the jobs of washing clothes and cooking cereals well. I never cared anymore and felt I had no future.

A Sweet Turn in My Life

One Monday morning I was going to buy my drugs and I came across a lady I was schooling with in high school. She looked so good and was selling second-hand clothes. I admired her and wanted to know more about her life. She told me she was in business of second-hand clothes and also braids peoples hair after she got trained by Baraka Women Center. She was introduced to the center by a friend who sympathized with her when she shared what she was going through and lacked food to give her baby. She informed me that at Baraka Center, one is counseled and mentored to become the person she has lost in life. Sure enough she looked beautiful and proud of herself. She also told me that through her business savings she has opened a bank account and she has saved a good amount of money.

I got excited and requested her to take me to the Center. The following day she took me and introduced me to Wanjiru, the Program Director, who in turn introduced me to the Center Manager, Teresia. Wanjiru took me through the course outline and also started a one-on-one counseling session. On the first day at Baraka Women's Center, I looked very changed and positive in life. I realized I had so much potential and there are many open doors for me. I went home and shared with my mother and she was so excited to

learn that there were no charges at the Center. The following day I woke up and did all my duties and left for the Center .

By the end of the second month I had acquired skills in hair dressing, beauty therapy, beading, entrepreneurship, and leadership. I started braiding peoples hair and could charge them, and this helped me to get capital to buy beading material to make products for sale. Initially I used to wash clothes for people when my mother requested me, but after training it became my own business and did it with passion which has enabled me to get more customers.

Baraka Women’s Center has given me a platform to rediscover myself and reignite the fire in me. I am no longer bitter with life and I am so proud with myself. I am in love with who I am and surely my mother’s words have come to be real that our God loves us so much and He will never forsake us. Madam Teresia and Teacher Wanjiru are mothers to me.



In July of this year [2019] we were visited by Grant Williams and David Lent, and we had great moments with them. Grant took us through The Edge and it helped me in healing and rediscovering myself. That helped me be at peace with who I am. Thanks Grant and David for the great moments we shared!

The WCI CEO Susan Burgess-Lent visited Baraka Center in August and I saw another mother in her. She is full of love and ready to give a shoulder to the vulnerable and a voice to the voiceless. She mentored and counseled us which lifted our spirit even more.

As I narrate this story today to Wanjiru, I am in tears of joy when I recall where Baraka Women’s Center removed me from and who I am today. I have two good businesses of my own and have opened a bank account where I do my savings. I have stopped taking drugs. If it were not for BWC, I would not be who I am today.

Story told by Mary Paul at Baraka Women’s Center, Nairobi, Kenya November 2019

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