



Teresia Wanjiku - Success Story

My name is Teresia Wanjiku, a wife and a mother of two children. My mother is a single mother of my brother and me . She rarely took care of us because of the nature of her job, hence she left us under the care of our grandmother. Life was good; I had playmates and lacked nothing. I was the teddy bear in the family and the loved one.

Life as a Teenager

Life changed when I became a teenager and I started having 1001 questions and nobody could respond or give me satisfying answers. I never had an issue with who my father was when I was a small girl because my uncles were always there for me. I would call them daddy as I heard my cousins call them but in my adolescence I realized they were not my father. This made me to start withdrawing from people and spending most of the time in the bedroom. I became rude and would do nothing in the house. This really annoyed my grandmother and she reported me to my mother. When my mother came, she did not want any explanation but got into me and gave me a through beating. I was so annoyed. I shouted at her and demanded to be shown my dad. Instead of telling me who my dad was she shouted back at me and told me to pack my things go and look for him. After that my mother picked her bag and left for her place of work leaving me more miserable and confused than before.

This became a turning point in my life and never wanted to be associated with my family. By then I was in Form 2 and was in adolescence hence looking for identity. I started coming home late from school and would not assist in the house duties at all. This made me to get into bad books with my grandmother who started quarreling me on daily basis. All this affected my class performance and my teacher would send me home regularly to bring my parent. My grandmother never sided with me and always would tell the teachers that I had become hard-headed and very rude even at home. This actually destroyed my relationship with my teachers.

Life became hard and I struggled so much to make my grandmother re-accept me and get into a good relationship like in the past. I started getting home early and would do all the house chores before embarking into my homework. My grandmother started appreciating me and would give me bus fare in the morning to go to school instead of walking. This at the end of the day helped me to improve on my academics and my teachers started appreciating me. In return I was at peace with myself and started working even harder on my class work. Things worked well form me in Form 3 until Form 4 third term when I got a boyfriend. He could wait for me on my way back home and would walk me home. This resulted to me getting home late hence I lacked enough time for the



house chores and my homework. At the end of it all my performance went down and when I sat for my KCSE at the end of Form 4, I only managed to get a C minus which could not take me to the University.

From Grace to Grass

After the Form 4 results were out, reality sank into me that I would not join the University due to my low grades. I started hating the idea of staying at home without going anywhere and this made me to miss school; every day I would wake up prepared to go to school. Three-quarters of a year, I stayed at home and boredom became too much. I spent most of my days in my bedroom which made my grandmother to be on my throat every time. Any small mistake or anything not done made her make noise to me seriously and this contributed to my stress so much.

One Monday morning I woke up and found a very clean kitchen and there was no breakfast. I proceeded to the cupboard to check what I could cook but to my disappointment I found the place locked, which it rarely was. When I enquired from my grandmother, she told me it's the high time I woke up and started a working like other girls of my age. I was so bitter that I went back to my bedroom and started crying. I hated myself so much. When I felt relieved from crying, I started thinking deeply of what steps I was going to take. I decided to look for any type of job so that I could get away from home and also be in a position to provide for myself. I remembered my cousin who was working as a house help in Nairobi city. I called her and requested her to get me a job as a house help. She was so positive about it. After two days she informed me she had found a job for me.

Life as House Help

When my cousin informed me about the job, I traveled immediately and met with my employer. She was a single mother of two children and we agreed she would start my salary with five thousand shilling (about \$50). I was okay with this amount because I was not buying any food or paying rent. I worked for one year, saving three thousand shilling. I would send one thousand to my grandmother and use the other on for my personal needs.

I did my job with total dedication and my boss was always happy with me. Her children loved me so much and all was going on well. After seven months I met a man. We became friends and after some months we became lovers. Five months down the line we became intimate and I conceived. When I informed him he was happy but told me to wait so that he can prepare. I continued working until the pregnancy was seven months and could not work anymore. I informed my boss that I was going to stop working at the end of the month and she should look for another house help. At the end of the month I stopped working and decided to go and visit my aunt who was staying in Namanga. From the word go, my mother had cautioned me that if I ever got pregnant I should know where to take the pregnancy so there was no way I was going home. I traveled to Namangan and called my auntie when I alighted from the bus. I told her I was on my way to her place and she welcomed me. Within ten minutes in her house, she got excited to see me though said I was in Namanga when I called her.

The first and the second day my auntie never asked me anything but on the third day auntie called me into her bedroom and asked me what had really taken me to her place. When I told her I was okay and was only visiting she told me to tell her the truth as she could see there was something troubling me. I burst into tears and informed her I was pregnant and my mother had always warned me about it. She reassured me all will be well and she would talk to my mother.

The following day my auntie called my mother and they had a lengthy conversation. My mother was surprised but she listened to auntie's advice and informed her that I should go back home, she would welcome me with open hands. I travelled back home after four days and my grandmother was so warm to me. My mother visited us the following day and did good shopping for the baby and food. After one month I delivered a healthy baby boy and was so happy. It was not very easy nursing a small baby but my grandma was there for me.

After a month, the father of my baby came looking for me at our place. He knew I was pregnant but I hadn't informed him that I had delivered. He was so surprised to find me with a baby and told my grandma he would come for us that weekend. That's how I started being a wife and having my own house.

After nursing my son for six months, I joined Baraka Women Center to learn some skills so that I could start my own business. I heard some young mothers like me discussing how they were benefiting from BWC – how independent they had become and could provide for their families. This challenged me. I felt I also needed to be supportive to my husband in providing

A Turning Point in My Life

When I joined BWC, I found other young mothers like me who wanted to acquire skills. We were introduced to the BWC vocational skills and other classes which included Beadwork, Tailoring, Hair Dressing and Beauty Therapy, Computer Training, and Leatherwork.

We were also trained on Entrepreneurship and Transformative Leadership skills, Parenting skills, and received counseling and mentoring.

Within six months I had perfected in all the vocational skills and God was on my side. Upon graduation I was made a hair dressing trainer at BWC. I was so happy and I took my new position seriously. For the next year, I did my work so well that I was later promoted to an office administrator.

This was actually a shock to me because I had lost hope in life and was thinking marriage was the only thing which could save me. I have started feeling like a working-class woman which has brought so many changes in me. Some of the changes: my dressing code, the way I interact with people, the way I manage my family. I waking up every morning to go and train.



During this time, our teacher Wanjiru introduced a mentorship program which made my self-esteem to go high and my confidence improve. I am in love with who I am and have started dreaming of the great woman I can become.

Recently BWC introduced designing and tailoring. I enrolled as a trainee and have now perfected my skills. I am now designing and sewing outfit for my clients and also making masks for the government tender. I now see there is no vision a woman can't achieve with a willing heart.

Today I am the lead trainer in tailoring and dress making and making many designs for African bags and dresses. I am in charge of the new machines which were bought by U.S. Ambassador's Self-Help Fund. These machines have helped us to design and make unique African bags and African attire that are being sold in exhibitions. This has had a great impact on my life! I am being marketed nationally and I am receiving so many orders.



BWC has made me who I am today. I am delighted to work with them. I have become a peer mentor to other trainees.

Long live BWC! Asante sana!



Wanjiku with her children displaying her handbag designs



Wanjiku training how to design and cut African dresses.

Interview with Teresia Wanjiku at Baraka Women Center, Nairobi, Kenya October 2022

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