

## **Claude's story**

(Claude's name has been changed for confidentiality reasons).

Claude became a resident of the Umugongo House in October 2009. This is an account of how he came to be one of the beneficiaries of this project.

Until Claude was 14 he was living with his well-off family in Rucuro, DRC and attending school. However, due to their appearance and their Kinyarwandan language, the Interahamwe believed they were Tutsi and killed Claude's family whilst he was at school. His only remaining relative is one brother who is in the Congolese military, but Claude does not know him.

When his parents were killed Claude's neighbour took all of their belongings (200 cows). Claude went to the authorities to resolve the situation and it was ruled that Claude's neighbour must return all of Claude's belongings. However, the neighbour had a son who was a Colonel in the Congolese army, so when the ruling was made the neighbour's son came with other members of the military to Claude's house, kidnapped him, put him on a boat to cross the lake to Rwanda, and threatened him never to come back.

When Claude arrived in Rwanda he didn't know anyone. He managed to arrange a job on a farm where he could work for his keep. When he arrived to work the police discovered he had no papers or any other belongings, so they collected him up, along with other boys from the area, and put him in a prison for difficult youths called Kabuga. Claude remained in this prison for 4-6 months, until he and some fellow inmates were deemed 'rehabilitated' and were released on good behaviour. Not knowing where he was or where to go, Claude followed the other youth to the streets of Kigali.

He remained on the streets for 6 months until Centre Marembo became aware of him through the Tuesday Drop-in service. He wasn't taking any drugs and was desperate for an opportunity to escape his situation, so staff at Centre Marembo resolved his situation with the Rwandese authorities and he was taken into Umugongo House.

When he arrived he was very sick and distressed. He wept nearly all day, every day and wasn't looking after himself properly: he didn't bother to brush his teeth or wash himself. It was difficult for the other boys to accept him into their home.

Slowly the staff at Centre Marembo and Umugongo House helped him out of his devastated state. Nicolette, the Centre Manager, counselled him daily, talking him through his situation and the importance of fighting for his survival. This daily one to one support, and the gradual support of his 'brothers' at Umugongo House has taken him from a semi-suicidal state to the smiling, gently-mischievous 16 year old boy he is today.

Centre Marembo is working with the Congolese embassy to try and resolve Claude's case. Meanwhile Claude is going from strength to strength. On February 2<sup>nd</sup> he began studying at a good secondary school in Cyangugu. He has had to drop to education level S2 from S4 due to differences in the Congolese and Rwandan school system, but he is doing very well. He is top of his class and the 2<sup>nd</sup> best student in the whole school of 1,500 pupils.