

# Hand in Hand Kenya and Maisha Girls Safe House

In June of 2021 for the first time, I visited Maisha Girls Safe House (a registered NGO in Nairobi, Kenya). It was at the request of a friend, who also assists Maisha. I met Florence Keya, the founder and Executive Director. When I set across the room from the girls I could see the pain and emptiness in the eyes of the girls, but what could I and Hand in Hand Kenya do?

After many discussions with Flo over the next few months, a needs assessment implemented and a trial period of collaboration, Hand in Hand Kenya came to the conclusion that we best could help with strengthening Maisha as an organization, so that they could stand stronger as an organization and seek their own funds. Up until now they struggled to meet the needs of the girls on a consistent basis.

We hired staff that created financial policies and procedures, and organizational policies and structure as a whole. We were able to rent a small house as office space that was close to the current safe house. The staff were paid a higher consistent salary with basic benefits. One of the actions we took that was not directly related to strengthening the organization, but directly focused on the girls, was therapy. Together with Flo we hired a therapist to give the girls individual and group therapy sessions on a consistent basis. We also helped with the grocery budget, to be able to add more vegetables and proteins to their diet. We have now partnered with Maisha Girls Safe House on a formal basis since February of 2022.

During 2023 they received a grant from the United Nation's Trust Fund. They were the only organization in Kenya and one of the few in Africa to receive it. They also received a grant from the French Embassy. We are very pleased and Maisha is headed in the right direction, however both were for advocacy work. Flo and Maisha are leaders in Nairobi in advocacy work. It remains difficult to get funding for salaries and food for the safe house itself.

Children's Services or the Kenya police knock on the gate or give us a call that they have a girl that needs a place to live until her case in court is adjudicated, the baby is born, and/or she is able to be reintegrated with her family. No funds are received for the care of a girl. We must pay for; her food, health needs of the girl and her baby, her education, if she is able to return to school, the assistance of a social worker, who supports her in court, at the health centers, and school. You get the idea, Maisha pays for everything.

The victims range in age from 11 years and sometimes younger to 21 years, plus their children. Sadly the age of the girls is getting younger that come to the house. Some stay for a week and some for 4 years or longer.

Our goal is to make our presence obsolete. Hand in Hand Kenya is working to continue to support Maisha in raising their own funds and strengthening their own organization and we can step back and say "Job well done."