

Stories
from

the
field

IZU Immaculee and Naphtal help Laura to escape child labour and abuse in Musanze

Laura, a 12-year-old girl from Rusizi district, cannot help but lighten up when speaking about Immaculee, an IZU from Musanze district. Laura used to work as a child labourer in Musanze, living in violent and exploitative conditions. Thanks to Immaculee, she was able to escape and start a new life.

Immaculee heard about Laura's case in 2020 when a village chief in Musanze district found Laura wandering in the bush with a sizeable wound on her arm. Laura told the chief that she was from Rusizi (six to seven hours away) and, at just 11 years of age, had been working as a housekeeper for some months while schools were closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The employer had promised her RWF5,000 per month, and her mother had been struggling to feed Laura and her siblings, so she allowed her to go. After Laura's first month of work, the employer told her she would not be paid and became verbally and physically abusive.

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They first told me that they would treat me well and that I could go to a good school when schools reopened and continue studying as I work. But that is the opposite of what really happened. She sent me to carry bricks to different places and whenever I got paid, I was supposed to bring all the money to her and that's exactly what I did.

Umubyeyi, CPWO

Upon hearing this story, the village chief informed the police, the Child Protection and Welfare Officer, and the Labor Inspector to begin investigations through the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB). With the investigations ongoing, the Child Protection and Welfare Officer asked Immaculee and her IZU partner Naphtal to support Laura to recover from the violence she had experienced, in line with IZU's roles and responsibilities in their communities.

As part of their IZU training, Immaculee and Naphtal learned that handling cases of violence against children requires a holistic, child-centred response. First, Immaculee explained the investigation process in simple words to Laura to ensure she knew what to expect at each step. Immaculee and Naphtal then took Laura to the health centre and the RIB stations as they compiled medical records for prosecution. Immaculee also provided basic counselling to Laura throughout every step.

Immaculee and Naphtal next requested support on the next steps from the Musanze district Child Protection Officer, who guided them to trace Laura's family. This proved challenging due to Laura's mother's tendency to move house frequently in search of work. However thanks to the Tubarerere Mu Muryango and IZU WhatsApp groups, Theogene, an IZU from Laura's home district of Rusizi, eventually recognized Laura and contacted her mother.

Immaculee and Theogene worked together to organise bonding visits for Laura to her family home, to help rebuild their connection. Immaculee also arranged for a reunification support package (including books, stationary, clothes and shoes). In July 2021, almost one year after she was separated from her family, trafficked into child labour and exposed to physical and emotional violence at the hands of her employer, Laura returned home. Her case was transferred to Theogene for follow up.

Since Laura's reunification with her family in Rusizi, Theogene and the local Child Protection Officer have advocated to sector and district authorities to construct a house on the family's new plot. Theogene also helped re-enroll Laura in school and advocated to sector officials to provide her with new uniforms and scholastic materials. Laura finally resumed school in October 2021, and has high hopes for her future.



My name is Laura, I am 12 years old, and I wish to become a nurse when I grow up because I hope that it could give me a better life in future

Laura states she is especially grateful for the emotional support she has received from Immaculee. Laura says she was showered with love, counseled, and guided through the many visits to the hospital and investigation bureau which helped her to recover from the physical and emotional violence she experienced during her time as a child labourer. Laura's face still glows until today when she speaks about Immaculee and how she helped her.

TAKE-AWAYS

- In this case study, key components of IZU's support included psychosocial support; referrals to essential legal, health and education services; advocacy; mediation; and regular follow-up
- The IZU ensured coordination and collaboration with other child protection actors including in other districts, building on each other's competencies, mandate and responsibilities
- Multi-faceted support to Laura enabled her to meet her needs in a holistic manner, from psychological and emotional wellbeing to justice