

# PHUMULANI 2021 IMPACT REPORT

## UPDATE FROM COMFORT

This February marks our fifth official year as Phumulani, Minnesota African Women Against Violence. I want to reflect for a few moments about where we are as an organization and where we are going.

The pandemic presented itself as a challenge and a blessing. It helped our institutions to see the urgency of the issues we're addressing, including high rates of homelessness, domestic and sexual abuse. Our partnership with the Department of Human Services ensured that many of the historically marginalized did not fall through the cracks. In just a month our organization grew from a very small nonprofit to serving *seven times the number of clients we served the previous year.*

Now we're building capacity. In the past, we worked from crisis to crisis. This year we seek to be a leader, **modeling a way to serve survivors that is responsive rather than reactive.**

This shift means equipping survivors with the tools to be financially, spiritually, and mentally self-sufficient. It means investing in family therapy and culturally specific housing that offers dignity and respect. It means holistic services like culturally specific mental health care, wealth building tools, and teaching women how to monetize their talent and discover a career path.

"Ubuntu" means "I see the humanity in you". When one of our survivors moves into a shelter, they don't feel their humanity is seen. They are seen as a victim. We are going to change that by empowering them to be a partner in their own healing, worthy of investment.

We're hiring two more lead advocates and looking to work with other community programs. We're excited about partners like the organizational librarians in Minnesota and the Office of Justice Programs. And we will be opening two more peace homes along with a resource hub to incubate survivor businesses, offering home ownership and credit building classes.

So here is to five years of service; to the continued fight against all forms of gender based, interpersonal, and systemic violence. Here's to being a light in our community.



## FINDING HOME

K, an international graduate student studying for her Masters in Behavioral Health, was at her wit's end after fleeing an abusive relationship.

*"After all the abuse that I had been through, I needed a safe space to confide in someone I could relate with," K said.*

Then she heard a podcast during Domestic Violence month that featured Comfort Dondo, the Executive Director of Phumulani.

*"I was instantly drawn to Comfort; her work, her story as a survivor of domestic violence and the women she was working with to be better versions of themselves."*

Understanding that Phumulani was a culturally sensitive organization, K immediately connected with Comfort to share her experience.

*"With Comfort, it does not feel like work. I connect with her on different levels, she understands my unique situation," K explained, adding, "Comfort introduced me to resources, legal support, and opportunities that would have been impossible for me to access on my own."*

K moved from Uganda to Minnesota in 2017 to study for an Associate in Medical Administration.

The difficulty of navigating a new environment, isolation, and lack of opportunities for work as an international student was made worse by the incessant abuse she suffered at the hands of her boyfriend.

*"He would hit me, choke me, push me, and threaten me."*

One night in the middle of winter, fearing for her life, K decided to run. She knocked on a neighbor's door to ask for help. To her shock, a middle-aged white woman opened her door holding a baseball bat, threatening to hit K if she did not leave.

**"AFTER ALL THE ABUSE THAT I HAD BEEN THROUGH, I NEEDED A SAFE SPACE TO CONFIDE IN SOMEONE I COULD RELATE WITH."**

*"I came from a culture where you could run to a neighbor for help when your life is threatened. I was so confused." Defeated, she returned to his home and stayed for two more years.*

*"This stage of my life affected my emotions, and took a physical toll on me as well. I couldn't talk to anyone."*

**Finally, with the support of Phumulani, K decided to create a life free from constant manipulation. She gained the confidence to call the police on her abuser when he forced himself into her new home.**

*"When he came into the apartment I shared with my sister, I stood my ground, called the police."*

K continues to receive mentoring from Phumulani to this day. *"I'm thankful for the immense support I was given. We need culturally appropriate programs like Phumulani to fill the gap."*

## THE DREAMER

N's dream was to travel to the United States, raise a family and go back to school to pursue a doctorate degree. When she married a man with American citizenship, she thought she would finally fulfill that dream.

That dream, however, turned into a nightmare after she gave birth to their three children.

A few years after they were born, N raised the idea of going back to school. She was shocked by her husband's sharp response: *"Stay home and take care of the children."*

Still, she figured that he would change his mind once the kids got older.

The waiting continued for 13 years. Her husband, claiming there was no time for her to go back to school, forced her to take on low paying jobs to support the family. And what began as subtle manipulations soon turned into different forms of abuse.

*"I was in so much pain," N lamented. "But even with the pain I was experiencing, I still wasn't sure if I should call the police. At one point he used all his strength to hit me against a coffee table, which broke. Still, I was too shy to show the injury to the police when I finally gathered the courage to call them."*

N had him arrested but ultimately didn't press charges. *"I was worried about how I could care for the children if he went to jail."*

Finally, one year ago, N saw a file on her ex-husband's computer that convinced her that it was time to finally flee. The title of that file? *"How to get rid of N."*

This made the decision to leave easier, but she had no money to rent a place for herself and all of the shelters were occupied.

**The awful treatment from N's ex-husband took not only a physical, but also an emotional and financial toll as well.** Her husband ruined her credit by taking out credit cards in her name. He refused to let her see her teenage children.

*"At one point I thought I might commit suicide..I was battling all kinds of post traumatic disorders."*

N finally got placement at a shelter, where another survivor introduced her to the work of Phumulani.

*"Comfort welcomed me with love and care. She gave me a place to live with my own bathroom. And I got accepted into medical school!"*

Natalia encourages any woman who is facing any form of abuse to reach out to organizations like Phumulani for help. *"Medical school is very tough. Comfort has been a huge support to me. She helps me write my goals, and to be appreciative by writing my appreciation lists," she said, adding, "I cannot thank Comfort and Phumulani enough."*

And of course: *"Continue to dream."*

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## MAYOR LISA JACOBSON GIVES BACK



For me, this work is personal.

In my community of Brooklyn Park, today I am the Mayor. But from 1987 until 1991 I was a quiet and shy victim of domestic violence. I lived at the Willows apartments, in the 5940 building. The complex was new and I was excited to have a place of my own to call home. Until that first punch, and every one after- through a wall, through a door, or at me, the punches kept coming.

I kept this part of my life a secret from everyone. I felt embarrassed. I felt sorry for him. As many do in the cycle of domestic violence, I went on to marry him and build a home in Brooklyn Park. He beat me on our honeymoon. He beat me the first night we moved into our house and every night thereafter. Until one night, a neighbor from across the park saw him hitting me through the window and called the police. That night was the beginning of the rest of my life. The neighbor, who I never knew, speaking up on behalf of another in their time of great need was all it took.

Phumulani and Comfort Dondo speak up for hundreds of women. But more importantly, they give women a safe space to speak up for themselves. I support their work in Brooklyn Park and beyond. I have been there; I know what it takes. Thank you, Phumulani, for your amazing commitment to women everywhere!

**4,236**  
SURVIVORS OFFERED  
SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

**80%**  
ARE LOW-INCOME  
INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

**89%**  
ARE IMMIGRANTS

**98%**  
ARE WOMEN OF COLOR