

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

Mary Hatwood Futrell Award

Presented to a nominee whose activities in women's rights significantly impact education and achievement of equal opportunity for women and girls.



Theresa Bwanya Kashale
Member, South Dakota

Many teachers transform lives. Theresa Bwanya Kashale transforms and saves lives.

A refugee from the war-torn Congo, Ms. Kashale came to the United States in 1994 with her four children and settled in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She did not speak a word of English. Today, she has a B.A. in Education, a M.Ed. in Reading, and soon will receive an Ed. D. in Educational Leadership. Today, the woman who didn't know a word of English teaches English to students at Hawthorne Elementary and to new refugees in Sioux Falls. She credits her first English tutors at Lutheran Social Services. "Those women," she says, "had a powerful influence on me. Their belief in me changed my life—I could not let them down." Ms. Kashale is now fluent in six languages—English, Swahili, Kirundi, Lingala, Kinyarwanda, and French; and she is now learning Spanish.

But for all of her success in the U.S., Ms. Kashale has never forgotten her native land. The images of orphan children living in the streets of Kinshasa and scavenging in the city dump for food have haunted her. And when she returned to the Congo to visit her parents, she decided to do something for the children, especially the girl children, so often the victims of rape and abduction for the sex trade.

Ms. Kashale somehow scrapped together \$6,000 and founded an orphanage. She took 20 girls off the streets, put them into a home and found staff to care for them. She returns every year, and when she does, the girls call her "Mamma Theresa." Which is music to her ears. I've always been drawn to children. I can't run away from helping them."

To ensure the sustainability of the orphanage, Theresa's House, Ms. Kashale has established a nonprofit organization with a volunteer Board of Directors whose mission is to create the strategies and secure the funding to continue to provide food, shelter, education and counseling to the orphan children of Kinshasa. Theresa's House also provides parenting and career training for adult Congolese women.

When Ms. Kashale is not raising money for her orphanage or teaching in the classroom or studying for another degree, she is helping refugees in Sioux Falls, especially the women. She is, as one of her colleagues says, "planting the seeds of self-determination." Aside from parenting and career classes, she has taken a plot of land given to her by a church and is helping refugee women plant a community garden, growing produce to sell to help support their families. In addition, they are learning English—"I am planting a tomato."

"With everything people have given me," says Theresa Kashale, "I have to give back."

