

## Education: Paving the way from the Congo to Providence

On July 22, 2010 Marie U. and her family stepped off an airplane Warwick RI, a final steppingstone on a long journey from a rural village in The Republic of Congo to Providence. With her 3 year old twins and husband, she began to build a new life. Her husband, proficient in several languages including English, quickly found employment at a local linen supply company. Maria enrolled in English and Life Skills classes at IIRI.

After completing her first semester, Maria signed up for more classes. She looked for work, she came to class, and she took care of her family – just like so many Rhode Island parents juggling the demands of life today. But Maria’s story is also one of a refugee, forced to leave a homeland that was dangerous and unstable. Unable to carve out a secure life in a neighboring country, she and her husband took that ultimate step to start again in an unknown place to give their children a chance for a better life.

Marie’s eyes well with tears when she tells you why she is so lucky – not just to be here, to have opportunity, to see her twins going to kindergarten – but because her mother gave an even bigger gift – an education and the permission to dream of a better life. Unlike most of girls in rural Congo, Marie’s mother insisted that all her sons AND daughters go to school and taught them that education is valuable. Maria became a life-long learner, and soaked up all the education she could at IIRI through job skills classes, Pre-Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training, and English as a Second Language classes.

Maria took all the skills she has learned at IIRI and applied for a factory job she heard about from a friend. The manager hired her on the spot. Unfortunately after a few months, the company had to lay off employees, a temporary setback on her journey.

When she could not find employment, Maria became a volunteer. She said, “I don’t like to sit down, I like to be doing.” She has been coordinating the Refugee Community Garden for the Southside Community Land Trust, managing 40 families from all over the globe who share the garden. Maria also volunteered at Rhode Island Hospital’s recovery room for several months and realized that she loved caring for others.



She has now decided to take another step to follow her dream of helping others. She has enrolled in a GED class at Dorcas International Institute of RI and is preparing to take the GED test in preparation for a Rhode Island Community College CNA program. Marie still volunteers her time – in the community garden, in IIRI’s refugee babysitting room, and helping translate for new refugees. Every day she is one step closer to her dream – a dream made possible by IIRI, by Marie, by her mother, and by you.