



CHANGING LIVES IN HOPLEY: STORIES OF DIGNITY, CHOICE AND TRANSFORMATION

Real Stories. Real Change. Real Impact

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The stories in this booklet are shared to amplify lived experiences, celebrate personal and collective journeys of change, and contribute to learning, advocacy, and evidence on community-led development and social justice.

Introduction

In Hopley, young people have been navigating complex realities marked by limited opportunities, social vulnerability, and constrained choices. Yet within these circumstances, many have begun to chart new pathways for themselves -towards dignity, safety, and economic independence. Between 2021 and 2026, the Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project, funded by Danish Television through ActionAid Denmark, supported this journey of change. ActionAid Zimbabwe (AAZ) led an integrated approach that brought together a range of partners to expand opportunities and strengthen support systems for young people. Through this collaboration, Young Africa provided accredited vocational training through AAZ-supported scholarships,

while the City of Harare, Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre, and Vichelle Design School delivered specialised skills development. Population Services Zimbabwe (PSZ) strengthened access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services through referrals and clinic-based support. Friendship Bench Zimbabwe provided psychosocial support, and the City of Harare Health Department contributed to improvements in services and advocacy at Tariro Clinic and surrounding water points. Together, these interventions helped young people build skills, access essential services, and strengthen their wellbeing- laying the foundation for more stable and self-determined futures.



Some of the young women from Hopley who graduated in various vocational courses.

The stories in this booklet are the stories behind the numbers.

They are stories of young women and men who chose courage over despair, opportunity over limitation, and hope over uncertainty. They are stories of resilience, determination, and transformation. Most importantly, they remind us that when young people are given the tools, support, and opportunities they deserve, they become powerful agents of change in their own lives and communities.

The Place: Hopley

On the southern edge of Harare lies Hopley, a settlement that emerged in the aftermath of Operation Murambatsvina as thousands of displaced families sought to rebuild their lives. Over the years, the community has grown rapidly, but access to essential services has struggled to keep pace. Many households continue to face challenges in accessing reliable water, sanitation, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Life in Hopley is marked by resilience, but also by daily uncertainty. For many families, survival depends on informal trading, casual labour, and other precarious sources of income. Young people have often borne the greatest burden of these challenges. Limited employment opportunities, social exclusion, and persistent poverty have left many difficult choices with few pathways to secure and sustainable livelihoods.



Aerial picture of Hopley May 2026.

For girls and young women, these pressures are frequently compounded by gender inequality and heightened vulnerability to exploitation, child marriage, gender-based violence, and other harmful coping mechanisms driven by economic hardship.

Across the community, substance abuse, crime, and disengagement have become symptoms of deeper structural challenges rather than individual failings. Before 2021, many young people in Hopley saw few opportunities beyond day-to-day survival. Yet beneath these challenges lay something powerful: a generation determined to learn, to earn, and to build a different future if given the chance.



Women drawing water from the new solar-powered taps, installed by City of Harare following engagement by young women supported by AAZ.

The Project: What We Set Out To Do

The Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project was built on a simple belief: every young person deserves the opportunity to live with dignity, exercise choice, and shape their own future.

By April 2026, the project aimed to reach 3,600 young people in Hopley—2,880 females and 720 males—with opportunities, skills, and support that would enable them to improve their livelihoods, access essential services, and claim their rights. To achieve this, the project focused on four interconnected areas of change:

- Empowering young people to organise, lead, and support one another through solidarity, participation, and collective action.
- Expanding access to sustainable livelihoods by providing vocational training, skills development, and pathways to economic independence.
- Strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights through education, information, referrals, and access to youth-friendly services.
- Improving access to essential public services, including healthcare, education, water, sanitation, and social protection mechanisms.

At its heart, the project sought to do more than address immediate needs. It aimed to expand choices, strengthen resilience, and create the conditions for young people to build safer, healthier, and more prosperous lives for themselves and their communities.

How We Worked: Centering Youth Voice

Lasting change begins when young people are trusted to speak, lead, and act on the issues that affect their lives. At the heart of this project was a commitment to placing young people at the centre of change. Rather than designing solutions for youth, we created spaces where they could identify challenges, shape responses, and drive action within their communities.



Aerial picture of young women in Hopley during a “Pachoto” meeting where issues ranging from SRHR to livelihoods are discussed.

One of these spaces was the Pachoto Web Approach. Derived from the Shona word pachoto - around the fireplace - it created safe and confidential circles where young women could speak openly about their experiences, aspirations, relationships, health, and violence. In these spaces, silence gave way to solidarity.

Young women strengthened their knowledge of their rights, accessed support services, built peer networks, and transformed personal experiences into collective action. Together, they challenged harmful norms, mapped safety risks in their communities, and advocated for improved health and protection services.

The project also applied the LEAD Model - Learn, Engage, Act, Develop - which recognised young people as agents of change rather than passive recipients of support. Young people learned about their rights and opportunities, engaged families, community leaders, and service providers, acted through advocacy and community dialogue, and developed the skills and resources needed to build sustainable livelihoods. The impact of this approach can be seen in the lives of the young people whose stories fill these pages. There is Mavis, who survived child marriage and abuse and now mobilises more than 500 young women while building her own business.

Diana, whose leadership helped secure safer and more reliable water access for her community. Melinda, who left survival sex work behind and built a new career in panel beating. Douglas, who overcame substance abuse, started multiple small businesses, and is creating a more secure future for himself and his family. These stories are not exceptions. They are part of a broader shift across Hopley: young women speaking out against violence, young people turning skills into livelihoods, communities demanding better services, and youth accessing healthcare with greater confidence and less stigma.

The stories offer a glimpse into that transformation - one voice, one choice, and one changed life at a time.



Young women supported by ActionAid Zimbabwe testing electrical gadgets during their Auto Electrics training at Young Africa.

Project Reach In Numbers



Training

Young women and men who received training and/or technical assistance from the project.

1,825



Psychological Support And Sexual Productive Health And Rights

Young women and men receiving psycho-social support and referrals to sexual and reproductive health services.

3,723



Livelihoods And Life Skills

Young women and men adopting new livelihood activities.

2,868



Rights Assertion

Young women and men who can assert their rights.

4,831



Public Services

Young people reporting access to public services.

2,679



Youth Hub Users

The hub recorded new and continuing users.

1,463



Social Services

Young women and men with improved access to social services.

3,638



Diana Juta, 35, stands by the stiff bush pump she and four committee members fought to replace with solar-powered taps that cut water collection time for women.

Turning Voice Into Action: Diana's Fight For Safe Water

For most of her life, Diana Juta, 35, fetched water from unsafe wells and graveyards in Hopley. Clean water was never guaranteed, and the threat of cholera and typhoid was a constant reality for many families. "Cholera was not something we heard about on the news," Diana recalls. "It was something we worried about every week." For women and girls, the burden went beyond health risks. Long walks, long queues, and unreliable water sources consumed hours each day and exposed them to additional safety concerns.

Determined to change this reality, Diana joined AAZ's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project in 2021. Through the project, she received training in leadership, social accountability, and community engagement. The experience strengthened her confidence and equipped her with practical skills to engage decision-makers and advocate for improved public services. As a member of Hopley's community water committee - the youngest among five members, four of whom were women - Diana helped bring residents' concerns directly to the City of Harare. Together, the committee highlighted the health and safety risks associated with unsafe water sources and called for action.



Diana, left, with one of the water committee members at the solar-powered borehole site Charity Gudoricharima.

Their advocacy yielded results. Following sustained engagement, the City of Harare drilled a borehole fitted with a bush pump, providing families with a safer source of water. While this was an important step forward, the solution quickly revealed its limitations. Water remained rationed, and the pump handle was so stiff that many women struggled to operate it. “Every time I drew water from that bush pump, I came back tired and in pain,” Diana says. “It was too stiff for most of us women.”

Rather than accepting the situation, Diana and her fellow committee members returned to the City of Harare with a clear message: the community needed a water system that was not only functional but accessible to women, children, and older people. This time, their advocacy led to the

installation of a solar-powered borehole with taps. “Since the solar-powered borehole and taps came, everything changed,” Diana says. “Women are no longer spending all day at the borehole because we can draw water from the taps. This is a real step towards safety, dignity, and better health.”

The improvement has reduced the physical burden on women and made access to water safer and more convenient for many households. Yet Diana knows that the work is not finished. Water supply remains limited, and some families continue to face long waits and insufficient allocation, particularly larger households. She continues to advocate for additional water points and greater investment in water infrastructure so that all residents of Hopley can enjoy reliable access to safe water.

Diana's story demonstrates the power of informed and organised community action. What began as leadership training became something much bigger: a young woman helping her community secure a more dignified and responsive public service. Her journey is a reminder that when women have the confidence, knowledge, and opportunity to engage decision-makers, lasting change can flow far beyond a single water point.

From Independence To Dignity: Rudo's Journey To Economic Independence

For much of her married life, Rudo Kamurai, 31, a mother of four, lived without an independent income. Every financial decision depended on her husband, and disagreements over money often led to tension and conflict at home. “Whenever I asked for money, that's where the trouble started,” she recalls. “We fought all the time over it.”

Her daily life was shaped by uncertainty and stress, with limited control over household decisions or financial stability.

In 2023, Rudo was introduced to AAZ's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project. Through business management and entrepreneurship training, she began to see a different possibility for her life—one where she could generate her own income and contribute meaningfully to her household. She later enrolled in a six-month dressmaking course at the AAZ Waterfalls Global Platform, where she gained practical tailoring skills and confidence to start a small business. After completing her training, Rudo took a decisive step. She borrowed US\$40 from her sister and purchased a second-hand sewing machine. That investment marked the beginning of her independent livelihood.



Rudo Kamurai showing off her latest design from her homestead workshop in Hopley. Right: Some of Rudo's tracksuits she sewed.

With financial independence came a shift in her home life. “Now I’m financially empowered,” she says. “I no longer depend on my husband. We help each other to take care of the family, and we now live in peace. No GBV.” What began as a survival situation has evolved into shared responsibility and stability within the household.

Looking ahead, Rudo hopes to expand her business and formalise it under the name Angel Babies, with the goal of opening a dressmaking shop in Hopley. She sees her work not only as income generation, but as a pathway to long-term security for her children.

Rudo’s story illustrates how economic empowerment can shift power dynamics within households. When young women gain skills, income, and confidence, they are better able to negotiate their lives with dignity - and build more stable futures for their families.

Beyond Survival: A Young Woman Reclaims Her Future

Mavis (pseudonym), 26, was just 15 when she entered child marriage. Today, she is a mother of three, a survivor of abuse, an entrepreneur, and a community mobiliser helping hundreds of young women build safer and more empowered futures. After losing her parents in Domboshava, Mavis moved in with her grandmother. In 2011, following the birth of her first child, she relocated to Hopley. What began as marriage soon became a cycle of violence and control. “My ex-husband took advantage of my age. He beat and scolded me. I have three unresolved abuse cases at Hopley Police Station. Once he burnt my hand with hot cooking oil and I was hospitalised with serious burns,” she recalls. After recovering, she reported the abuse and left the relationship with her children. But leaving did not bring immediate relief.



Mavis facilitates a “Pachoto” session with women in the community.

With no stable income and rent to pay, Mavis turned to sex work as a means of survival. The years that followed exposed her to significant health risks, including untreated sexually transmitted infections and an unsafe abortion that nearly cost her life.

“I’m lucky to be alive,” she says. Her turning point came when she joined the Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People Project. “My health-seeking behaviour changed. I used to fear nurses would scold me. Through the project I received treatment for STIs and learned about my rights,” she explains. The support she received extended beyond healthcare. Through training, mentorship, and participation in the Pachoto programme, Mavis rebuilt her confidence and found her voice.

Today, she serves as a lead mobiliser for Pachoto sessions, connecting more than 500 young women and girls to information, support services, and empowerment opportunities. Her experience has also positioned her as a peer educator beyond Hopley. Through a partnership with Springs of Life in Epworth, she has trained 200 women involved in sex work on SRHR, gender-based violence, and health-seeking behaviour. At the same time, Mavis has built new livelihood opportunities for herself. She now produces detergents, runs a poultry project, and sells branded dishwashing liquid under the name Joy Dish Wash. "I stopped sex work after the trainings. Now I make detergents, run a poultry project, and sell branded dishwashing liquid," she says.

The income from her businesses has transformed life at home. She has moved from a single room into a three-roomed house, and her children are back in school and thriving. Looking ahead, Mavis hopes to expand her poultry enterprise. "My only limit now is space. If I can keep 50 chickens at a time, my poultry project will be fully viable," she says.

For Mavis, the project did more than provide skills or services. It restored something that had been taken from her at a young age: the ability to make choices about her own life. Today, she is not only building a future for her family - she is also helping hundreds of other young women believe that a different future is possible for them too.

From Survival To Strength: Melinda's Journey Of Healing And Empowerment



Melinda (pseudonym) doing a panel wipe on a client's car, a key step in panel beating.

At 31, Melinda (pseudonym) found herself in Hopley after her marriage ended in 2021. With no income, no stable support, and four children depending on her, survival quickly became her only focus. "I was left with nothing. I had to start over with my children depending on me for everything," she recalls. At first, she tried to rebuild through small informal trading. With a \$20 loan from her brother, she started selling undergarments in town. For a short time, she worked tirelessly to keep it going, but the business was eventually lost after her goods were confiscated by authorities. "I felt hopeless. I didn't know what else to do," she says. With no income and children out of school, Melinda turned to sex work between 2021 and 2023 as a means of survival. The experience exposed her to violence, exploitation, and serious health risks, including untreated illness and prolonged physical suffering.

"I didn't even know how to protect myself or negotiate for safe sex," she says. For months, she lived in pain and uncertainty - until a turning point came through a community referral to Pachoto sessions under AAZ's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project. For Melinda, that moment was life changing. "The first day I attended Pachoto, I cried. Everything they were explaining about STI symptoms - I had been living through it," she remembers. Through the programme, she was linked to PSZ for treatment and began her recovery.

More importantly, she gained knowledge, confidence, and a new sense of possibility. “That was the moment my life started to change,” she says. Determined to rebuild her life, Melinda made a decisive shift. In 2024, she enrolled at Young Africa Zimbabwe, AAZ’s partner under the project, training in panel beating - a trade often dominated by men. She learned practical technical skills including body filing, primer application, spray painting, and workplace safety, and completed her attachment at Issa Firm before graduating with an internationally recognised certificate. “I was so proud.

For the first time in a long time, I felt capable,” she shares. Although entry into formal employment in her field proved challenging, Melinda did not abandon her path. Today, she works at a Beverages Company as a security guard and fire stock controller, earning a steady income that supports her household. Her fire safety training also allows her to train colleagues, adding to her earnings and reinforcing her confidence. With this stability, Melinda has been able to send her children back to school, provide for their needs, and rebuild a sense of home. “I now see a future beyond survival,” she reflects.

Looking ahead, Melinda dreams of opening a garage in Hopley where she can use her skills not only to build her own livelihood but to train other young people facing similar challenges. “There are many youths trapped in sex work, drugs and poverty here,” she says. “If there are opportunities, we can change that.”

Melinda's story is one of many that show what becomes possible when young women are given access to information, skills, healthcare, and support systems that restore choice and dignity. She is no longer defined by survival, but by the future she is actively building - for herself, and for others.

From The Streets To Entrepreneurship: Douglas’ Path To A New Future



Douglas Chidyanembwa at his grocery tuckshop in Hopley, which stocks food items and LP gas refills.

Growing up in Hopley, Douglas Chadywanembwa, 27, spent much of his youth on the streets, caught in cycles of drug use and uncertainty. With no stable income or direction, the future once felt distant and unclear. “Before the project, I spent my time taking drugs and abusing substances. I had nothing else to do,” he recalls. His turning point came when community volunteers, supported through AAZ’s Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project, engaged him and a group of young men on the streets.

They were invited to Tariro Youth Centre, where Douglas began a six-month journey of skills development and personal rebuilding. At the centre, he was introduced to practical income-generating skills including floor polish production, petroleum jelly, detergent making, baking, and dressmaking. He chose to focus on floor polish and petroleum jelly - skills he immediately began applying to earn a living. “I started using those skills to earn money,” he says.

With time, Douglas developed structure and discipline in his daily life. He sold products at specific times of the day, gradually building a small but steady income. Alongside this, he joined an internal savings and lending (ISAL) group, contributing consistently and building financial habits he had never experienced before. "I entrusted my savings to my mother to keep it safe," he says. Over time, his savings grew to US\$500 - enough to take a decisive step forward. Douglas invested in a small business, opening a grocery tuckshop and later expanding into LP gas refilling services with two gas tanks. Today, his business generates up to US\$30 per day, providing a stable income that has transformed his household. He is now able to pay school fees for his children, support his family, and meet basic needs with dignity. "My business is doing well," he says proudly. "I am now able to take care of my children." But Douglas is thinking beyond survival.

His ambition is to grow into a larger wholesale business that can serve more people and create employment opportunities for other young people in Hopley. "My dream is to expand into a bigger wholesale grocery," he says. "With more capital, I can create even greater impact."

Douglas's journey reflects what becomes possible when young people are given access not only to skills, but to structure, support, and belief in their own potential. A life once shaped by drugs and uncertainty is now defined by entrepreneurship, responsibility, and hope.

Breaking Barriers, building A Home, Owning Her Future



Home sweet home: Loveness Madhume in front of her two-roomed house, which she built thanks to the entrepreneurial skills she learnt from AAZ trainings.

For much of her early life, Loveness Madhume, 27, lived in a cycle of daily struggle and uncertainty. Survival meant collecting plastic bottles and selling them for small amounts, often barely enough to cover basic needs for herself and her child. "Life was very hard," she recalls. "Sometimes I couldn't even afford proper meals or school fees for my child. We ate twice a day." As a young single mother, even basic education for her child was out of reach. Her child started school late due to a lack of ECD fees—a reality she describes as deeply painful. Her turning point came in 2021, when AAZ began working in her community through the Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for the Young People project. Through early awareness sessions and later Pachoto circles, Loveness joined other women in safe spaces where they discussed gender-based violence, women's rights, and shared lived experiences. "At first we didn't know our rights or where to report cases of GBV," she says. "The Pachoto sessions opened my eyes. I found my voice."

Over time, she grew from participant to community gender champion, supporting others to access services, report violence, and connect with the Police Victim Friendly Unit and health services at Tariro Clinic. The process was not only about awareness - it was about reclaiming agency and dignity. As the group deepened its work, a common reality emerged: unemployment was closely linked to vulnerability and violence.

In response, livelihood training was introduced, and Loveness chose to learn floor polish and petroleum jelly production. "I wanted something I could do with my own hands," she says. She began small, reinvesting income from recycling plastic bottles into raw materials for production. Slowly, her work expanded from survival income into a structured livelihood. To strengthen her financial stability, she joined an Internal Savings and Lending Scheme (ISAL) with other young women, saving consistently and building discipline over time.

By combining savings, recycling income, and business earnings, she gradually worked toward a long-term goal: a home of her own.



Left: Loveness Madhume. Right: Loveness showing bags of empty bottles she collects for recycling.

That goal became reality in 2025 when she secured land and began investing in construction materials. By 2026, she had built a two-roomed house - brick by brick, through savings, enterprise, and determination. "I am empowered," she says. "I have a home, I can pay school fees, provide food, and meet my family's needs. I am no longer struggling like before." Today, Loveness continues to grow her business while raising her children. Her first child is in Grade 3, and she is able to meet the needs of her household with dignity and stability. Looking ahead, she hopes to expand her market beyond Hopley and strengthen her branding and business networks. "I now see myself as a businesswoman," she says. "When my child asks for something, I can provide. That gives me dignity."

Loveness's journey reflects what becomes possible when women are given space to find their voice, build their skills, and access opportunities. From survival to stability, and from stability to ownership, her story is one of transformation rooted in resilience and collective support.

Psychological Support Model Builds A New Generation Of Confident Informed Women In Hopley

At 25, Grace Mugwenhi is transforming lives in Hopley—starting with her own. Once unsure of her rights and voice, she is now a confident gender champion. Through AAZ's Pachoto sessions, she facilitates conversations, supports women in crisis, and helps drive community-led change. Pachoto is an integrated psychosocial support approach rooted in SASA Together. It supports communities to understand power, challenge violence, and promote gender equality. Through community "join in circuit" approaches, it strengthens demand for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services, improves referrals for GBV, and increases uptake of health services.

Grace's journey began in 2023 through SRHR training under AAZ's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project. That training became a catalyst for broader community action. Today, she anchors "The Golden Girls"—a group of 10 young women who meet twice a month to share experiences and strengthen their knowledge on health, safety, and wellbeing.



Grace Mugwenhi

In a context where GBV remains prevalent, these sessions have become a vital support system. Women who once suffered in silence now know how to seek help through the Police Victim Friendly Unit, access guidance on safer relationships, and obtain maternal health support. Pregnant women are referred for vouchers to deliver safely at Tariro Clinic, reducing the risks previously associated with unsafe home births. The impact is visible in individual and collective change. In one instance, a woman supported through this network received counselling, completed vocational training, and has since become a peer supporter herself. For Grace, the change is deeply personal: "Before Pachoto, I didn't know my rights. Now I know my health comes first. I can go to the clinic without fear. I can decide when to get pregnant. That power was never mine before."

Grace's story reflects what becomes possible when knowledge, trust, and peer support come together. From silence to leadership, she is part of a growing movement of women who are not only improving their own lives, but reshaping what is possible for others in Hopley. Her journey is not individual transformation alone—it is collective change in action.

Finding Her Voice, Building Her Future: Samantha's Story Of Economic Empowerment



Samantha Isaac at her market stall, selling the home-made floor polish that changed her life.

Samantha Isaac, 27, is a mother of two children aged 8 and 4. Today, she runs four income streams: selling floor polish and petroleum jelly, participating in income savings and lending schemes, and operating an LP gas business.

Life was not always this stable. Samantha used to collect plastic containers, plastics, and cans to sell to a recycling company. The income was very small—20 cents per kg for containers, 30 cents for cans, and 15 cents for plastics—and could not cover basic household costs. She needed \$20 per month just to store bottles before collection and \$30 per month for rent. Her daughter's school fees were \$45 per term, and she often missed school when fees could not be paid.

"From recycling I was paid very little per kg, so it was difficult to raise money for food, rent, and school fees. There was a time I slept on the floor because my bed and blankets were taken by my landlord after I failed to pay rent," she says. Samantha's turning point came through AAZ's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project.

She joined training on income-generating activities and learned ISALs, as well as how to make detergent, floor polish, and petroleum jelly. She also took part in Pachoto sessions supported by AAZ, where she learned about her rights, including access to sexual and reproductive health services. "From recycling plastics, I started ISALs with other young women in the community through the Pachoto sessions," she says. With earnings from recycling, small-scale production, and ISALs, she was able to buy herself a bed and blankets - her first major improvement after months of sleeping on the floor. As her income grew, she added LP gas sales to meet demand in her community. "From then, my life was never the same," she says.

Samantha now pays her children's school fees on time. Her eldest daughter no longer misses lessons and was recently selected for a leadership role at school. There is now enough food at home, and through her ISAL contributions of US\$1 per day, she is also gradually acquiring household items. "I won't wait for a man to look after me and my children. I can support my children and myself, thanks to ActionAid. Sometimes depending on a husband can also lead to GBV," she says. Samantha now needs capital to expand her floor polish business, sell in bulk to supermarkets, and brand her products. Her journey shows how skills, savings, and support can turn survival into independence.

Powering Change: A Young Woman Redefining What Is Possible In Auto Electrical Work



Left: Privilege Dzehonye at Young Africa's Auto Electrics workshop. Right: Privilege testing a bulb while other students assist.

For Privilege Dzehonye, 24, life in Hopley once meant financial uncertainty and limited opportunities to build a stable future for herself and her young child. Living with her parents and raising her five-year-old daughter, she struggled to generate a consistent income and depended on irregular, low-paying opportunities to meet basic needs. Her turning point came in 2023, when she joined Pachoto sessions supported by AAZ's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project. In these sessions, she gained information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, alongside broader discussions on livelihoods, confidence, and decision-making. What began as learning soon became ambition. Inspired to pursue a more sustainable future, Privilege enrolled in a one-year Auto Electrics course at Young Africa in 2024, supported through the project. She completed six months of classroom training followed by six months of industrial attachment, gaining practical experience in vehicle lighting systems, batteries, and electrical wiring. By the time she graduated in December 2024, she had not only acquired technical skills, but a new sense of identity.

Today, Privilege is applying her skills within her community, taking on part-time auto electrical work and steadily building her reputation in a field traditionally dominated by men. With her earnings, she is gradually investing in essential tools such as test lights and multimeters, enabling her to take on more complex work. "My work is showing that women are capable of doing jobs that are often considered for men," she says. Alongside her technical work, she also runs a small perfume business, drawing on the entrepreneurship skills gained through Pachoto sessions to diversify her income. Through these efforts, she is now able to support her daughter, including paying school fees and meeting basic household needs. Yet Privilege's growth is still constrained by limited access to equipment. "My wish is to have a complete toolbox with all the equipment I need," she explains. "There are opportunities in my community, but sometimes I cannot take them because I do not have adequate tools." Despite these challenges, her trajectory continues to shift. What was once a life defined by limited options is becoming one shaped by skill, income, and confidence.

Privilege's journey demonstrates more than individual progress. It reflects a quiet but powerful shift in social norms - where young women are not only entering non-traditional trades, but sustaining themselves within them. With the right tools and continued support, she represents a growing generation of women who are expanding what is possible in Hopley, one repair at a time.

Resilience Against the Odds: Building A Stable Future From Uncertainty



Left: Munashe Kampini attending to a client during a manicure. Right: Munashe outside Young Africa Beauty Therapy classrooms.

At 23, Munashe Kampini carries significant responsibility for her household. She is raising her young child, supporting her mother, and preparing for the arrival of another baby - all while working to build a more stable future for her family. Life in Hopley has often meant navigating uncertainty and limited opportunity. For Munashe, this included a time when she had little knowledge of her rights and limited confidence in accessing services or speaking out in situations of abuse or vulnerability. "I didn't know my rights back then," she recalls.

"If I faced any abuse, I wouldn't have known how to report it." Fear also shaped her relationship with healthcare services. Like many young women in her community, she avoided clinics due to concerns about judgment and negative treatment when seeking sexual and reproductive health services. That began to change when AAZ introduced SRHR sessions and women's empowerment discussions through the Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project. Through these spaces, Munashe gained knowledge,

confidence, and the ability to engage services and decisions affecting her life. With this foundation, she was selected in 2022 for skills training at Young Africa, where she studied beauty therapy, specialising in manicure, pedicure, and make-up. She completed six months of training followed by four months of practical attachment. While her trade provides some income, she continues to face financial pressure as the main provider for her family. "I pay US\$35 in rent every month at the salon, and my child's school fees are US\$45 per term," she says. "I am the breadwinner. I make sure my child and my mother have food."

Despite these challenges, Munashe is focused on building toward independence rather than remaining in survival mode. She has a clear vision of establishing her own fully branded beauty business, estimating that with approximately US\$300 for equipment and supplies, she could take that step. "I'm focused on my next step—starting my own beauty business," she says.

Munashe's journey reflects both the power and the limitations of opportunity. Training has given her skills and confidence, but her full potential remains tied to access to resources needed to translate skills into sustainable enterprise.

Small Savings, Big Change: How Collective Finance Builds Dignity



Left: Grace Tapera. Right: Tapera, centre, during an internal savings and lending scheme meeting with fellow women.

For Grace Tapera, 25, daily life in Hopley once meant constant financial pressure—balancing rent, household needs, and caring for her young child with very limited resources. “I had to think about everything at once,” she recalls. “Rent, food, my child’s needs. It was not easy.” Her situation began to shift in 2021 when she joined AAZ’s Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project and became part of an ISA group with 10 other young women. The model was simple: each member contributed a small weekly amount, and members took turns accessing loans that were repaid with modest interest. What appeared at first to be small, routine contributions soon became a structured system of mutual support. “At first, I thought it was just small money,” she says. “But over time, it taught us how to save, plan, and believe in ourselves.”

As consistency built discipline, Grace began to experience tangible changes in her life. She was able to pay rent more reliably, purchase food and clothing, and gradually replace basic household items that had previously been out of reach. “Before ISALs, even basic things felt difficult to afford,” she says. “I used to rely on second-hand items. But slowly, I began

to change how I managed my life.” These financial shifts also had wider implications for her well-being and decision-making. With improved stability, she gained greater control over household planning and access to health-related services, including family planning support, in a context where affordability and access remain significant challenges.

Alongside her participation in the savings group, Grace began building her own income-generating activity, starting a small business selling homemade samosas within her community. “I used what I saved to start my business,” she explains. Today, her income from both savings discipline and enterprise allows her to meet her household needs with greater consistency and dignity.

Rent is paid on time, her child is supported, and she has begun to build financial independence step by step. For Grace, the impact of ISALs goes beyond income. “It means I can take care of my child, pay my rent, and manage my health needs,” she says. “It taught me how to build a future instead of waiting for one.”

Her story reflects the quiet power of collective savings: small contributions that, over time, create stability, confidence, and expanded choice for young women navigating economic hardship in Hopley.

Trash Out, Taps In: Young People Drive Cleaner Water And healthier Communities In Hopley



Left: Clean-up campaign exercise in Hopley. Right: Tinashe Ravurayi.

In 2025, following a severe cholera outbreak, young people in Hopley took action to protect their community and restore dignity to their environment. At the centre of this response was 23-year-old Tinashe Ravurayi, who helped mobilise a small group of volunteers to begin community clean-up efforts around water points and waste-dumping sites. What began as a response by just three young people quickly evolved into a broader youth-led movement focused on public health, hygiene, and community responsibility.

The initiative was sparked when Tinashe and his peers approached the sister in charge at Tariro Clinic, requesting permission to carry out clean-up activities. With support from the clinic, they were provided with protective equipment and guidance, enabling them to begin structured community action.

Their motivation was strengthened by prior learning through AAZ's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project. Through health, hygiene, and Pachoto dialogues, they had been exposed to concepts of collective responsibility, disease prevention, and community-led change.

Armed with this knowledge, the group organised regular clean-up campaigns twice a month, focusing on Fridays. They removed waste from high-risk areas, including water points, and worked with City of Harare services to ensure proper disposal of collected refuse. As the initiative gained momentum, community participation increased significantly. Churches, local leaders, and service providers began mobilising residents, and participation grew to between 25 and 30 volunteers per session.

The impact on public health was quickly visible. "Before the campaign, Hopley recorded cholera cases every single week," Tinashe explains. "After the campaign, we would go a whole month with zero cases." Beyond clean-up activities, the group also began advocating for improved access to safe water. Recognising the link between sanitation and disease, they engaged the City of Harare to address water shortages.

Their advocacy contributed to the installation of an additional borehole in Hopley Zone 2, increasing access to safe water for residents. Despite these gains, challenges remain, including limited protective equipment for volunteers and the need for additional water infrastructure to serve a growing population.



Alyn Jack

The movement has also created wider ripple effects. Among the volunteers is 26-year-old single mother, Alyn Jack (left), who was inspired through Pachoto sessions to strengthen her own livelihood journey. She now runs a small home-based bakery, producing cakes for community events, alongside her participation in clean-up activities. For Tinashe, the initiative has also reinforced his own path. As a trained fashion designer, he has begun formalising his business with support from ActionAid Zimbabwe and registered his company through the Zimbabwe Youth Council, advancing his economic independence.

Together, their stories reflect a broader shift taking place in Hopley: young people are not only responding to crises, but actively shaping solutions that improve health, restore dignity, and strengthen community resilience.

Skills Training Opens A Path From Uncertainty To Opportunity



Allan Chirongwe testing his tools and troubleshooting an electrical issue at Young Africa.

At 19, Allan Chirongwe is beginning to build a future grounded in technical skill, discipline, and growing independence. After completing school in 2023, Allan faced limited opportunities and uncertainty about his next steps. Like many young people in his community, formal employment was not immediately available, and he relied on occasional informal work alongside his father, who is an electrician. This early exposure introduced him to the trade but did not provide a stable livelihood. "I had nothing else to do after school," he explains. His pathway shifted when he was selected for technical training supported by AAZ through a partner institution, Young Africa.

Motivated by his early exposure to electrical work, Allan enrolled in a 12-month Electronic Technology programme. The course combined structured classroom learning with practical experience, including a six-month industrial attachment. During this period, he developed hands-on competence in electrical wiring, socket installation, and the repair of electrical systems and appliances.

By December 2024, Allan had completed his training and transitioned from informal exposure to certified technical skills.

Today, he applies his training within his community in Hopley, taking on part-time electrical jobs such as household wiring and repairs. Each assignment provides both income and further practical experience. With his earnings, Allan is gradually investing in essential tools, including screwdrivers and multimeters, to strengthen his capacity to take on more complex work independently.

"I am using the money to buy my own tools like screwdrivers and multimeters," he says. Looking ahead, Allan is focused on expanding his practice into a fully independent electrical business. He is steadily acquiring additional equipment such as grinders and drills, with the long-term goal of formalising his services and increasing his client base. "My plan is to grow from here," he says.

Allan's journey reflects how structured technical training can shift young people from uncertainty toward productive livelihoods. Through skills development and practical experience, he is laying the foundation for a future defined by stability, self-reliance, and enterprise.

Called To Lead: Rosemary's Journey From Hopley To Hope



Rosemary Chiripanyanga, all smiles as she cares for a baby while the mother attends a dressmaking course.

At 24, Rosemary Chiripanyanga is building a life that connects learning, care, and community support in Hopley. Before joining ActionAid Zimbabwe's programmes, she describes a sense of limitation and uncertainty about her future. Opportunities felt distant, and she did not imagine herself in roles that required formal training or leadership. "I thought opportunity was for other people, not for girls from Hopley," she says.

Her journey began in 2021 when she joined ActionAid Zimbabwe's Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project, where she was introduced to foundational business and life skills. This marked the beginning of a gradual shift in how she understood her potential. In 2024, with support from the programme, Rosemary was selected among a group of young women to pursue formal training at Young Africa Training and Skills Development Centre in Chitungwiza. She enrolled in a one-year ECD course, gaining both theoretical knowledge and practical caregiving skills. Following her training, Rosemary began working at AAZ's Global Platform as a childminder.

In this role, she cares for children of young mothers from Hopley while they attend training programmes, ensuring that mothers are able to participate fully in skills development without interruption. In doing so, she plays a critical role in enabling other young women to learn, earn, and build livelihoods. Through this work, she earns an income that has contributed to greater stability in her household.

She is now able to meet her basic needs and support her family with greater consistency, while gaining confidence in her own independence. "Now I don't just wait for my husband's income," she says. "I contribute, and I can plan." Beyond income, Rosemary's role has given her a strong sense of purpose.

By supporting mothers across multiple training programmes, she has become part of a wider system that strengthens care, learning, and participation for young women in her community. Looking ahead, Rosemary hopes to establish her own pre-school in Hopley, creating a dedicated early childhood learning space for young children while fully applying her Early Childhood Development training. She envisions securing a stand and start-up support to make this possible. For Rosemary, early childhood education is no longer just a qualification - it is a pathway to building opportunity for others.



Rosemary with some of the children in her care during mothers' dressmaking class.

Her journey reflects how skills, when combined with opportunity and community support, can position young women not only as learners and earners, but as essential contributors to the systems that sustain others.

From Aimless Days To Purposeful Work: A Young Man Builds A Livelihood In Hopley



Alexio Sande

At 29, Alexio Sande describes a life that once felt without direction, shaped by unemployment and long periods of uncertainty about the future. “I was a person with no vision or mission in life,” he says. Like many young people in his community, the absence of stable opportunities meant long days without structured work or income.

Over time, this contributed to a sense of frustration and uncertainty about his future. His pathway began to shift in 2024 when he was introduced to AAZ’s Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project. He first engaged in business management and entrepreneurial skills training, which helped him begin to reimagine his future and identify practical steps toward income generation. With further support through the programme, Alexio enrolled at Young Africa, where he studied Electronics Technology.

Over the course of the training, he developed practical skills in electrical systems, wiring, and repair work through both classroom learning and hands-on experience. He graduated in December 2024 with improved technical competence and renewed direction.

Following his training, Alexio began taking on short-term electrical jobs within and beyond his community. He used the income from this work to invest in equipment and gradually establish a small enterprise focused on printing, photocopying, and customised T-shirt production. “I used the money I earned from an electrical contract in Masasa to buy a printer and other equipment,” he explains. “That is how I started my business.”

Today, Alexio operates his business in Hopley, generating income that supports his household and provides a more stable livelihood. Each new assignment allows him to reinvest in tools, expand his services, and strengthen the foundation of his enterprise. He has also continued to build his business capacity through additional training in digital marketing and graphic design, which he now applies to design promotional materials and reach clients more effectively. Looking ahead, Alexio plans to expand his enterprise by improving his workspace, increasing production capacity, and formally registering his business under the name ALROSE Prints. For Alexio, the shift is not only economic. It is a transition from uncertainty to structure, from inactivity to enterprise, and from survival to purposeful work.

His journey reflects a broader transformation taking place in Hopley: when young people are given access to skills, opportunity, and support systems, they are able to rebuild livelihoods, restore dignity, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Concluding Reflections: From Vulnerability To Agency In Hopley



Rejoice Mutonhori, an agroecology trainer, inside the greenhouse at the Zimbabwe Global Platform in Waterfalls, where practical horticulture training took place.

The experiences documented in this booklet illustrate a consistent pattern of change across Hopley. While each story is unique, together they reveal a shared trajectory: young people moving from uncertainty to capability, from dependency to economic agency, and from isolation to collective action. Across different pathways - whether through vocational training, small enterprise development, savings groups, community leadership, or skills-based employment - a number of common threads emerge.

Access to skills has enabled young people to generate income. Savings and group-based financial systems have strengthened stability and planning. Community platforms have created spaces for dialogue, accountability, and support.

Together, these elements have contributed not only to improved livelihoods, but to shifts in confidence, decision-making, and social relations within households and communities. Importantly, the change observed is not solely economic. It is also social and relational. Young women are negotiating greater autonomy within their homes.

Young men are transitioning from cycles of inactivity and risk toward structured livelihoods. Communities are increasingly engaging local authorities on issues of water, health, and service delivery. These shifts point to a deeper transformation in how young people see themselves and how they are seen by others.

At the same time, the stories highlight the persistence of structural constraints. Limited access to start-up capital, inadequate equipment, and gaps in public infrastructure continue to shape the pace and scale of individual progress. These realities underscore an important lesson: skills and motivation alone are not sufficient. Sustainable change requires continued investment in enabling environments where young people can translate capability into long-term economic security.

The Dignified Lives and Decent Livelihoods for Young People project demonstrates that when integrated approaches are applied, combining skills development, psychosocial support, community engagement, and improved service access, meaningful and lasting change becomes possible. The role of partnerships has been central to this process, ensuring that young people are supported not through isolated interventions, but through a coordinated system of opportunities.

As this phase of work concludes, the experiences from Hopley provide a clear message. Young people are not waiting for change; they are already creating it. What they require is continuity - of opportunity, of support systems, and of investment in the spaces that allow their potential to grow. The future of Hopley will not be defined by its challenges alone, but by how effectively its young people are enabled to transform those challenges into pathways of opportunity, dignity, and collective progress.



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Picture credits, Project and Editorial Team

Front Cover: Youth from Hopley show off products they created following a two-month dressmaking course with Vichelle Feminine, in partnership with ActionAid Zimbabwe.

Back Cover: Talent Bhosha (23), a solar installation graduate trained at Young Africa with support from an ActionAid Zimbabwe scholarship.

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