

## APPRENTICESHIP PUTS REFUGEE REPORTER BACK INTO ACTION

Grace Rutha is a survivor who knows when to seize a good opportunity. As a reporter in Kenya, she covered the serious crimes that occurred around the 2007 presidential election, making her a target of the oppressive regime.<sup>12</sup> She was forced to go into hiding for several years through a witness protection program following investigations by the International Criminal Court that identified her as a potential witness. By 2013, after receiving threats on her life and seeing colleagues disappear, she sought a better life in Philadelphia. Yet she soon found herself unemployed and forced to live in a homeless shelter. To treat her HIV, she connected with Philadelphia FIGHT, a community-based organization that provides AIDS and HIV treatment for low-income people. After volunteering with Philadelphia FIGHT and developing a passion for its community-based approach to health delivery, she eagerly accepted a slot the agency offered her in an apprenticeship program to work as a community health worker while receiving classroom and on-the-job training.

The Community Health Worker (CHW) apprenticeship program was launched in 2012 through a partnership between Temple University Health System (TUHS), the Temple University Center for Social Policy and Community Development (CSPCD) and the District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund (a joint union-employer training fund that serves both union members and low-income communities).<sup>13</sup> The program was born out of recognition that health care delivery would be more effective and efficient if laypeople could be trained to

improve communication, outreach and coordination of care between health providers and recipients. The three partners developed a curriculum to train CHWs in a range of skills, including service coordination, patient advocacy, cultural competency, and communication and interpersonal skills so that the CHW becomes a strong “bridge” between care providers and patients. The program specifically targets individuals from disadvantaged communities in Philadelphia to fill the apprenticeship slots.

After only a few months on the job, Grace could see the value of the skills she was developing through the apprenticeship. She was assigned to work with a woman living with HIV who had limited English proficiency and a distrust of the medical system. Upon visiting her at home, Grace realized the woman was taking excessive amounts of HIV medication and required a visit to the emergency room. Over the course of more visits and conversations with her, Grace was finally able to gain the woman’s trust and set her on a healthy path, whereby she now is a strong advocate for Philadelphia FIGHT. According to Grace, the CHW role is “saving the government money by preventing people from going to ER. Clients go to ER because they are depressed and have no one to talk to. Once you establish trust with them, we save the government that expense. We tell them if they are using drugs or are depressed, we can get them resources.”

Not only is Grace doing valuable work that benefits her new community in Philadelphia, but she is earning enough money to live in her own apartment. At the start of the yearlong apprenticeship, she acquired medical benefits, paid leave and an \$11 hourly wage working twice a week and attending classes the other three days. After three months, she began earning \$12 per hour, then jumped to \$15 per hour upon completing the program. Later she was promoted to work as a patient care concierge for Philadelphia FIGHT, where she improved the experience for patients in the clinic. She recently received her third promotion as a program assistant in TEACH, a Philadelphia FIGHT program, where she will provide emotional support through the seven TEACH programs and act as co-instructor for their HIV and AIDS curricula.

Grace Rutha shares her inspiring story at the Apprenticeship Forward conference, held in May 2017 in Washington, D.C.

