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**Mentors Help AGSP Scholar Pursue Her Education**

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Since the death of her father in 2000, life has been tough for 14-year-old Anne Mchinta. Anne's eldest sister, who is now 21-years-old, dropped out of school at the age of 16 to get married. Her brother also dropped out of school while in standard 4 to take care of their aging grandmother.

"Since the death of our father, we have experienced hell on earth, as our mother cannot fully support us from the proceeds of the local beer brewery and sometimes forces me to be absent from school and assist her with the beer selling. When I try to reason with her, she asks me to leave her house and go to my late father's village. Sometimes, she has been coaxing me to serve the customers so that in turn they can coerce me into sex for money. This has been a long-time battle which I have always won," Anne confided.

In addition to being an orphan, Anne is very hard-working in school, which is why community members on the selection committee chose her to receive a scholarship from the USAID-funded Africa Education Initiative AMBASSADORS GIRLS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (AEI-AGSP). Anne knows that being able to attend school can solve some of the problems she was facing, and this has motivated her to work even harder in school.

Winrock International partners in Malawi with the Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM), a local non-governmental organization, to implement AGSP and provide high-quality mentoring. As an AGSP beneficiary, Anne is mentored by two women, Mrs. Chirambo, a teacher in the community, and Mrs. Msinde. Their guidance and support have enabled her to be assertive and goal oriented, so much so that she stood up to her mother's demands to work in her beer bar, causing her to be thrown out of the house. She fled to her grandmother's home, which is located far from school. Seeing that her education and future were in jeopardy, Anne approached her mentors and explained to them what she was experiencing.



Upon hearing her story, the mentors visited Anne's mother at her house. At first, it was difficult to talk with the mother because she was busy serving customers. The mentors came back the following day, however, and were able to talk to her. They discussed Anne's concerns and then explained the importance of girls' education, the effects of premature sexual initiation and the risks of HIV/AIDS infection, as well as the dangers of early marriage. Anne's mother was advised not to involve the girl in the business of beer selling, as this could affect her health and her performance in school. The mother later apologized to the mentors for her poor parenting skills.

Commenting on her academic performance, the headmistress at her school, Mrs. Nyirenda, explained, "Anne is a very intelligent and active girl in class. Just imagine: she was in position 13 in Term 1, but managed to move to position 6 in Term 2. This is why it was a concern to me when I heard that she was not reporting for classes for a week. As such, I advised the mentors to make a follow up visit to her. I was shocked to hear that she was chased out of her mother's house to a village very far away from this school."

Anne, who aspires to be a nurse, is striving hard to achieve her long-sought dream. This is why she reached out and confided in her mentor. "I don't want to get married at this age because I want to get educated and become a nurse. Since the mentors' talk with my mother, I have not experienced any problems of late. It is my sincere hope that my mother changes for the better. She should allow me to go to school, do my homework and study without disturbances." Through its local mentors and field officers, CRECCOM continues to monitor the situation to ensure that Anne has a chance to achieve her dreams.



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