2017

ALUMNAE AT WORK

STORIES OF CHANGE
Dear Friend of Akilah,

In January, Akilah celebrated its fourth graduation. Eighty-two students crossed the stage, received their diplomas, and will start the next chapter of their lives. Our alumnae network is now 227—women strong.

We see that Akilah alumnae are outperforming their peers, securing in-demand jobs, and making valuable contributions to their families and communities. But we wanted to go further. We wanted to test Akilah’s Theory of Change, an evidence-based model for preparing women to lead productive, purposeful lives. The Theory of Change stipulates three critical program elements: market-relevant education, leadership training, and career development.

We conducted an extensive alumnae evaluation to assess whether that model is working. More specifically, we wanted to know if our diploma programs effectively prepare graduates to secure jobs and become leaders in their workplaces, households, and communities.

The three-month evaluation included alumnae surveys, focus groups, and interviews with community leaders, employers, and graduates. The report will be released in spring 2017 and available for download at www.akilahinstitute.org.

We found that Akilah’s model has demonstrated results:

- At least one year after graduation, 89% of Akilah alumnae secured and retained employment.
- Alumnae earn an average of 12-13x the national median per capita income.
- Ninety–percent of graduates are supporting at least one individual or family member financially.

But numbers alone can’t provide the full picture. You’re holding a collection of individual stories from some of the alumnae surveyed in the evaluation. Their experiences illustrate the impact of an Akilah education on a personal level.

The results of the alumnae evaluation will inform future planning as Akilah scales its operations and grows its alumnae network. It will also be used as an accountability tool to ensure that we continue to prepare our graduates for meaningful professional lives.

I invite you to read through the alumnae stories and reach out to us with questions. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Ashley Hollister
Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist, Akilah Institute

www.akilahinstitute.org
MONITORING & EVALUATION: THE PROCESS

GOALS OF THE EVALUATION
- To validate the Akilah Institute’s Theory of Change
- To assess the relevance of Akilah’s academic programming and its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission:
  - To prepare young women to achieve economic independence and obtain leadership roles in the workplace and in society.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS
- To what extent does the program address an identified need in the private sector?
- To what extent is the program helping graduates to achieve economic independence and leadership roles?
- What were the unintended outcomes, whether positive or negative?
- What were the particular features of the program and context that made a difference?

AKILAH’S RESULTS FRAMEWORK
Akilah addresses the skills gap and prepares students for the workforce through a competency-based education model designed to meet the needs of the private sector. Through coursework, mentorship, extracurricular activities, and community service, students develop soft skills, giving them the power and confidence to tap into their full potential and effect positive change in their families and communities.

- Graduates of Akilah achieve economic independence
- Graduates show leadership in their workplace
- Graduates show leadership in their communities
- Graduates show leadership in their households

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY
A representative sample of 75 graduates was drawn for the survey.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Survey Implementation</th>
<th>Focus Group Discussions &amp; Key Informant Interviews</th>
<th>Synthesis: Review and Triangulation of Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class of 2012</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class of 2012</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class of 2013</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<td>Class of 2013</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class of 2015</td>
<td>Hospitality Management</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class of 2015</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>36%</td>
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*All graduates from the classes of 2012 and 2013 studied Hospitality Management, and all graduates from the Class of 2015 remained in Rwanda for work.

Akhilah alumna Nadia T3 (top row, right) with community members and Akilah M&E Specialist Ashley Hollister (top row, third from right).
**THEORY OF CHANGE**

**IMPACT**
- Young women achieve economic independence and obtain leadership roles in the workplace and in society
- Young women secure employment in their career pathways
- Young women are career ready
- Students achieve mastery of Program and Core Competencies

**VISION**
- African women lead productive and purposeful lives according to their own definition and invest in their families, communities, and nations

**OUTCOMES**
- Information Systems
- Hospitality Management
- Business Management & Entrepreneurship

**PROGRAM COMPETENCIES**
- English & Communication
- Information Technology & Quantitative Literacy
- Personal Growth & Self-Confidence
- Leadership & Responsibility
- Career Navigation
- Critical Thinking

**CORE COMPETENCIES**
- Students are promising young African women who have graduated secondary school and come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds

**ENROLLMENT**

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**AKILAH’S CHANGE NARRATIVE**

**CONTEXT**
By 2035, an additional 100 million people will join sub-Saharan Africa’s working-age population, more than the rest of the world combined. However, many young people lack the education and skills to actively participate in the region’s economic growth. This is especially true for women. In East Africa, nearly 85% of women still work in subsistence agriculture, living on less than $2 a day. In Rwanda, fewer than 8% of university-aged women enroll in higher education. East Africa urgently needs an effective and affordable education-to-workforce model to capitalize on the tremendous untapped potential of its young people; the Akilah Institute, Rwanda’s only all-women’s college, fills this void and serves as a bridge between women, the workforce, and a rapidly developing economy.

**VISION**
African women lead productive and purposeful lives according to their own definition and invest in their families, communities, and nations. This vision forms the core of our evaluation and accountability framework outlined below.

**THREE ESSENTIAL PATHWAYS**
Akilah’s private sector partners have cited employees’ leadership and industry-specific technical skills as critical to their workforce success. Akilah graduates are more than capable employees; they are leaders and job creators with long-lasting and fulfilling careers. To this end, students’ education is centered on three essential areas to ensure that young women graduate career ready.
- Market-Related and Competency-Based Education: Akilah prepares students for the workforce through a competency-based education model designed to meet the needs of the private sector. Our student-centered approach requires learners to demonstrate competency in a range of measurable skills related to their diploma in Information Systems, Hospitality Management, or Business Management and Entrepreneurship.
- Leadership Skills: Through coursework, extracurricular activities, and community service, students develop key leadership competencies that give students the power and confidence to tap into their full potential and effect positive change in their families and communities.
- Career Development: Akilah works closely with the private sector and other organizations to connect students with internships and jobs in Rwanda, East Africa, the US, and Europe; in addition, students learn essential skills for successfully navigating the workplace, such as job search skills, networking, and professionalism.

**PROGRAM HYPOTHESIS**
If Akilah targets promising, young East African women who have graduated secondary school and come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and provides them with market-relevant and competency-based education, leadership skills training, and career development services, then they will develop proficiency or mastery of the core competencies listed.
Students simultaneously build program competencies in Information Systems, Hospitality Management, or Business Management and Entrepreneurship.

**CORE COMPETENCIES**
- Critical Thinking: The ability to identify and predict issues and challenges, evaluate evidence carefully, and apply reasoning in order to reach informed conclusions.
- Personal Growth and Self-Confidence: The ability to present oneself convincingly and demonstrate belief in one’s own ability to grow and accomplish goals.
- Leadership and Responsibility: The ability to critically assess, explore, negotiate, and pursue career aspirations.

- Career Navigation: Demonstrated interpersonal skills, ethics, and the ability to make reasoned judgments based on an improved understanding, and appreciation of diversity across local, regional, national, and global communities.
- Information Technology and Quantitative Literacy: The ability to locate, understand, synthesize, and effectively use information and data in a technological and data-driven society.
- English and Communication: The ability to interact with diverse audiences using all forms of communication and understand, interpret, and present complex materials using English.
When Jacky Mutamba began her studies at Akilah in 2010, she was 35 years old and the mother of two small children. After 11 years away from school, a Diploma in Hospitality Management at the Akilah Institute seemed an unlikely choice.

But Jacky knew that it was the right decision for her.

“I was a housewife but I always wanted to go back to school. I was struggling to find a way to make it happen. When I heard about Akilah, I knew I wanted to join. I heard about their focus on leadership. I thought, ‘That’s something we always need, not just in our careers but also at home and in our community,’” Jacky explains, while leading the way through her banana fields.

Convincing her husband that she should go to school instead of staying at home with their small children was not easy.
“My daughters are confident and have their own dreams. The oldest wants to go to Oxford. The youngest wants to go to Harvard and study to be a doctor. They are informed and confident.”

But Jacky insisted. And with encouragement from her mother, she joined Akilah’s first class of students in 2010.

“My mother never got an education. When I told her I wanted to start at Akilah, she encouraged me, even though it was unusual to start at such a late age. She asked me, ‘Do you even remember how to study after all these years?’ She was so happy when I got accepted. She sent me 5000 francs to go and buy a notebook.”

Today, five years after graduating with Akilah’s Class of 2012, Jacky runs a large farm on the outskirts of Kigali on land she and her husband bought together.

Starting with just a small plot in 2013, step by step, Jacky grew her farm to more than 7 hectares. She grows maize, bananas, millet, cassava, and groundnuts. Jacky and her husband no longer need to buy food – the farm supplies all of their fresh produce. Jacky currently sells her harvest to markets, but she wants to start selling to schools to improve nutrition among children and grow her business.

The leadership lessons that Jacky took with her from Akilah come into play every day on the farm. She manages four permanent employees, and in the busy seasons, she takes on several casual workers to help with harvesting.

“To me, leadership is to be myself no matter what. A leader doesn’t give others a hard time. I treat my staff well. I try to be humble and lead by example. If they are out in the field working hard, I join them,” Jacky explains.

Two of Jacky’s employees recently bought their own land with their salaries from the farm. “That makes me feel very proud. I want to support my community, and this is a good way of doing it. They’re growing, and I’m supporting them to do so.”

Jacky used income from her farm to send her two daughters to a private school in Kigali. They speak fluent English, take part in the school magazine, and dream of becoming doctors and engineers. Her daughters’ experiences and opportunities are worlds apart from Jacky’s own upbringing. She grew up in exile in Uganda and, when she was 18, returned to Rwanda, where she worked on her mother’s farm. During her childhood, access to education was a challenge, especially for girls. The school was an hour away. There was no food and very little encouragement for girls to be ambitious.

“Girls now have so many opportunities compared to when I was a little girl. In our generation, girls were told to not make eye contact or speak up. Now there is no limit. My daughters are confident and have their own dreams. The oldest wants to go to Oxford. The youngest wants to go to Harvard and study to be a doctor. They are informed and confident in a way that we were not.”

For Jacky, joining Akilah was the first step to taking matters into her own hands and building a future for herself and her family.

“I would not have bought this farm without Akilah. I would have still been a housewife. My kids would not be in a good school. Seeing how much I’ve grown through Akilah changed my husband’s mindset. We’re partners now. We’re running this business together.”

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE HOUSEHOLD

90%

OF GRADUATES ARE SUPPORTING AT LEAST ONE INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY MEMBER FINANCIALLY*

100%

OF 2012 GRADUATES PROVIDE SOME SORT OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY MEMBER

*Financial support was assessed across the following categories: education, healthcare, housing, food, and livelihoods. On average, graduates are paying for 15 other individuals’ education, two other individuals’ healthcare, one other individual’s housing, two other individuals’ food, and one individual’s livelihood (including business support and agricultural inputs).
EMMANUELLA UWIMBABAZI
MANAGER
SISTER LEADER

After graduating with a Diploma in Hospitality Management in 2012, Emmanuella UWimbabazi has worked steadily to build a successful career with Marriott International, the world’s largest hospitality brand. Today, she is the Event Booking Center Sales Manager at Kigali Marriott Hotel and has aspirations to climb even further up the career ladder.

Emmanuella was among a group of Akilah alumnae who traveled to the Middle East to undergo training at Marriott’s properties there. The journey took her to several different hotels and positions in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The experience would prepare her for a career at Marriott’s new hotel in Kigali.

“I set a goal to be the youngest manager in my field at the Marriott. My supervisor always laughed at me and told me to take it easy. But I knew I could do it.”

“My experiences in Dubai and Abu Dhabi were great. I met a lot of international people and was exposed to many different cultures. Personally and professionally, I gained so much. It is completely different than Rwanda. It’s very fast-paced and incredibly competitive. It made me learn a lot about being independent.”
Marriott International opened its first sub-Saharan Africa location in Rwanda last year. More than 40 Akilah graduates, pictured below with Marriott International CEO Arne Sorenson, were on staff.

“I LEARNED SO MUCH ABROAD, BUT I WANTED TO COME HOME TO THE COUNTRY THAT INVESTED IN ME. HOW WILL RWANDA AND MY COMMUNITY BENEFIT FROM ME WORKING ABROAD? WE NEED QUALIFIED LOCAL PEOPLE WHO CAN DO A GOOD JOB IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY, AND I WAS PROUD TO COME HOME AND BE PART OF THAT.”

The competitiveness and exposure to a new culture encouraged Emmanuella to push herself professionally.

“I set a goal to be the youngest manager in my field at the Marriott. My supervisor always laughed at me and told me to take it easy. But I knew I could do it. I gave myself five years to reach a managerial level, and after four years, I was a manager at Kigali Marriott Hotel.”

She now manages five people, including three other Akilah graduates, and has played a key role in developing the department from day one.

“I worked hard to get to where I am, and I want to keep improving. I try to challenge myself on a daily basis—keep learning, keep doing trainings, and ask people for advice. I always worked hard, never complained about my hours, always tried to learn from the people around me. That’s how you grow.”

Emmanuella says that the leadership skills and confidence she gained at Akilah shaped her into the professional she is today.

“They would always tell us, ‘You can do more than you think you can. Break down your goals, look at the steps you need to make to achieve them.’ They taught me to know myself and to be ambitious. Knowing yourself is the first thing you need to become a leader. Discover yourself and how you can contribute—that makes you capable of making hard decisions. They gave us that at Akilah.”

From her experience in the hospitality industry in Rwanda and abroad, Emmanuella observed that Akilah graduates stand out from others. “When I compare myself and my Akilah colleagues to others in this field, I can see that we are very competent. Especially when it comes to confidence and our skill set within hospitality, we perform very well. When we went for training in Dubai, most of the Akilah graduates were offered jobs in the hotel after the training ended, and the others were not. That shows something.”

Even though Emmanuella was doing well for herself in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, she always knew she wanted to return to Rwanda to help shape her country.

“I learned so much abroad, but I wanted to come home to the country that invested in me. How will Rwanda and my community benefit from me working abroad? We need qualified local people who can do a good job in the service industry, and I was proud to come home and be part of that.”

Today Emmanuella supports herself and her family through her job at Kigali Marriott Hotel. She is paying school fees for her younger siblings and managed to renovate her mother’s house through her earnings. She also paid for her younger sister to attend Akilah, and they now work together at the hotel.

Emmanuella plans to continue growing her career—this time with a new five-year goal.

“There are many opportunities ahead with new Marriott branches opening in East Africa, and I think I can play a role in that. I believe within five years I will be the director of a department. I’m still young, but I believe I can achieve it if I work hard.”
Since childhood, Francine Kawera has preferred to do things herself. So when she saw women in her hometown of Kibungo selling woven handbags lined with Rwanda’s vividly colored kitenge fabric, she had a hunch that she could do it too.

In 2015, that hunch proved correct. Francine and fellow Akilah student Jane Uwamahoro won second place in the Akilah Entrepreneurship Fund competition with their idea to launch a handbag and handicraft business. The prize came with Rwf 1,500,000 (US$2,000) in startup capital and mentorship from Inkomoko, a business accelerator.

Francine graduated from Akilah with a Diploma in Entrepreneurship in 2015, and she and Jane spent the next year fine-tuning their business plan and registering their company with the Rwanda Development Board. They combined their last initials to create the company name, K-U Social Ltd., and hired two suppliers to make bags for them to sell.

Francine’s first big break came when she found retail space in a handicraft shop in Kacyiru. The deal sounded too good to be true. The owner offered them shelves and racks to display their wares for Rwf 50,000 (US $60) a month, a good price in the competitive Kigali tourism market. She accepted the offer.

That choice would quickly turn into one of Francine’s biggest business challenges.

Her entrepreneurship instructor at Akilah had advised her to cut expenses where possible. She should not spend more on product placement and marketing than was coming in, he’d counseled. But that’s exactly what happened. Few people came to the shop, and K-U Social started losing money.

But Francine didn’t give up. She applied skills she’d learned in Akilah’s entrepreneurship program and came up with a new strategy. “I decided to market my product on my own,” she explains. “When someone puts in an order, then I make the bags they want and bring them to their shops.”

The new tactic seems to be paying off. Francine and Jane currently supply three shops, including Inzovu African Village and a stall in Caplaki Craft Village. She estimates that she’s sold more than 200 bags and aims to be in more shops by the end of this year.

Long-term, she envisions a thriving handbag business that will allow her to provide employees with fair wages, food, and transport, while training them in a useful craft.

Francine credits Akilah with giving her the confidence necessary to start and run her business. “Before joining Akilah, I couldn’t even look someone in the eyes... I was very shy. But now I can talk to everyone without fear. My confidence is very high, and I can communicate with anyone.”
When Peace Muganwa chose to pursue a Diploma in Hospitality Management at the Akilah Institute, she assumed she’d be working in hotels and restaurants. Little did she know that her education would prepare her for a career with the Rwanda National Police.

Peace is a police officer and supervisor at Kigali International Airport. “We’re here for security and customer care,” she says. While keeping travelers safe is her No. 1 duty, her role calls for providing quality customer service too. When people forget items, she makes sure their things are returned. When travelers are lost, she provides directions. And when newcomers arrive, she makes sure to welcome them to Rwanda.

While it may seem like a big jump from hospitality to policing, Peace made the transition seamlessly. After graduating from Akilah in August 2012, she heard that the Rwanda National Police force was seeking female candidates. She showed up for a recruitment event, and the competition was fierce. “I went there and was competing against lots of people with degrees,” she recalls. Her diploma from Akilah helped her stand out, she says.

But what really set her apart was the interview. A panel of over a dozen people, including police commissioners, fired questions at her: “Why did you apply? What did you study? What are your qualifications?” they asked. But she was ready and answered their questions with poise and confidence.

“Some people don’t know how to speak in a big group, but by then, I knew how to do it because of Akilah,” she says. “I was comfortable speaking in front of people.”

Peace received a job offer and joined the Rwanda National Police in November 2012, only three months after graduating. Her Akilah diploma gave her an added advantage: She could enroll in the one–year cadet course for recruits with tertiary education. She graduated the course as a police supervisor.

In her supervisor role, she regularly uses the skills she gained from Akilah to help develop and instruct the officers under her. Eventually she hopes to take that even further by leading police trainings in customer care and leadership, she says. But for now, Peace is happy with where her Akilah diploma has brought her. “After I graduated, I immediately got a job. It changed my life. I have everything — like heath insurance, a good salary, and I am saving up for a house.”

“After I graduated, I immediately got a job. It changed my life. I have everything — like heath insurance, a good salary, and I am saving up for a house.”

PEACE MUGANWA
POLICE SUPERVISOR LEADER
NADIA KUBWIMANA
WOMEN'S GO-OP
FOUNDER &
COMMUNITY
LEADER

Nadia Kubwimana has made it her mission to create business opportunities for herself and the women in her community.

“When I first graduated from Akilah, someone recommended I join a group of women running small businesses, like selling vegetables, clothes, or other items,” Nadia recalls.

Nadia did not have a business at the time, but she decided to join anyway— if nothing else, she could learn from other women and get business ideas. But her involvement quickly grew, and a much bigger idea formed in her head.

“I realized early on that we needed to be better organized. I thought, ‘Why don’t we form an association and invite other women to join?’ That way it would be easier for us to work together and support each other,” Nadia explains, standing in the middle of a group of women at a local market in the Gatsata Sector, a community on the northern outskirts of Rwanda’s capital, Kigali. The women clearly see her as a friend and leader.
Nadia started the association Ikigea Ishema B'yumuyarwandakazi, which translates to “the Pride of Rwandan Women Fund.” It grew quickly as more women from the Gatsata Sector joined. The association officially registered in 2015, and today it has more than 250 women working in 42 cooperatives.

The member cooperatives range from vegetables markets to charcoal producers to traditional basket weavers. Each one takes part in the association by contributing a small amount of money every month. The funds go into a combined pool, from which members can take out loans to make improvements to their businesses.

Nadia initially served as the association president, but she recently passed the torch to another member. Her current role is predominantly as an advisor, but she is still involved with every person and every group.

These days, finding time to support the association is not easy. With her full-time job at Kigali Marriott Hotel and two small children at home, Nadia’s time is very limited. But she still makes an effort to stay in touch with the women from the association.

“I try to balance my time – I try to take some time off work so I can come out here and visit. I don’t want to leave behind what I started. I want them to continue to grow, think outside the box, and build their confidence. I want to show them that they are able to do big things, even with small means.”

On a tour of the local market to meet with cooperative members, Nadia regularly stops to ask the women how they are progressing and what she can do to help. She works with the women to solve issues ranging from business management concerns to domestic violence.

“The group is about women empowering each other. We sit together and try to fix problems people might have,” she explains. “For instance, if there are problems with conflicts in the home or domestic violence, we sit down with the husbands and try to come up with a solution. We support each other.”

According to Nadia, the leadership skills she learned from Akihlah pushed her to think bigger, start something new, and become a role model for the women in her community.

“I am applying what I learned at Akihlah. It gives me confidence to see that people trust me. I’m young, and I’m not even really in a position to advise these women – they have a lot more experience than me. But we trust each other, we help each other out. They tell me I give good advice. Even if you don’t have money, you can still have good ideas and strong willpower,” she says.

Nadia’s leadership skills paid off in several ways. She was hired by Rwanda’s largest five-star hotel, Kigali Marriott Hotel, and was recently promoted to Banquet Supervisor. Nadia’s Diploma in Hospitality Management from Akihah prepared her to excel on the job.

When she is not at work or with her children, Nadia travels to Gatsata to visit the women in her association. Her influence among the women is evident. More than 100 women showed up to a town hall meeting she organized to provide information about Akihlah and the importance of higher education.

When Nadia took the floor, many of the women started dancing in celebration. “I want them to have the same opportunities as I had through Akihlah. I’m telling them about the skills and confidence I gained through Akihlah and the doors it opened for me,” she says.

Nadia is not paid for her work with the association. But, for her, the association’s impact on the community is reward enough.

“It might not give a profit right now, but it gives me other things. I’m a leader. I get to build the women’s confidence and show them that they can do what they set their minds to,” she says.
MARIE AIMEE UMUHOZA
IT SPECIALIST
WOMAN IN TECH LEADER

As a recent graduate, Marie Aimee was not surveyed in the alumnae evaluation. However, her personal story illustrates the early success of Akilah’s Information Systems (IS) graduates. The first IS class graduated in January 2017 and will be surveyed extensively in the next alumnae evaluation.

Every year, the Akilah Founder’s Award is given to an outstanding alumna who embodies the values of the Akilah Institute in Rwanda. In January, Marie Aimee Umuhiza was recognized as the Founder’s Award winner for her “impressive leadership on campus and her constant willingness to go above and beyond in her academic and extracurricular activities.”

She mentored other young students in programming at the TechKolwa Camp organized by IBM in Kigali and served on the Akilah Student Council. She graduated with the second highest GPA of the Class of 2016. Today, Marie Aimee works as an IT Support Specialist at Kigali’s Radisson Blu Hotel and Convention Center. But pursuing her passion for technology wasn’t always easy.

Ever since she was a little girl in primary school, she loved taking things apart and putting them back together. She’d skip ahead to the hardest math problems on her homework, and when classmates had trouble with a gadget, she’d offer to fix it for them. When Marie Aimee wanted to study math and chemistry in high school, her teachers tried to dissuade her. “But you’re good in history and literature, why would you go for math?” they asked.

When it came time for college, she knew she would study technology. Most schools she talked to pushed her away from ICT. Then she found the Akilah Institute. “At Akilah, they understood and encouraged me to study for the Diploma in Information Systems,” she recalls. That was the deciding factor for Marie Aimee.

Marie Aimee dove into her Information Systems studies at Akilah. She learned how to take a computer apart and put it back together, the intricacies of computer networks, and the painstaking art of writing code to produce a program. As part of a class project, Marie Aimee developed a hotel booking system and a program that allowed her fellow students to reserve library books online. “I am passionate about technology because it is challenging. It’s all about coming up with solutions to problems, and it can be applied everywhere,” she says.

When it came time for her internship, a requirement for Akilah students, Marie Aimee set her sights on the Radisson Blu Hotel and Convention Center. She’d heard that Akilah’s Hospitality Management students were applying there and figured she could find a role in the complex’s IT department.

“I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT TECHNOLOGY BECAUSE IT IS CHALLENGING. IT’S ALL ABOUT COMING UP WITH SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS, AND IT CAN BE APPLIED EVERYWHERE.”
Marie Aimee also gained the confidence at Akilah to share her ideas and suggest improvements to the current processes. “I find that some of the ideas I give are adopted,” she says. Most recently, she proposed a record-keeping system to track the department’s equipment and repairs. The records save the staff time in troubleshooting and help identify recurrent problems and faulty equipment.

Recalling her discouraging start in tech, Marie Aimee has made it her personal mission to encourage more girls to pursue technology. “One of the goals that I had when I came to Akilah was to help other girls know what they’re missing,” she says. “Being in tech is not only for men. It’s not only for their older and younger brothers, [women] should be able to study what we want.”

As part of Akilah’s required Social Change Project, Marie Aimee teamed up with four others to travel to a secondary school in Rwanda’s Southern Province to teach girls soft skills, such as confidence, developing a growth mindset, and public speaking as well as computer basics.

“We trained the girls on how to make PowerPoint presentations, how to look for universities online, and how to apply for scholarships,” Marie Aimee recalls. She wanted to support girls in choosing their own career paths, even if those didn’t lead to ICT.

“When I’m inspiring young girls, I feel I’m doing something special and that they can benefit from it. I believe there are many girls like me, who are always trying to go for what they want. Tech for girls is becoming bigger, and I believe as time goes on, there will be more girls in tech. I’ll be happy about that,” she says.

Her friends suggested she apply at the reception or concierge desk, but she held out for an IT role and landed an interview with the IT manager. It went well, but three weeks passed, and she heard nothing. “At that time, I was in confusion,” she recalls. “I just wrote a follow-up note in May asking what had happened.”

Two days later, the manager replied. The Radisson Blu was so impressed with Marie Aimee that they wanted to offer her a job in lieu of an internship. In the hotel’s hectic opening weeks, no one had informed Marie Aimee. “He asked me, ‘I haven’t seen you coming to work, what happened?’” she says with a smile.

She explained to him that she didn’t receive an offer. That was soon fixed. Her manager even granted her a flexible schedule so she could attend class two days a week and complete her Akilah diploma. Marie Aimee showed up for her first day of work on August 1.

Marie Aimee quickly discovered that her coursework prepared her to shine on the job, even in the first few weeks. Akilah’s IT Essentials class proved particularly helpful, as did the networking course where she mastered the skills to earn her Cisco Networking Associate certification. “Had I not passed through the networking class, I wouldn’t know about the different ports and connections,” Marie Aimee points out.

ASSESSING OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
Grades report applying leadership skills learned at Akilah in the workplace.

75%
40% GROWTH MINDSET
Demonstrates conscientiousness, discipline, time management, and dutifulness. Open to feedback from others.

60% COMMUNICATION
Can articulate ideas clearly and present self confidently.

44% SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
Demonstrates a strong sense of responsibility to act with integrity, respect, and empathy.

76% TEAMWORK & COLLABORATION
Works well in teams and is agreeable, kind, trustworthy, and socially competent.

65% HIGH-ORDER THINKING
Capable of critical, logical, and reflective thinking.

27% HIGH CORE SELF-EVALUATION
Displays a strong sense of self, confidence, and emotional intelligence.

PREPARING FOR LEADERSHIP
When graduates were asked which element of the program best prepared them for entering the workforce, 75% mentioned leadership classes. In addition, 58% of graduates said that they learned leadership skills at Akilah and continue to apply them in their careers.

WORKPLACE LEADERSHIP
Fifty-eight percent of graduates have received at least one promotion in their position and/or salary since graduation. Thirty-six percent of graduates are in a supervisory role and supervise an average of 2.4 employees.

OUR CONCLUSION
The results of this evaluation verify that graduates proceed along the critical pathways detailed in Akilah’s Theory of Change to advance in their careers and obtain leadership roles in their families and communities.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
Eighty-two percent of graduates are participating in at least one community group.
The Akilah Institute offers a unique model of market-relevant education that prepares women to launch successful careers in the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. Since 2010, Akilah's diploma programs have equipped hundreds of women with the academic, professional, and leadership skills necessary to start their careers and advance rapidly into management roles.

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