

Learning the Kenyan Way

Jewelrymaker Evelyn Njoki came to campus to share Imani Workshop's techniques with Herron students

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Transcript

The sun rises above a land rich in beauty where flamingos flock along the water; the thorns of the acacia trees softly nestle along the mountainside; and the buffalo roam, quietly calling out the peaceful sounds of Africa that are found in a Kenyan workshop called Imani!

That's where they sing songs of praises for positively living with HIV/AIDS. It's the attitude of peace that gives them the will to change their lives through art.

We first met Evelyn Njoki last year in Eldoret, Kenya. She gave us a tour of Imani as we watched employees make some of the most beautiful pieces of jewelry. Everything is handmade with care and with courage, all thanks to the Indiana University AmPATH program. It provides them with clinical care to treat HIV/AIDS.

It gives them Imani, where they not only make art but sell it to achieve self-sufficiency. Njoki is one of Imani's founders. She traveled 8,000 miles to Indianapolis to share her story and her passion with students at IU's Herron School of Art.

"I was pregnant and I did not know that I was HIV positive. I started making necklaces. I don't know where the designs came from. I could go with my baby, knocking at people's offices and asking them, "Can you buy this, can you buy this, can you buy this?" Njoki shared. She asked and they bought enough for Njoki to employ and train others in the art of making jewelry. Now, IU students can learn her trade secrets.

"Oprah Magazine is our material. This is the product we finally make out of the magazine," she said.

There are many products, but the one called the Imani necklace, which means peace, is also a top seller.

"We are peaceful by getting medication and everything at AmPATH," Njoki says.

It's a lesson of life beyond the skill.

"In life you cannot just give up because you have something wrong or something wrong going on in your life. You can always keep trying. It doesn't matter what happens. You can always find hope," said IU student Fatoumata Bah.

And the students are learning the Kenyan way about how to turn used into new.

"We have to think ahead about how it's going to eventually turn out. I learned to think about the different color schemes you want to use and just the artistry that goes into it," said Herron School of Art student Emma Fisher.

Another student Courtney Ware said, "It's really beautiful. It's like better than anything we could've ever done."

And Njoki continues to out do herself.

"This one is called "Njoki Funky Meats" and, like, now it's the top-selling product, selling like hotcakes," she said.

Njoki, Imani, and IU create a partnership where ideas are shared.

"I had the chance of seeing different countries' products in gift shops. And that's how we can develop our products," said Njoki.

The universal fair trade system sustains a world and saves lives across the continents with peace, all thanks to Imani.

"People buy our products, it creates jobs for us and it can change many people's lives," Njoki said.

If you know of an extraordinary woman whose story should be told, send Andrea an e-mail.