

# Comfort Dondo



Comfort Dondo is a first generation African immigrant. She holds her Zimbabwean roots near, saying, “my heart is still in Zimbabwe.” She is also a human rights advocate, feminist, humanist and leader in her community here in Iowa.

Comfort moved to the United States in 2004, originally living in Minnesota. She was 18 years old when she made this move. “With a suitcase and a dream, I wanted to make my life better.”

Women in Zimbabwe are not valued, so her father did not want her to get an education. Women are seen as second-class citizens and often viewed as property. It is normal for women in Zimbabwe to be married by 16, 17, and 18. Men buy their wives and wait for them to be of age to then marry them.

This is one of the reasons there is a high rate of domestic violence in Zimbabwe. After Comfort graduated high school there was a man waiting to marry her, but she knew from a young age that wasn't the path for her.

Comfort focused her education on learning how to teach women to be leaders and to empower themselves. In Zimbabwe is it very hard to get into University because of the corruption. You must come from a wealthy family to get into a University and Comfort's family wasn't wealthy. She and her mother sold chickens and food at the market to fundraise for her plane ticket to the United States. She was unable to share her plans to leave with her father until the night before because she knew of his disapproval. Luckily, Comfort had mentor who worked at the US Embassy in Zimbabwe and helped her apply for a visa.

Comfort quickly discovered how different things are in the United States. She comes from a collective community based culture and the United States is more individualistic. The concept of family in each country is very different as well. She sometimes feels isolated in the United States because she has not experienced the same concept of a village raising a family.

When Comfort moved to the United States she did not know she was black. Because she was in the majority in her country, she didn't realize she would be the minority when she came to the United States; it just wasn't something she thought about.

Comfort works for the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence. She counsels battered women and helps them gain confidence. She is also working on a campaign for a man who is running for Zimbabwe's presidency in 2018. She has done work on Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign as well and has hopes of her own of running for president of Zimbabwe in the future.

For Comfort, part of the dual value of her time in the U.S. has been both her education and experience. However, that experience comes at a price. Comfort can't go back to Zimbabwe now because it would be unsafe for her to be there due to the work she has been doing in the U.S.

It is very important to Comfort that her children understand their roots and where part of their identity comes from. They know basic Shona and also some Swahili. Comfort hopes to go back to Zimbabwe someday to be a part of the change Zimbabwe needs.