



Introducing the 2025 Alumni Ventures Fund Recipients and their Impactful Projects in Chicago and Rwanda

December 15, 2025, New York, NY- In December, Alumni Ventures Fund announced the 2025 recipients: [Anusha Somani](#) from Pakistan, living in Chicago, IL, with her project “MindZen”, and [Olive Nyinawumuntu](#) from Kigali, Rwanda, with her project “Empower to Transform.”

Anusha, a 2017 Young Leaders Fellowship Alumna, will be working on a platform to detect mental health issues before they become evident or cause more harm. Her project is currently being implemented in Chicago, and there are plans to introduce it in two schools in New York in the foreseeable future.

Olive, who participated in the 2024 Young Leaders Conference, through her project 'Empower to Transform', aims to equip and mentor teen mothers in rural Rwanda with vocational skills, demonstrating tangible community impact.

MindZen in Chicago

MindZen, which includes Kowala [a patent-pending mental health risk detection and social-emotional learning platform], was born from a crisis Anusha witnessed as a teenager: students silently struggling while a single counselor tried to support more than 500 young people.

A decade later, this gap has only grown, with U.S. schools still averaging one social worker per 500 students. Anusha's personal experience during her 2017 Young Leaders Fellowship inspired her focus on early intervention.

For her, MindZen is personal. She is building the support she once needed- a system that could have recognized her struggles early on. Every feature of MindZen reflects that intention: daily Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) check-ins that give teens a voice, AI-powered pattern detection that surfaces hidden risk, and real-time educator dashboards that show who needs support immediately. Unlike tools that only teach SEL or only respond to crises, MindZen bridges prevention and early detection. Co-designed with practitioners, it identifies at-risk students three to four weeks faster than traditional referral methods and protects student privacy while strengthening school community care.

“Mindzen is the intervention I needed when I was a teenager, i.e., a way to make sure no kid's struggles go unnoticed. Our platform is already helping educators catch warning signs weeks earlier. This spring, we are launching pilots with schools across Chicago and New York,” says Anusha, who has been engaged with MCW Global since her first participation in the Young

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Leaders Fellowship nine years ago, including as a mentor and intern with MCW Global's Affiliate, MC-Tanzania.

"The Alumni Ventures Fund grant is helping us scale that impact and build the team and resources to reach more schools, more counselors, and more kids who deserve someone paying attention before it's too late," she adds.

Anusha does not see herself as a distant tech founder; she is a former at-risk teenager who has spent years, since her participation in the Young Leaders Fellowship, building toward this exact intervention. MindZen has already proven traction through Chicago pilots, clear demand from schools seeking early access, and a vision grounded in equity, dignity, and youth-centered leadership.

She believes that by supporting this initiative, MCW Global investment is not just funding a project; it scales a movement, ensuring no student's mental health crisis goes unnoticed again.

Empower to Transform in Rwanda

Olive's project "Empower to Transform" addresses the economic and social exclusion of teen mothers in rural Rwanda. Many of these young women are forced to abandon school due to early pregnancies and lack of support, leaving them without education and vocational skills or economic resources. As a result, they face unemployment, poverty, and social stigma, perpetuating cycles of gender inequality and economic dependency.

This issue has deep socio-economic implications. When young mothers are excluded, their families and communities lose the potential of productive and empowered contributors to local development. Research and field experience show that targeted empowerment programs that combine vocational training, mentorship, and market access can effectively lift women out of poverty while fostering community resilience.

Olive, Co-founder and Executive Director of [the Nyinawumuntu Initiative](#), shares:

"The Empower To Transform is changing lives here in Rwanda. I have met teen mothers who once felt ashamed, rejected, and without hope. Today, thanks to the support I gave them through my Alumni Ventures Fund project, they are learning practical skills, starting small businesses, and smiling with confidence again," highlighting the power of personal stories to connect and motivate.

This is the same issue that motivated her to participate in [the 2024 Young Leaders Fellowship](#), where she strengthened her leadership and advocacy skills to design and implement community-driven, gender-focused solutions alongside 38 other young leaders from around the globe.

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“With the support of the Alumni Ventures Fund, Empower to Transform is more than a project; it is a second chance for young girls and women from vulnerable families. It reminds these young girls and women that one chapter of their life does not decide their whole story. When we give them support, skills, and belief, they rise, and when they rise, their families and communities rise with them,” Olive adds.

The Alumni Ventures Fund is supported by The Claire Friedlander Family Foundation and Hyman R. and Ruth Shapiro Foundation, Inc.

Please click [here](#) to read about the 2023 and 2024 recipients of the Alumni Ventures Fund and the impact their work through the support of the Alumni Ventures Fund has had on their communities.

About Us

MCW Global is a non-profit organization with a vision for communities around the world to achieve greater levels of education, improved health, and increased economic security. Our mission is to address communities’ pressing needs by empowering current leaders and readying leaders of tomorrow. Founded in 1999, MCW Global is based in New York with affiliates in Africa (Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zambia). MCW Global offers Young Leaders and Africa Programs. Across all our programs, we seek to act with integrity, compassion, accountability, responsibility, and excellence. www.mcwglobal.org.