



# VITAL SIGNS

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## Background

CivSource Africa is a philanthropy support and advisory organization committed to nurturing a more sustainable, effective and connected civil society that advances the dignity and voices of all people. We do this through promoting reflective, responsive and accountable philanthropic practice.

We work, through our core strategies to support civil society organizations, movements, individuals, companies and social enterprises to advance their mandates. We firmly believe that resourcing civil society and strengthening its leadership is critical for advancing social justice.

## The Experience - Leadership Retreat

At CivSource Africa, we are passionate about enabling leaders be their very best selves. We believe critical self-reflection is core not only to our quality of practice but to our ability to withstand processes of rusting and erosion.

We believe leaders drive organisations and their well-being is crucial for the health of organisations especially when it comes to growth and success. As part of our leadership work, CivSource Africa runs The Experience, an Executive Leaders Retreat, that challenges participants in every field to achieve meaningful leadership growth through a critical examination of self.

## Vital Signs

Every quarter, CivSource performs a vital sign check on the participants of the retreats. Just like at a doctor's check up where one's heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate and body temperature are able to reveal information about a person, the CivSource vital signs checks are done against four components of the impact framework, to reveal the wellness of leaders and their organisations. The Retreat methodology treats the body as the lens through which leaders examine themselves and their organizations. Through the examination of 7 energy points (also known as Chakras), the leaders' consciousness is awakened to the importance of the body as a vehicle through which to embody better, more healthy leadership of self and others. The metaphor of the body and the energy points in the body, are also used to help the leader examine how the organizational vehicle is operating. The tool used in the retreats is one that supports civil society leaders to reclaim their wholeness. It is a powerful tool which integrates the heart, mind and body, together with the organizations these leaders manage.

In 2020, CivSource Africa held three leadership retreats. The first was in collaboration with the Female Lawyers of the Uganda Law Society after a memorandum of understanding was signed in November 2019. A total of 17 female lawyers attended the retreat. The second retreat was with 24 female leaders from various civic spaces including civil society organizations and social enterprises. The last cohort had nine members of the donor community.

CivSource has published, on their website, and continues to follow-up and document stories of change from the previous cohorts. This report documents the stories of change of some of the leaders, over the first quarter to 2020 (January - March), across four areas of the program impact framework: Individual, Organisation, Collective, Society.

**Individual:** Impact of the programme on the individual in body, mind and soul.

**Organisation:** Impact on the organisation since the leader's well-being directly affects the wellness of the organisation

**Collective:** This term is used to describe the specific cohort that attended the retreat and any synergies and collaborations created within the group. This could be as a whole or within smaller groups.

**Society:** Impact on the wider community the leader belongs to and represents. This is where movements could potentially be built.



# What is the most significant change attributed to The Retreat for the Individual?

I am more aware of what's happening to me internally, particularly when I am unstable. I am cultivating deeper relationships with the people around me. I ask questions about their heart, energy levels and well-ness. For the coming quarter, I would like to double my income.


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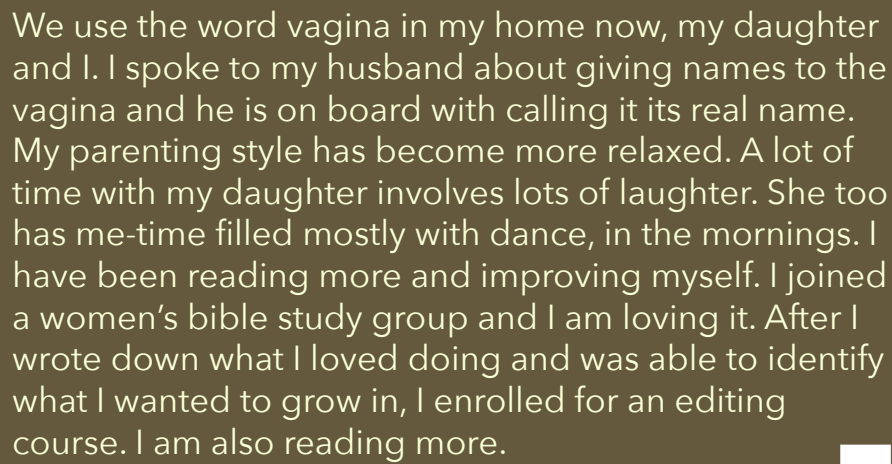
The ability to stop for me and preserve my peace have been the greatest takeaways since The Retreat. I have increased the time I spend with God and with myself. I have gone for massages and gone away alone because it would be something good for me. My children are a part of my schedule with my son now being my personal assistant. My schedule, which is managed by my son, has helped me be organised. Being present has also been very helpful. My husband has joined my campaign team which was not the case in the past. I am not panicked like I have been in the past, under the same circumstances. I am enjoying my relationship with my children...it has become tenderer and more friendly.

I re-claimed my schedule. I used to sleep 4 hours a day but now, once my day ends, I shut down work. I come home to my family, sleep at 10pm and then wake up at 4am and start a new day. I now stop and have lunch unlike before. I have a more spiritual approach to my tasks. I re-did our home roof and we now use it as a family space.

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We use the word vagina in my home now, my daughter and I. I spoke to my husband about giving names to the vagina and he is on board with calling it its real name. My parenting style has become more relaxed. A lot of time with my daughter involves lots of laughter. She too has me-time filled mostly with dance, in the mornings. I have been reading more and improving myself. I joined a women's bible study group and I am loving it. After I wrote down what I loved doing and was able to identify what I wanted to grow in, I enrolled for an editing course. I am also reading more.



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I am more honest and open with myself. I fit in my body and I try to do things for myself. I am now spending money on myself which was not the case before. There is a genuine appreciation of who I am and what I bring to the world.

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I now pay attention to my colours. I am very intentional about that. I exercise regularly and it really relieves my stress.

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Self-love was my biggest takeaway from The Retreat. I now go to the salon every week. This was something that I struggled with before. I have more time with my family, particularly with my children. I took my gift from The Retreat, the kanga, and made a dress. I take the stairs to my office on the 4th floor of our building. I no longer use the lift. I still do the breathing exercises we learnt at The Retreat. I am currently writing a book about my life to share with my children.

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Towards the end of last year, I was very tired. I was questioning if I should be doing what I was doing. The Retreat gave me my voice back. It renewed my resolve for the things that I do. My confidence is back. The fire in my belly is back and I am more grounded. I am starting to love me - taking care of myself even as I take care of other people.



When I came to The Retreat, I was recovering from depression. It was therefore very energising to take part in it. My biggest takeaway was to have hope. I pray outside in the compound, barefoot and I like it a lot. I am more open to listening to other people and even more spiritually aware.

The Retreat allowed me to answer the question - What do I want to do with your life? It gave me confidence to go after the things I want to do. I left employment while it did not make sense to many people in my life but I have not lacked. I got the confidence to drive the dreams I have carried for a long time.


The deep breathing exercises we learnt at The Retreat have helped me a lot to calm down and have time to think. I now leave the office early because I need to unwind from the stress of work. Music is very therapeutic for me so it is my way of meditation. I also dance a lot like no one is watching. I used to ask my daughter to wear slippers around the house. After the retreat, I no longer bring it up because she likes it and it's a way for her to ground.

I became more organised after The Retreat. I started arriving at work at 7am. Other people started coming early as well and now we pray together in the mornings. I do the breathing exercises we learnt at The Retreat before I go to work. This has given me more energy in the morning. Ginger and lemon water is part of my day to build my immunity during the government instituted lockdown to fight COVID-19.



When I arrived at The Retreat, I was unwell. However, by the end, I was more energised than when I went. I was very encouraged by the ladies there. I previously did not have a social life because I was preoccupied with work. I typically slept for three or four hours a night. The Retreat helped me to slow down and see my life as a whole. I have since done things I had not done before like repainting my home so there is more life and light, and adding nature with flowers. I have invited peace into my space and joy which I had always wanted. I had honestly been living in my own darkness but now I have more light. Before the lockdown, I had stopped bringing work home because I needed to separate my work from other areas of my life. I would come home and watch a movie, read, watch the news etc etc. I revise my notes from The Retreat quite often. I have added colour to my daily routines including to my wardrobe and food. I have also introduced walked barefoot to my sister and nephew.

Being intentional about self-care during this time of Corona, with concerns about my staff, is hard. I panic sometimes and must remind myself that self-care is crucial particularly now so that I do not harm myself and the people I lead. I am also on a spiritual journey to stay connected to my spiritual power because that is a major anchor for me.



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I am more aware of myself and my appeal. I am more conscious of greenery when I take a walk. I ensure to exercise for 30 minutes every day.

I have learnt more about my personality after having met and talked to several people. And the more I learn about myself, the more comfortable I am in own skin.

I downloaded a free ebook on the root chakra although I haven't yet come around to reading it. I also realised that as much as The Retreat is not premised on any religious guidelines, it made me appreciate my religion even more. The material discussed as part of the coping mechanisms are reflected in what the Hadith in my religion states. I appreciate my few friends and value them. I have learnt not to feel abnormal for only wanting people in my life that add value to me. I learnt what love is to me and that was extremely important.

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I started to stop for me, every day. I am deliberately choosing and adding myself to my to-do list. That is new. I often feel guilty, but I have learned that without me nothing else matters!

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I reorganised the leadership of my Association after The Retreat.

I now appreciate colour and greenery more because they have meaning and power. I started doing a bit of gardening which overall is good for me and the environment.

## What is the most significant change attributed to The Retreat for the Organisation?

After The Retreat, I have slowed down the consulting business to allow me think through what is important for the business.

I changed the office space, put plants and even added a drop-back of Kampala City to our logo. We changed our lunch routine and now have lunch together as a team. We are going to explore the Chakras together as well. I am using an app I created, the Nkola App, to create a platform for responses to COVID-19 employment issues. This is together with another woman from the cohort.

At the retreat, I was going through a huge transition. I had closed parts of my business and The Retreat helped me 'allow' the closure. It allowed me to end the grieving that had lasted 3 months. I have since closed the physical library and started a mobile version. There is a membership of 15 children who are actually reading now. We have partnered with schools which do not have libraries as well. All these ideas were only possible because I got clarity at The Retreat and released myself to start thinking fresh ideas. The business has been able to focus on what's core which is: the word game Otyo, the mobile library and editing.

I have been calmer and built friendships with my legal team. Our teamwork has improved because I am more accepting. I was previously a slave-driver but coming out of The Retreat left me more accepting of myself and other people.



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Last semester, I was aloof in class, not talking much with my classmates. After The Retreat, and those grounding conversations, I was surer of myself and what I brought to the world. When my lecturer asked if there was anyone in the class who was doing something outside of class, and I was the only one who raised their hand, I was affirmed. We had a Q&A session which led to me starting to share opportunities for work with my classmates. It has connected me to them in a way that had not happened previously.

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I proposed getting the services of a wellness coach and the idea was bought by the company. He comes thrice a week and whoever is interested in the service can go for a collective 2-hour session. It has helped relieve stress among staff because people have an opportunity to share what's bothering them. I also share about Chakras in our monthly meetings for female staff.

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I now have more empathy for my staff at the firm and the school. I got funds from other sources to help the teachers particularly during this season of COVID-19

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I shared with my colleagues about positive energy and the need to call out negative energy. During this time of Corona, I have been able to support people who've unfortunately lost their jobs.

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After The Retreat, I am a more tolerant leader because I am more accepting of my teammates. I no longer nitpick. I used to concentrate on the bad things but now I focus on and celebrate the good things.






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I am now striking out on my own because I have confidence in myself.

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I am supporting colleagues to manage their emotions as a result of the negative energy that's around the office.  
I am still looking for ways to support junior staff because I oversee HR.

I started giving more compliments at work. I am gentler with my workmates and the office space is now freer. I rearranged my office and beautified it. This has increased my energy at work. During this Corona season, I have championed a prayer alter which other advocates in the city have joined.

I learnt how to create a space that breaks power structures in the organisation. We used conversation, when we were closing the office because of COVID-19, to understand how people were feeling and what they could do in this season to cope. We had a conversation about supporting the community in this season and people came up with great ideas we will implement. We have previously had a meeting where we all sat on a mat. It was shocking but also generated discussions around gender dynamics in communities because the men were adamant. We were then able to have a discussion about equity and breaking power thinking in the way we do things. By the end, we decided that it was something to take into our community work - creating spaces which allow us to all be at an equal footing.





I do not shy away from confrontation anymore. I readily and respectfully give my opinion at work now.

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Before The Retreat, I used to care about our clients as the founding leader, but I learned to tell all my staff to have a soul for people walking into our office, afterwards. We want to treat people with respect and dignity. We want every woman and girl to know that we value them and will fight for them with our lives.

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There is more social cohesion and better communication within the Association as a result of The Retreat. We've set in place clear roadmaps with timelines and continuous reassessment of our progress as an Association.





## What is the most significant change attributed to The Retreat for the Collective?

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The get-together with a smaller group, in March, was very good because I got feedback to ground and help with an issue I had been dealing with. I would benefit from a regular smaller group. I will reach out to the people I had a connection with and see how to build a check-in group with them.

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I am leading Pheona Wall's campaign team for the Uganda Law Society presidency. Together with Lydia Namuli, a colleague at the Law Development Center (LDC) and another participant in the cohort, we've partnered with FIDA and Girls For Girls to start a mentoring programme for female students at LDC.

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My Uganda Law Society presidential campaign manager is from my cohort. Other women from the cohort are supporting with publicity and prayer.

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Nothing has happened here because I have not been on WhatsApp. But I plan to get in touch with 3 women to collaborate on work.

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A group of 6 of us met in Bukoto to catch-up and talk about how we were doing since The Retreat.

I am using my platforms to share Pheona Wall's ULS campaign messages. I celebrated Alinda's 40 Under 40 recognition.

I celebrated Alinda's 40 Under 40 recognition. I am supporting Pheona as she campaigns for ULS president. A lot of my support is through prayer, encouragement and sharing her message in my circles.

I have not been in touch with anyone except Catherine. And that was only for a few minutes in Kampala.

I am not in touch with everyone except for a handful of people.

I've reach out to some people in the Collective, on a one-on-one basis, to discuss issues around work. I am also supporting Pheona as she carries out her ULS campaign.

I am supporting Pheona Wall for ULS president.

I have not been able to connect with other ladies because I live in Lira. However, I am in touch with a few people on a one on one basis.

I am intouch with a few people and we communicate regularly.

I have not been able to connect with the group. I made some friends though. They call to check in. When we've meet in town, we've stopped to hug and chat.



# What is the most significant change attributed to The Retreat for the Society?

The Retreat helped me ask who my Consulting firm should be serving beyond making money.

I am working on an App meant to help people, particularly women, fight against sexual harassment.

Running for ULS President has cemented my belief in myself. This started at The Retreat where I learnt to be comfortable being me.

Coming to The Retreat made me more aware of the privilege of learning so i have taken on more mentees. I am now more intentional about the women in my discipleship spaces.

I shared the Chakras with a few friends after The Retreat and we did the 21-Days of Meditation together. It was a great way for us to ground. A good friend and I started working out on Saturdays.

I shared the Chakras with a few friends. One of them found them weird and did not buy the idea.

I am supporting Pheona as she campaigns for ULS president. A lot of my support is through prayer, encouragement and sharing her messages in my circles.

I am constantly speaking to people around me about the Chakras. Two friends are interested in attending the next Retreat. 1 Kenyan and 1 West African.

I can see the strengths of my siblings and other people in my life. I like to give, and I've become accepting of that part of myself.

I am mentoring 3 people to share what I learnt at The Retreat.



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I speak more positively since The Retreat which has helped me with my clients and in the community where I work. I am also mentoring young women at UCU and Nkumba universities following The Retreat.

I wondered how to bring The Retreat's ideas to my community when I came home. We have a large group of young people and women still healing from the war. We had a conversation around talk-therapy, with students from Lira University, using the information I learnt at The Retreat. This experience showed me that there is a lot of need for this kind of training.

My family has also been surprised by the changes to my house. I repainted and added plants.

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I am thankful for the sisterhood that developed after The Retreat because I know I can get support when I get stuck. I pray we are able to each one find time to invest in other women and their well-being!

The Retreat enabled me to reconnect with the environment and those around me on a more personal level.

## What the Tests Show:

The leaders have taken the tools they were handed during The Retreat and applied them to their lives and institutions. Taking care of and improving their relationship with themselves has produced positive changes in their lives and that on the organizations they run. The myth that we are separate people when we are at home and when we are at work is being debunked by this approach of embodied leadership. When you flourish, your organization, Collective and society flourish too.

## Contributors

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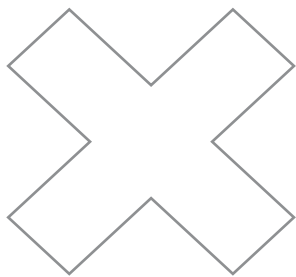
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## GET IN TOUCH

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