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Opportunity International Announces Tanzania Correspondent Contest Winners

First Place Winner to Travel to the East African Nation to Document the Impact of Microfinance on Women

Oak Brook, Ill., July 8, 2011 – [Opportunity International](http://www.opportunity.org) (www.opportunity.org), a global non-profit organization dedicated to providing access to savings accounts, small business loans, insurance and training to people working their way out of poverty in the developing world, today announced the winners of its Tanzania Correspondent Contest.

Launched in April as part of Opportunity International's "Banking on Women" campaign, the contest solicited more than 300 entries from individuals around the globe interested in using their creative writing skills, photography know-how and/or video production expertise to help the non-profit tell the story of how women in the United Republic of Tanzania can become leaders and change agents within their communities when given access to small business loans and other financial services.

The first place winner of the Tanzania Correspondent Contest is Kelly Flanagan for her essay, "Working Women." In late July, she will travel to the East African nation with Opportunity International's Young Ambassadors for Opportunity (YAO) group. Kelly is a native of Sacramento, Calif., and a recent alumnus of Arizona State University, where she graduated with a BFA in intermedia arts. Currently, she works for a video production company and resides in Tempe, Ariz. When asked why she entered the contest and what she hopes to achieve with her trip, Kelly said, "Diane Ruebling, a family friend, shared the contest flier with my mother and encouraged me to enter. Diane is on the Board of Governors for Opportunity International, and it was her passion for this organization's work that led to my contest submission. I am looking forward to connecting with the women who are working their way out of poverty in Tanzania. I will be producing a video which captures their stories and informs others about the impact that access to financial services can truly have on women's lives."

Laura Gamse, a documentary filmmaker from Arlington, Va., won second prize for her essay "Real as a Wish in a Well," and will receive two tickets to Opportunity International's Fall Microfinance Conference taking place Nov. 14-15 in San Francisco. Laura holds a degree in social activism from Pomona College and spent the last two years in South Africa directing and producing a documentary called "The Creators" which explores the lives and works of musicians, visual artists, poets and dancers in the region. Laura entered the Tanzania Correspondent Contest when a college friend from Kenya sent her the link and strongly urged her to participate. In speaking about the contest and the impact that the non-profit has on its clients, she stated, "The work that Opportunity International does in Tanzania and other African nations is, without a doubt, changing lives."



Third place winner was Joel Carlman of Arlington, Va., for his essay “The Power of ‘Typical’.” Joel will receive a \$100 Opportunity International gift card to help fund an Opportunity client’s loan. Joel is a graduate of Pepperdine University, where he earned his undergraduate degree in business psychology and administration. He went on to earn a master’s degree in development finance from Stellenbosch University near Cape Town, South Africa. His thesis was on the impact of the global financial, economic, and food price crises on microfinance institutions. In 2009, served as a Kiva Fellow in Kisumu, Kenya. Joel is currently working on an MPhil in futures studies. He also works with a South African research institution, and edits a semi-annual publication called *Finance Forward*, which explores trends influencing the future of inclusive financial services. When asked why he entered the contest, Joel said, “The African women who are recipients of microloans have accomplished incredible things within their communities as a result. They have earned the respect of their communities and are seen as leaders, and I felt that it was important to tell their stories.”

“We are pleased for the winners of our first Correspondent contest, and grateful to all of the contestants for sharing their passion for microfinance and for our organization’s work,” said Jennifer Mitrenga, senior vice president, Opportunity International. “We look forward to seeing the outcome of Kelly Flanagan’s multimedia reporting on our clients in Tanzania, and anticipate that we will use her reports to build greater awareness surrounding the correlation between financial inclusion and women’s empowerment.”

For impoverished women, secure banking services have remained largely out of reach due to a lack of proper identification required to open a bank account. For many, an Opportunity International bankcard is their first step toward establishing formal identification. To give women in the developing world safe, secure access to banking services, Opportunity deploys cutting-edge technologies such as smart cards and biometric fingerprint readers. With biometric fingerprint technology, Opportunity is able to ensure that no one else, not even her spouse or his relatives, can take money out of her account. To access her savings, a client simply inserts the card and presses her finger to the screen. Greater control over her family’s resources can lead to expanded economic opportunities and a stronger voice in family and community matters.

About Young Ambassadors for Opportunity (YAO)

YAO is a network of passionate, globally-minded young professionals who are dedicated to providing economic opportunities for people living in chronic poverty. Through volunteer-led, regionally based chapters, YAO is raising awareness and funds to build a full-service bank for people living in poverty in Tanzania.

About the “Banking on Women” campaign

Opportunity International’s “Banking on Women” campaign is designed to build awareness of the impact of savings accounts and small business loans on the lives of women living in extreme poverty. The campaign includes a combination of offline and online engagement, education and fundraising initiatives. To learn more about the “Banking on Women” campaign, and to take action, please visit www.opportunity.org/change.

About Opportunity International



Opportunity International provides access to savings accounts, small business loans, insurance and training to over two million people working their way out of poverty in the developing world. Clients in more than 20 countries use these financial services to start or expand a business, provide for their families, create jobs for their neighbors and build a safety net for the future. For more information, visit www.opportunity.org.

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