



**Legal Resources  
Foundation**

# PhotoVoice



James Munembe

*» She never bothered to visit the children although she lived a few kilometers away.«*

## LRF outreach empowered me

**“I never knew a man could apply for custody!”**

My name is James Munembe from Samanyika Village, Nyanga. In 2011 I divorced my wife who refused to take our two minor children with her — Bright, a boy who was then 7-years-old and Ruvarashe, a girl who was 3-years-old. I had to take care of them with the assistance of my mother until my former wife suddenly reappeared in 2016.

She took the children with her, pretending she would bring them back after the school holidays; she never did! I pleaded with her to send the children to school and she agreed on condition that I provided food and paid school fees. Problems started when she re-married, leaving our children with her father. No one could take good care of them; they even dropped out of school. Ruvarashe got sick with sores all over her body, to the extent that she could neither eat nor walk and I learnt about this from the school headmaster. What shocked me was that my former wife never bothered to visit the children although she stayed less than 10 kilometers away. My father-in-law refused to give me the children—he was bitter that I had discussed the issue with the school headmaster.



James narrating his story

### The LRF assisted me to prepare court papers

The LRF was conducting community outreaches in our area and I attended one on children’s rights. It was my first time to hear that a father can apply for custody. After the outreach I approached the LRF Paralegal Mr Hazvinavamwe and narrated my story and he encouraged me to apply for custody. He assisted me to prepare the court papers and I confidently approached the court which ruled in my favour. However, my father-in-law refused to give up the children until I approached the police . They called him and explained the consequences of disregarding the ruling - that’s when he turned up with the children.

### I went back to the LRF hopeless and depressed

On our way back home, my father-in-law became arrogant and only allowed me to take my son, he refused with Ruvarashe ,accusing me of embarrassing him by reporting the case. I had to go back to the LRF, hopeless and depressed. The paralegal assisted me to draft contempt-of-court papers which I submitted to court. I was asked to go back to the police who were supposed to enforce the judgment –they did not cooperate until the Clerk of Court ordered them to act. I was assured by both the court and the police that I would get my daughter back in a few days. My son is now going to school and I am confident that very soon Ruvarashe will join him.

I am grateful to the LRF’s efforts. No one in our village knew that a man can successfully apply for custody. In fact, we had never been taught about the law by anyone. This area is remote and rarely do we get development organizations coming here to work with our community.



James with LRF Paralegal  
Fanuel Hazvinavamwe