

when one door closes

Fledgling nonprofit **Windows for Widows** aims to empower women one widow at a time

When retired Wall Street power player Heather Ibrahim-Leathers' beloved grandmother passed away in 2007, it gave her a chance to reflect on both of their lives. Pregnant with her second child, Ibrahim-Leathers "couldn't fathom being widowed," she recalls. Years earlier her grandma, who lived in Egypt, had lost her husband and was forced to forfeit her inheritance, leaving her with "four kids, no income, and barely a roof over their heads."

Ibrahim-Leathers started doing some research and learned that there are 100 million widows around the world—many facing similar hardships and financial struggles. This knowledge, plus a desire to "draw attention to the epidemic of widowhood" led Ibrahim-Leathers to create Windows for Widows (WFW) in 2009. The organization partnered with the Lead Foundation, Egypt's largest microfinancing firm, to give widows of all ages skills-based training in everything from computers to woodwork, along with business development know-how and guidance. The Lead Foundation then provides the women with small-business loans to launch their own endeavors.

Based in an Egyptian community center in Old Cairo, Windows for Widows has already helped the lives of 75 women in the six months it's been actively on the ground. The organization is slowly chipping away at cultural barriers that frown upon women working, while providing females who've lost their spouses with a safe space to learn. And they're taking their work global—WFW recently joined forces with orphanages in the Dominican Republic to provide the funds necessary to hire Dominican widows as caregivers for children orphaned after the earthquake in Haiti. "We're trying to take a very bad situation and harness the skills these women have and make something positive," Ibrahim-Leathers says. — **Anthonia Akitunde**

Visit windowsforwidows.com for more information.



Although Windows for Widows' outreach has centered on women in the Middle East, it recently expanded its global efforts by partnering with orphanages in the Dominican Republic.