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Giving girls a competitive advantage



Girls from different girl groups in Nairobi have gathered in this theatre in Babadogo, ready to gain new knowledge and a competitive advantage in the employment market.

- I hope to be someone good in the future, and reach the goals I set for myself in life, Mary Akinyi tells me. She is one of the participants of the Braintrust program.

By: Sigrid Eikeland

In a theatre in Babadogo 10 girls from all over Nairobi are meeting up to learn how they can prepare for the challenges they will be facing later in life. Mary was chosen to be a part of the Braintrust program as a volunteer from the Kibera girl Guide Centre. All the girls participating in the program are representing different girl groups from all around the city in the sun. Elizabeth Okinda, one of the assistants in the program can mention some: Binti Pamoja, Kwen Serious and Heshima Kanya are some of the girl groups.

A great network

Susan Adhiambo is one of the main coordinators working with the Braintrust program. - The main purpose of Braintrust is giving the girls knowledge they wouldn't get elsewhere, in their schools

for example, she explains. - This program is a result of a great working network, Susan continues and can mention the Nike foundation to be one of the head funders, supporting their project. - Normally we would be three times as many girls here today and our great goal is to eventually reach out to two million girls, with the growth of the program the coming years.

Learning to believe in themselves

Each of the girl groups taking part in Braintrust will be attending for a period of six months, meeting with their coordinators two Saturdays each month. - During these sessions we learn a lot. Among the topics our coordinators teach us I can mention financial education, the reproductive system and life skills, Mary explains. - The life skills is a big one covering things such as communicative skills, assertiveness and having confidence in yourself. After the six months period is over the girls will have an exam to make sure they are worthy of the Braintrust certificate. - This certificate will open many doors for me, with it it will be easier to get into college and later getting a good job, I really hope I will pass.



The leaders of tomorrow



195 young girls, from Grasham secondary school and Mcedo primary school, can proudly raise their Mrembo certificates in the Air. Showing that they have been privileged enough to be able to learn a lot about HIV and Aids prevention, as well as knowledge every girl should be entitled with while growing up.

You might think that living in Nairobi's second biggest slum reserves you from a life of sexual knowledge, personal hygiene and HIV prevention. One might even think that people living in the slum lack of interest in these subjects. In that case, these girls can prove you wrong.

By: Sigrid Eikeland

During the past twelve weeks they have gained great amounts of knowledge, knowledge they never thought they would possess.

Two curious girls

Jacinter Adhiambo and Eddah Awino were

designated as the two girls who had stood out the most, as interested students with dedication and willingness to learn. After having a talk with these young ladies about their experiences with Mrembo, and what they had learned, there was not a question to that designation. - For girls, especially us lining in the slum it is very hard to know how to handle many things. Kidnappings occur often in the slum, we even have to be careful just going to school, Eddah tells me. - Mrembo has thought us how to handle issues like dangerous men, rape cases and pregnancy. How the mother should

handle all the stages of the pregnancy process, Jacinter compliments.

An uncomfortable topic

An important part of the Mrembo program is teaching the girls about their menstruation. What it is and how to handle it. A big problem for girls in the slum is that they don't learn about this anywhere, therefore thinks something might be wrong with them, doesn't tell anyone and skip school for the period. If a girl stays away from school every time she is menstruating, she will lose a lot of teaching in a year. - It must be difficult for the girls to

talk to their parents about this, especially if they are a little bit shy, Eddah thinks. Every month, the girls are given pads and sanitary towels by Mrembo, but this isn't enough. - Fortunately for me, I have talked to my mum about this and she can buy the pads for me, but this isn't the case for many girls, Jacinter says.

Saving up for marriage

Both Eddah and Jacinter wants to keep their virginity until marriage. - This is extra hard when you are living in the slum, and next year I will be starting High School. In High School the pressure will increase as the boys are getting more mature. Eddah can also tell me that if you are living in the slum it is extra important to stay away from sex as the chances of getting pregnant, getting HIV and other STIs.



Elizabeth Okinda is the program officer of the Mrembo program. Here Elizabeth is giving advice to the girls on how they can implement all of their new knowledge to their every day life.

Women Win impressed over VAP and Mrembo

An important Visitor

To the graduation VAP brought especially one very important visitor. Clementine Klijberg, the resource mobilization director for Women Win. Women Win is a great Dutch organization fighting for women's rights. Throughout the world you find plenty of non-profit organizations, Women Win targets the ones using sport to teach young girls about their rights, just like the Mrembo program does. - I am especially impressed with Mrembo's curriculum. At our organization we work to build up the capacities of the organization we fund and co-operate with. Now we can bring the Mrembo curriculum to other organizations as a good example of how their programs can be run,



Some of the girls got the honor of receiving their certificate from Clementine Klijberg, Women Win.

Clementine says. She also agrees with Moses, the head teacher of Graham secondary school. - Mrembo has done a lot, and there is still a lot for the organization to be done.

A grand Graduation

- This has been a really nice graduation, Clementine can gladly ascertain. - Many, many girls were attending and they all looked really happy. I also found the comments of their male teacher very motivating, nice to hear a man's view on a program like this. The teacher took the girls through all of the learning objectives on the certificate, making sure every girl knew the importance of every points.

Potential funder

After seeing the good work of the Mrembo program and VAP in general, Clementine hopes to assist the Mrembo program in searching for new funding within the Dutch government.

- True life experiences



Mary (11 years) and Ann (10 years) are primary school students at St. John's, located in Nairobi. At school the two girls love studying science, but not so much social science.

- At the program we learn about AIDS, Ann tells me. - We learn that you can't tell just by looking at a person if he or she has AIDS or not.

By: Sigrid Eikeland

Ann and Mary are both attending the Skillz Kenya program at St John's primary school, held by peer educators from VAP.

- Also, we learn about sex, Mary continues. - We learn that we are too young to start having sex and one should never have several partners. This increases the

chances of getting HIV or AIDS.

The peer educators at VAP teach differently than what other teachers do at the school - They teach us very well, so that we can easily understand. And the things they teach us are true! Ann confirms. Mary agrees with Ann. - Everything we learn are information we need when we are growing up. We learn by listening to what they are saying while playing games and soccer.

For the educators at VAP it is important that the message they give to the youths get passed on. - I have told my family about what we have learned. They like it. When I told my mum about the coaches and their message, she told me that everything they are saying are true life experiences, Ann says.

"Guys want to be my boyfriend, but I refuse. I am too young for that"

Fortunately both Ann and Mary can tell me that they have never experienced to be pressured for sex. And hopefully, through the life skills they learn by the peer educators, they will know how to stay away from sex until they are old enough and know how to handle the pressure by older boys.



Vijana Amani Pamoja has a mission to integrate social and economic values through soccer by creating a pro-active health environment. Their vision is to establish a society that is socially, economically and healthfully empowered.

VAP is a charitable organization based in Nairobi that was founded in 2003. Currently, VAP focuses on four different programs: Skillz Kenya, Stop TB, Mrembo Program, and Kick-Out Corruption. VAP also performs an annual TB screening soccer tournament.

VAP uses soccer as a universal language to connect with members of the community and therefore enable a strong foundation to teach HIV prevention

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