

ROYALS

How Prince Harry's Own Struggle With Mental Health Inspired Nigerian Students

"The duke and duchess definitely lit a spark that we're just happy to keep going and growing," Afam Onyema, CEO of the GEANCO Foundation, which organized a mental health summit for teens in partnership with Archewell, tells *Vanity Fair*.

JUNE 3, 2024



KOLA SULAIMON

 SAVE

Last month, one of the highlights of **Meghan Markle** and **Prince Harry**'s trip to Nigeria was **spending time at the Lightway Academy**, where they participated in a mental health summit that focused on giving teens tools to help deal with their emotions. The summit was a part of the couple's charity partnership with the GEANCO Foundation, a Los Angeles-based organization that helps support education and medical care in the West African nation. According to GEANCO's CEO **Afam Onyema**, the partnership is ongoing, and the Archewell Foundation's support for mental health programming for Nigeria's teens will continue into the future.

Onyema told *Vanity Fair* that Harry gave a speech outlining some of his own mental health struggles, and it had a visible impact on the students. "He inspired those kids to open up and realize it's okay to not be okay," he says. "They were inspired so much by Harry and Megan. From the questions they asked about mental health, you could tell they were so hungry to learn more."

Royal Watch

An overview of the chatter from Kensington Palace and beyond.

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Meghan and Harry first partnered with the foundation in 2023, when **they supported a program** to distribute period supplies and provide education about menstruation to 2,500 girls in Nigeria. Late last year, Archewell approached

Onyema with the idea for a program that would expand on that previous support by adding in a mental health component for all genders. With the help of a licensed psychiatrist and a team of psychologists, GEANCO created a two-day curriculum focusing on mental health basics and their application to teen life.

Though the cornerstone of the trip was supporting wounded veterans and promoting Nigeria's recent entry into the Invictus Games, the duke and duchess were able to spend a day with the students at Lightway as they began the program. The couple gave speeches that touched on their own experiences with some of the fundamental ideas that would be discussed, like friendship and making connections.

"Harry mentioned it during his talk: Do you see a friend in class who looks down? Do you see someone you're playing with is not feeling well? It's about asking, Are you okay?" Onyema explains. Then the curriculum continued unpacking those themes with trained facilitators. "The facilitator would ask, 'Have you ever felt stressed about a test, or stressed about a family situation or a relationship? And what do you do to deal with that?'"

Not every student will benefit from beginning their seminar with a pep talk from some high-profile mental health advocates, but Meghan and Harry wanted to build something that continues beyond their visit to the nation. "They want to do a program that's lasting, that has an effect throughout the years," Onyema says. "We love the fact that they're coming along as partners. It's not just a photo op, or doing this one time. They really want to dig in and make this an ongoing part of their work, a major part of their work."

Onyema says the students at the Lightway Academy are still benefitting from the initial summit. "The duke and duchess definitely lit a spark that we're just happy to keep going and growing. And even now, weeks after that summit, as we're preparing for the rest of [the lessons], kids are still asking questions, and they're

still challenging the status quo,” he adds. “It’s great to be able to be part of that change, and a lot needs to be done, a lot more on the government-funding level. But in our small but impactful way, we’re trying to make a difference.”

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