

Davis Project for Peace 2013 - Project Proposal
The Buddies Program: *be a mentor that matters* - Swaziland
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Swaziland: Swaziland is the last absolute monarchy with a population of about one and a half million people. The Kingdom of Swaziland is acclaimed as the most traditional and peaceful country in Africa. However, just like in most African countries, Swaziland faces high rates of HIV/AIDS, illiteracy rates and cases of women abuse and rape. Over the past few years, more Swazi women have reported cases of abuse to authorities – and we have seen a few peaceful marches there and there decrying abuse targeted towards women. While this is a positive trend towards equal rights for all, there is still much to be done. Swaziland's culture and tradition relegates women to second-class citizens. Such cultural barriers incite abuse in Swaziland and lead to poor law enforcement.

Introduction: My NGO, Stop Women Assault (SWA), came to existence after I created a Facebook group and twitter account that condoned rape and sexual assault/harassment in Swaziland. A month later, with the help of a female student at the University of Swaziland, Stop Women Assault was launched at the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) as a student-ran-group. Our purpose is to bring attention and start dialogues about sexism in Swaziland through the use of skits. Currently, our skits challenge people to look at the Swazi law that bans Swazi females to wear mini skirts through different lenses. Unfortunately, my culture teaches, "don't be raped," instead of "do not rape." For example, a police spokeswoman justifies banning of mini-skirts by saying; "the act of a rapist is made easy, because it would be easy to remove the half-cloth worn by the women". Because of the authorities' indifference to stopping sexual assault my NGO has created a new program, *The Buddies Program: Be a mentor that matters*. Sharing some similarities with Teach for America, this program aims to use academic achievement as a way to help women from disadvantaged backgrounds gain admission to Swazi universities. This nine week long academic program will also host a daylong anti-abuse workshop and help participants attend the Young Climber Career Program. So create a safe space for the anti-abuse workshop, the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA) will facilitate the workshop. Stop Women Assault believes that education is an indirect yet effective way to fight sexism and abuse. In Swaziland, education breaks the poverty cycle. More importantly, education exposes a person to different ideas and opportunities. Education creates a critical thinker, and it allows self-dependence. Poor female education has led to a high increase of sugar daddies in Swaziland and it has led to many cases of disease and abusive relationships. By educating women, we create a generation of females in Swaziland that understands that any form of abuse is not their fault and abuse is wrong.

The Buddies Program is fortunate to have the support and the help of SWAGAA, my high school head teacher and the members of Stop Woman Assault at UNISWA.

Education System in Swaziland: The education system in Swaziland mimics that of the United Kingdom. Students are expected to go through primary school (grade 1 -7) and then attend high school (grade 8 – 12). Before graduating from high school, students across the country sit for the International General Certificate for Secondary Education (IGCSE) exam. Students who obtain above a certain point average in their IGCSE exam get admission to the country's universities. The Swazi government offers free higher education scholarships to any Swazi student admitted to these domestic universities. While free higher education is good, by default, this opportunity is available to students from high performing schools—which are mostly urban schools. Poor academic performance in rural schools has always drawn attention from the media but little has been done to alleviate this situation. Failure for students, especially girls from rural communities, to obtain a University degree leaves little incentive for their parents to "waste" money on education.

How will The Buddies Program work? The buddies program aims at helping girls from several rural schools score better in their IGCSE final exam. Schools that have agreed on working with us so far are Kalamdladla High School, Siphofaneni High School, Vuvulane High School, Timphisini High School, Dwalele High School and Hlathikhulu High School. I will work with schools in the Lubombo region – the worst performing region in the country. These schools were selected based on poor performance as seen on the Swaziland Exams Council's website and their financial status. These extra study sessions can help girls with great academic potential gain

admission to Swazi Universities. The program also aims to support these girls beyond academics by having their mentors become friends and role models. The Buddies Program will consist of fifteen mentors and sixty girls from underprivileged schools. On average, each tutor will be paired with four students. Tutors will be Swazi students doing third or fourth year in University. The tutor selection process will consist of a written application and telephone/personal interview. Preference will be given to SWA members. The buddies program will run from the 4th of June 2013 and end 2nd of August 2013. During this time all Swazi universities are on winter break and mentors can be available to assist girls. Teachers will be responsible for picking girls to participate in the program. They will pick girls that have shown strong dedication to academics and are more likely to share what they learned from The Buddies with their peers.

The typical framework for this program is, **Week 1:** Host a daylong workshop for the rural teachers and tutors. The aim is to introduce reasons to start the buddies program and give logistics of the program. Teachers and tutors will also use the workshop as time to go through IGCSE past exam papers and brief each other on topics that have been or have not been covered in class. During this period, past exam papers and stationery will be distributed to tutors. **Week 2-7:** Mentors start visiting girls in their schools at least three times a week. Each visit will last at least one and a half hours. Per visit, mentors will carry food to give to the girls. Most of the girls will be from poor families with little or no food. Mentors will also be given schedules of when they are expected to carry out study sessions. I will frequently check with the girls, teachers and tutors to understand the efficiency and impact of the program. Tutors will be given information on opportunities after high school to share with the girls during study sessions. The girls will also attend the Young Climber Career Program. The anti-abuse workshop will be opened to both boys and girls. **Week 8-9:** Collect feedback on the impact of the program. Meet with tutors on the final day of the program to discuss strengths and weakness of The Buddies Program. Provide girls with stationery and exam study guides that might help them pass the IGCSE exam. At the end of The Buddies Program the girls will have about a month to their official final IGCSE exam. Participating head teachers/schools will approve the Buddies Program, including the workshops, and if necessary, correspondence with parents will be via the head teacher/school.

Challenges: Even though I believe that this will be a fruitful program, there are some challenges that might be faced running this program. The success of the program is based on the quality and commitment of mentors. To stop this problem, I will regularly get feed back from the girls and choose mentors based, mostly, on desire to teach. Parents might frown upon workshops on women empowerment/talking about female abuse. I will rely on school principals to communicate with parents if need arises. Working with SWAGAA, a group with a great reputation in Swaziland will help prove legitimacy of the program.

What the grant means: Getting the peace grant will give *Stop Women Assault* the financial muscle to help girls from deprived communities stand a chance to get admitted to universities. This will lead to better careers and social status for these girls. Furthermore, the ability to actualize the idea of buddies program is important to me, as it can become an example that young people can be a force of change. Sixty percent of the African population is under the age of 30 and instilling the concept of service and self-dependence is a way to actively change "Africa's single story". I am passionate to do this program because education has changed my life. Attending a United World College in Mostar was a great introduction to serving. Through scholarships (including the UWC Davis Scholarship) I have been given so much and I believe that empowering others with education creates a positive cycle of change. Above it all, I hope this grant will be able to indirectly help women understand that sexual harassment is not their fault and it is wrong.