

Camp WISER (Women's Institute for Secondary Education and Research) 100 Projects for Peace Final Report - Summer 2007

Title: Camp WISER (Women's Institute for Secondary Education & Research)

School: Duke University

Student(s) Information: Chetan Jhaveri (USA, Duke '09); April Edwards (Duke '08) Andrew Cunningham (Duke '08); Kelly Teagarden (Duke '08); Tyla Fowler (Duke '09) Elise Dellinger (Duke '08); Mike Arndt (Duke '10); Patrick Messac (USA, Duke '10)

Project Summary:

The Women's Institute for Secondary Education and Research (WISER), along with Duke University, seeks to rectify the large gender differential in educational outcomes in Muhuru Bay, Kenya, a small fishing village on the shores of Lake Victoria. In the last 19 years, no girl from the Muhuru Bay school district has qualified for college entrance while a significant number of boys qualify every year. WISER will be the first all-girls' boarding school (Grades 9-12) and research center for women in the region.

This summer, the Davis Projects for Peace Grant enabled 36 students from Muhuru Bay and 9 students from Duke University to engage in a dialogue on the interconnections between Gender, Leadership and Health. This pilot program– named Camp WISER– laid the groundwork for tri-annual retreats to be initiated upon the opening of WISER in January 2009.

The Camp featured three core classes: Adolescent Health, Gender & Everyday Life, and Leadership & Entrepreneurship, each facilitated by a team of two Duke students. The curriculum for these courses was developed in the spring of 2007 using teaching modules from PATH, UNIFEM, and The Rockefeller Foundation as a guide.

Camp WISER took place from August 4 to August 18, 2007 on the campus of Rabwao Secondary School in Muhuru Bay, Kenya. The participants were split up into three teams of 12, and would rotate through the three hour-long classes during the day. In addition to these classes, WISER Camp featured a full slate of activities including games time, evening activities (movies, improv comedy, computer lessons, etc.), visits to Lake Victoria, and nighttime reflection. Three meals a day, room, and board for all of the participants was provided.

The goals of WISER Camp were threefold:

- To help participants gain a working knowledge of adolescent health, develop leadership techniques, and understand how gender inequities affect their everyday lives.
- To foster a sense of community between the US & Kenyan students involved in the retreat.
- To strengthen the Camp WISER curriculum by eliciting formal and informal feedback.

Project Results:

Milkah Atieno is a 24-year-old Form II (Grade 10) student at Rabwao. Before attending WISER Camp, she was unsure of whether she should pursue her education, because she has three children and a husband to tend to at home. On the last day of Camp, she proudly proclaimed in Gender & Everyday Life class that she would stay in school, go to college, get a job, and wouldn't mind being called the head of the household.

Chadwick Ouro is a 17-year-old Form I student, very kind but usually reserved with his feelings. For one of our evening activities, we hosted a Poetry Slam. Though he had never written a poem before, Chadwick shared a heartrending piece about his mother's last words before she passed away from HIV/AIDS.

Edwin Ogogo is an 18-year-old Form I (Grade 9) student. On the same day that Milkah announced her ambitions to become "head of the household," he pledged that he would help his future wife in the kitchen. Why? "Because I realize that being able to cook is a gender role, not a sex role, so anyone can do it, not just the females."

These are only a few of the many stories of friendship, growth and cross-cultural exchange that emerged from WISER Camp. Evaluated on the grounds of its three stated objectives, the pilot program was a spectacular success. The participants, though hesitant at first, learned to flourish in the interactive, discussion-based approach implemented in the classrooms. There were many stimulating discussions about HIV/AIDS, sexual health and gender roles. Leadership class took the interactive learning environment one step further through low-ropes course activities, trust falls, and other leadership games.

We attempted to quantify the participants' learning by administering before and after surveys consisting of 10 questions. On average, the participants showed significant gains in comfort with or knowledge of issues related to gender, leadership and health.

There were also many opportunities for informal revision of the curriculum during Camp WISER. The pilot helped us understand which topics to devote more or less time to, which topics translated across cultural lines well, and which ones did not.

Implications:

Camp WISER will be replicated annually following the opening of the WISER school in January 2009.

The key lessons we took out of this experience ranged from simple clarifications (its important for girls to wear skirts at all times in this traditional community) to deeper revelations (many participants did not believe that condoms reduced the likelihood of HIV/AIDS transmission). The lessons learned by the facilitators will be invaluable in running future retreats.

Our long-term vision is to spread the WISER model and curriculum beyond Muhuru Bay to areas of the world characterized by similarly unequal gender relations. Investing in women's education will ultimately increase the quality of life for both the men and women of these regions, the most important guarantor of peace and stability.

