Title: Promoting Education and Cultivating Empowerment (P.E.A.C.E.) Through Girls Basketball
Project Site: Monrovia, Liberia
Sponsoring College: University of Pennsylvania
Students: Summer Kollie, USA, University of Pennsylvania and Princess Aghayere, USA, University of Pennsylvania

Section I

Goal: The primary objective of P.E.A.C.E Through Girls Basketball was to address obstacles to female education in Liberia such as teenage pregnancy, poverty, peer pressure, traditions such as early marriage and female disempowerment among others. Our aim was to promote the importance of female education first through personal development workshops (which focused on sexual and reproductive health, accessing opportunities, leadership, and staying focused) and second, through basketball.

Through two generous grants from the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Projects for Peace Foundation and the Gelfman International Fund, we were able to launch a pilot vacation basketball camp and girls' empowerment program which occurred from July 2-August 2, 2018. We entered into a partnership with SOS Children's Villages Liberia in order to implement the five-week education and empowerment program that consisted of basketball clinics, personal development workshops, and educational outings to the Liberian Senate and the Liberia Coca Cola Bottling Company.

We came up with the idea for our project by combining our separate expertise in basketball and youth empowerment. Because we are both young females of African descent, we knew that we wanted to focus on females. We feel as though women in African societies are often marginalized and oppressed. It was important to us that we not only stress the importance of education but also emphasized the importance of girls exploring careers where women are heavily underrepresented. Therefore, the outings exposed the girls to new career options. At the Coca Cola Factory, the girls learned about the chemistry behind the preparation of soft drinks. At the Liberian Senate which houses the legislative branch of government (the highest law making body in the Republic of Liberia), the girls were able to see the senators and representatives debate and brainstorm solutions to current pressing issues in Liberian society such as the depreciation of the Liberian currency, the economic crisis, and the bad conditions of the roads. Due to the low number of female representation in the different branches of the government, the purpose of this trip was to also inspire the girls to one day take on leadership roles in the Liberian government.

Initially, one of the biggest challenges we faced was in finding a suitable host organization to collaborate with. We first contacted a high school located in a rural part of Liberia. However, it was not feasible to partner with them after several weeks of ineffective communication. The communication was often delayed and for the type of project we intended to do, rapid response and action was imperative. After more weeks of contacting organizations, we finally found a solid partnership in SOS Children's Villages Liberia. The partnership between SOS and us was solid because initially we set up a Skype call to discuss thoroughly our goals and set action items for both parties. We were very impressed with how quickly SOS accomplished their goals and the enthusiasm they showed with working with us.

In the original project we proposed, we intended to build a basketball court from scratch. However, we soon realized that from a logistical and funding standpoint, building a basketball court was not feasible since the court would either have had to be built during the short span of our stay in Liberia or in the months leading to our arrival in Liberia. Therefore, we modified our initial plan and decided to renovate the basketball court already present at our host site.

Before the start of the program, we arrived a week early in order to take care of logistical matters for the successful implementation of the program. We first helped to renovate the basketball court at the SOS CV location. As a part of the renovation plan we repainted the lines and dimensions of the basketball court. We also installed new basketball hoops, nets and backboards. For the duration of the program, the basketball clinics were implemented every Monday and Wednesday and the four workshops were once a week on Fridays. The workshops
focused on topics such as sexual and reproductive health, accessing opportunities, leadership, career goals, and staying focused. 30 adolescent girls attending junior and senior secondary levels from 15 schools around Monrovia partook and benefited from the program which nurtured and enhanced their skills in basketball as well as provided key information and skills to empower them and help them make smart choices. Participants received basketballs, basketball jerseys, and basketball shoes. The Penn Women’s Basketball team donated the basketball equipment. The participants also received hygiene kits, and books among other giveaways at the culmination of the workshops that focused on topics such as sexual and reproductive health, accessing opportunities, leadership, career goals, and staying focused.

The program climaxed with an official closing program and 28 participants were awarded certificates of completion. Stakeholders from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection as well as other women led organizations were in attendance at the closing program. In order to sustain the project beyond our stay in Liberia, we presented the assistant coach with a basketball drills manual in order to continue basketball trainings and sustain the girls’ team for future endeavors. The director of SOS CV Liberia intends to continue with the summer camp in future summers to come.

The project exceeded our expectations in every way possible. The dual aspect of the project (sports education and personal development) for empowering young Liberian females proved to be extremely complementary. Without the two components, the project would not have been as successful as it was. The workshops served as a safe space for group learning and open dialogue to occur surrounding sensitive topics such as sexual and reproductive health. Through experience sharing, the girls were able to foster strong relationships with one another and us. They were able to learn from each other as well as from other female leaders who were invited to speak as panelists at two of the workshops. Overall, the participants were able to learn about the game of basketball and learn and improve upon key skills over the duration of the program. This allowed them to show improvement overtime while learning in a fun environment which fostered teamwork, strength, and sisterhood.

We define peace as the freedom from any and all societal restrictions placed on women. Hence the ability for young women to feel as though they have control of their futures. This program served as a safe space for the participants to play, learn, dream and work towards becoming confident and effective leaders despite their family backgrounds or challenges they may currently face. Being first generation college students, we are evidence of people who have surpassed societal expectations. We want to help other young females accomplish their goals in spite of their family backgrounds or socioeconomic status. This project has enabled us to truly see the importance of establishing programs such as this which empowers adolescent girls through both sports and education. Sports can offer an opportunity for females to learn skills such as cooperation, leadership, self-determination, grit, and perseverance, as well as build mental and emotional health and toughness. These are the building blocks for confidence which is the first step in empowering females. Empowered females can then take advantage of the opportunity to get an education and become leaders who can promote and maintain peace in their communities and the society at large.

In America most youth have probably had the chance to attend a summer program through their school or the YMCA. Many of the girls at the camp however, had never attended a summer program and truly appreciated being able to attend and be a part of this program. They demonstrated both verbally and nonverbally by showing up with enthusiasm to every clinic and workshop. We think about the world now as a chain reaction; by impacting the lives of 30 individuals it is our hope that they will venture out and impact others in their communities as well. Even if the impact is minimal, small changes can shift the direction of an individual’s life.

“This project was impactful because we did not seek to change the world in 2 months instead we sought to give adolescent girls a safe space to hone in on their voices and see the world around them with a new lens.” -Princess Aghayere

“This project has strengthened my belief that one of the keys to building and sustaining peace in society is through youth empowerment. Specifically, female empowerment because empowered women grow up to empower their children, their families, and the world at large.” -Summer Kollie
Section II

1.1 Participants at Closing Award Ceremony

1.2 Participants with their giveaways after a workshop