

VSO TEAM MACHAKOS NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO 2



It is over two months now since we stepped into Machakos County, the place to be. A lot has been achieved and much more is yet to be accomplished. Some wish for additional time in Machakos while others are tired of counting days. Whichever the case, the team is proud of many of its accomplishments. Many ups and downs have been witnessed by the volunteers, right from the placements to the host homes to the social events, that all culminate to the experience of volunteering

as a VSO in Machakos. Challenging, exciting, worth it, exhilarating, are some of the words used to explain the experience so far. This newsletter carefully follows up what has been happening in the lives of the volunteers.

The Mid-Phase Review

Commonly known as MPR in the volunteers' language, the event was held from 7th-9th of November, 2014 at Paradise Lost campsite

in Kiambu County. The daily and tireless meetings of the MPR committee prior to the event were well paid off as they organized a fruitful and enjoyable event at one of the undoubtedly coolest campsites in Kenya, save for the weather. The idea of holding the MPR in a campsite was a huge plus for the team as it was a huge distinction from the ever calm and feel-good-life in Machakos County that the volunteers had settled well into. The sessions covered during the 3 day event touched on cross-cultural differences, host homes, team dynamics, placements, counterparts, personal objectives, and specific phase review.



Cross-cultural session in progress

The sessions were interactive and full of games such as the salt and pepper game, the cup game and nerve wrecking quiz shows. Of note is the human knot game where no team was able to unknot itself although the objectives of the game were met.



Part of the team trying unsuccessfully to unknot itself.

Interestingly, personal and team issues were revealed and aired out during the 'Anonymous Comment Hat' activity over the Team Dynamic session. Issues such as language barrier, relationships, cliques and attitudes existing in the team were discussed and solutions sought.



The team airing out their team issues in a discussion

Well-coordinated teams of committees took care of the stomach issues of the group, with meals varying from chips and nyama-choma, rice and meat, chapatti and beans being served on different occasions. Activities such as horse riding, boat riding and bike riding added flavor to the MPR. Coincidentally, the rains timed our departure to drench the erected tents leaving them inhabitable no more. The

grounds got slippery and wet and the unlucky ones saw themselves slipping off the ground.

All in all, by the end of the MPR, the volunteers were left refreshed and rejuvenated, ready for the second phase of the program.

Community Action Days

CAD 1



The CAD banner

The dedicated CAD committee organized a successful CAD devoid of any failures. Held on the 15th of November at Kasaini Primary School, the event saw a total of 250 youths and interested members present. With support from development partners such as NACADA, BLINK, Future Leaders, Kenya Youth Climate Network, Red Cross, PostBank, DOT and the Kenya Scouts Association, we had various workshops on various fields such as CV Writing, HIV Testing and Counselling, drug abuse, environmental issues, ICT, enterprise and youth parliament. The rains threatened to steal away the day but the weather calmed down and the clear skies made the day better.



Part of the crowd during the CAD

On location we also had case studies speakers who shared their life experiences on terms of how they were empowered as youths and what they were doing with the skills passed onto them. The various workshops recorded a massive success with youths scrambling to get ideas from almost all the workshops. The whole event was a huge success and just to quote a short message from Mrs. Martin from Kasaini Primary School ***“You really did some good work to our youth. You left a great impact in our community with your team”***. It is such words that keep the team moving and their dedication uplifted to greater heights.



A VSO workshop in session

The event culminated with a football match pitting a combination of a VSO team and

Youth Climate team against Mtituni football team. Surprisingly, the VSO team won by one goal to nil.

CAD 2

To drive the point home on issues to do with youth empowerment and drug abuse, the second CAD revisited these issues with the inclusive of a charity walk that incorporated a clean-up of Machakos town.



The charity clean-up walk banner

With an initiative of making Machakos town a clean town we embarked on cleaning its streets right from Machakos University College down to the town center at Mulu Mutisya Gardens. This wouldn't have been a success without the input of some of our partners such as Light of Hope Youth Initiative, Kyaka Hotel, Red Cross, Kenya Medical Training College, Kenya Youth Climate Network, Postbank, Scouts Centre and Coca-Cola.



The clean-up in progress

Updates from Placements

A lot has been happening in the various placements keeping the volunteers on their toes. Many projects are underway while others are complete. Most notably are the Masaku projects that were completed within the first month. The Red Cross volunteers had a blood donor drive on 29th of September. The drive sought to create awareness on the importance of blood donation. Pitched at Huduma Centre in Machakos Town, the afternoon event managed to get 80 pints of blood from the community.



Part of the blood donor drive team

Our Scout Center volunteers have also been busy working on their painting projects in trying to decorate and give the center a

fresh and new look. Their bee-hive project is also running. Their other placement, Machakos Unit, is also full of activities including the decorating of swings for the Unit's students.



Larry and Becca appreciating their paint job

Jake, Juliana and Esther at Springs of Hope have also kicked off their projects including the painting of the furniture at the orphanage.

Far up the hills at Terry's Child Support and Youth Resource Centre, their painting project is underway whereby they are trying to give the dormitories and study rooms some fresh and new look. They have also participated in other activities such as the donation of porridge flour to some 42 home based care clients in the surrounding community.



Jamila (in the middle) assisting in the donation of porridge flour

The Exodus team successfully completed their pilot program of teaching International development at KITADS. In progress is the training of life skills and basic ICT skills to youths at Mwania. This program is realizing some immense success as depicted in the increasing numbers of youths seeking training from the volunteers week after week.

Socials

A couple of birthdays have so far fallen within the programme. Kate was the first volunteer to celebrate her birthday at Kyaka Hotel with the whole team. In her own words about her birthday "everything was new and exciting. I enjoyed trying to dance like a Kenyan". The team overwhelmed her with niceties and smiles were all over her face. Second in place was Shila who marked her birthday on the 17th of October. To her, she "felt good as it was away from home and I was still adjusting to Machakos and I really appreciated it and loved the cake". Celebrated at one of the coolest clubs in Machakos, the team danced with her all night. On 5th of November was

the next birthday belonging to Andrew. Celebrated at Scouts Centre grounds, his birthday coincided with the Bonfire night celebrated in the UK to commemorate the failure of Guy Fawkes attempt to burn down the UK Parliamentary buildings. To make Andrew's birthday more exciting, we decided to light a bonfire as a replica of the attempt to burn down Guy Fawkes.



Volunteers pitching up firewood for the bonfire during Andrew's birthday

The volunteers sang and danced with Andrew around the bonfire for the better part of the night. In Andrew's words "it was nice having the whole team on my birthday plus the bonfire was a unique experience" I bet this is the best way that Andrew has ever celebrated his birthday. Esther's birthday followed on 23rd of the same month. Celebrated at the infamous Machakos People's Park, Esther was lost for words as the team sang to her the birthday song, as her host family watched in smiles.



Esther salivating before cutting her birthday cake

25th of November was Takyiwa's birthday and since it was in the middle of the week, the volunteers decided to push the celebrations to the weekend at the ever cool Gardens Hotel. According to her, she had a good time, and all the volunteers made the birthday week very special to her.

Intercultural Dinner

One of the best ideas from the social committee, the intercultural dinner was meant to promote cultural exchanges and experiences among the volunteers through meal sharing. Hosted at Mama Rose's house in 5 hills, the night saw the sharing of different types of Kenyan and British foods. On the table lay different hot and cold dishes ranging from pilau, minced meat, macaroni, guacamoles, apple sauce, stir fry, livers, garlic bread, black and white forest cake, rice cake, custard and mixed fruits.



Volunteers enjoying the dishes served during the night

Indeed the volunteers ate to their fill in this night. It was exciting for many of the volunteers tasting dishes that they had never tasted before. Furthermore, this event was meant to strengthen team spirit as the volunteers were grouped to cook in pairs. By the end of the dinner, everyone was satisfied and happy, with the exception of the volunteers from Mama Rose's house who were left with loads of dirty utensils to wash.

Active Citizenship Days (ACDs)

As the program demands, the team has successfully conducted a number of ACDs that have addressed issues facing both the UK and Kenya. Issues discussed so far range from women empowerment, climate change, youth empowerment, child rights to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). During their GCD, our volunteers attached at Red Cross eloquently covered women empowerment issues, with emphasis on the differences on how women have been

empowered in different countries in the world. With the recent spotlight on environmental issues, our volunteers attached at BLINK thought it well to cover climate change in the world. Climate change effects especially in the third world were elaborated and the roles of different nations in limiting climatic changes highlighted. "What stood out during this GCD is the heated debate that ensued during a mock United Nations meeting on Climate Change" adds Kengah.



A presentation on climate change during the GCD

Hot on the heels was the Township/Scouts GCD on youth empowerment. This topic was so relevant and vital to be covered as the ICS-VSO program is built around youths. Issues to do with the youths in both Kenya and the UK were highlighted and discussed, including unemployment among the youths. A couple of guest speakers were invited to speak on this topic and at the end of the session, the volunteers had a much deeper understanding of issues facing the young generation.

In line with the issues covered at their placement, our volunteers at Terry's Child Support and Youth Resource Centre dwelt

on an equally important discussion on child rights. Their session was interactive enough and even included the children from the center who mingled and learned a lot from the volunteers. The dedicated and passionate Rev. Leah gave an inspiring and educative account of her own life, supported by a testimony from one of the youths at the center who is a victim of child violence that left many of the volunteers teary-eyed. According to Jamila, the ACD was “amazing and touching”.

Jake and Julianna, our volunteers at Springs of Hope, dwelt on issues that many people are quick to shy away from: Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and sex. The volunteers were courageous enough not to shy away from these issues and participated beyond expectations. Our speakers of the day were bombarded with questions on various issues that the volunteers were curious to know. Of interest was the demonstration by the guest speaker on how to appropriately put on a condom before sex. The role plays performed by the volunteers were also educative as they touched on different STDs.

Given the recent security issues in Kenya, our volunteers at Light of Hope saw it fit to elaborate more on crime and security issues during their GCD. Topics covered on that day included capital punishment, with a hot debate between two groups for and against capital punishment. To exhibit their creativity, we visited the Machakos Men’s Prison for more sessions, where we heard from convicts and ex-convicts and had a tour around the prison. By the end of the sessions, the volunteers had a correct perception of prison life as compared to what many thought of it as full of torture and hardships.

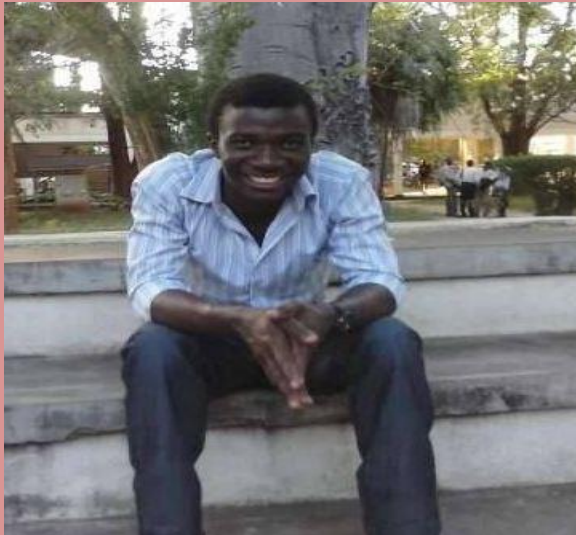


Light of Hope GCD in session



A role play sensitizing on gonorrhea in progress

Volunteer's Advice from Peter Ndoro



“What have you done and loved it in your life? What have you not done and hated it in that same life? You wouldn't realize that until you were part of ICS. This program takes you in the phases of your life: Phase 1; who you are, Phase 2; what you are capable and not capable of doing and Phase 3; how you can relive your life and be that better person than you are.

You are not mistaken being part of ICS. There is a reason you might not be aware of but it still exists. So here's what to do: Focus on why you are here, let yourself go; be flexible; change your conservative way of life; then you will learn more, and when you go back home, you will realize how better you have become. It's all about challenging yourself – experiencing.”
(crossherberts@gmail.com)

The Program and PWDs

One of the core areas that the VSO program in Machakos is trying to address is the plight of people with disabilities (PWDs). As a result, we have partnered with organizations such as Masaku School for the Physically Disabled, Machakos unit for the Mentally Handicapped and Blind and Low Vision Network (BLINK). The team has helped in many ways to address issues to do with PWDs such as trying to build the confidence of the vocational students at Masaku School, getting the Machakos Unit to be registered with the government so as it becomes officially recognized and helping in marketing of various products that BLINK members deal in. The team was one of the partnering organizations of the international disabilities day on the 3rd of December this year. During this day, PWDs living in Machakos were urged to register themselves with the National Council for People with Disabilities so as to draw various benefits from the council.

Our work in Machakos has been noted and appreciated by some of the PWDs groups that we are working with.

“For the last three months we have been having visitors from VSO who have really assisted us. They have showed us different methods of baking cake, improved our cake ingredients by introducing new flavors and more to that they have even bought for us the whisk for mixing the cake. It has been really tasking because we have been doing it on our own thus taking us a lot of time to

mix the cake, but then they have assisted us by providing the mixer which will really assist us. So we are grateful and we wish them well. We are also looking forward to having them any other time to come around and see how the project is picking up. Actually we can say that it's a step forward for us initiated by the volunteers and the group is really grateful for what they have done. We have really learnt a lot from them and we welcome them any other day and continue partnering with us and maybe bring more projects to the group." Anne, a disabled lady who serves as the chairperson of The Muvuti Challenged Self-Help Group in Machakos



The Muvuti Challenged Self-Help Group

Personal Reflection



Volunteer Fenella Henderson-Howatt

"The main lesson I learned in dealing with children with disabilities was that these children are like any others. When you interact with them in the classroom they are just as mischievous, studious, interested and charismatic as all children. The other major lesson I learned while working at Masaku School for the Physically Handicapped was one that I will always remember and means a great deal to me. Before working there I was not that comfortable working with children; I felt there was a slight barrier between me and kids as I was not a 'children kind of person'. However, someone at the school told me "They are just like mini adults". That message is what I'll take with me most as it's the same with all children - disabled or not - we are all equal no matter our age, ability, size, gender, and therefore our differences should be a strength and not a

challenge.” Fenella Henderson-Howatt, UK Volunteer

Volunteer story



Volunteer Dorcas Adhiambo

“As a volunteer at Blink organization over the last 3 months, I realized that the challenges disabled individuals face largely depends on their specific impairments as well as their severity. During fieldwork, I never expected the members of the disabled group to arrive early because their disabilities limited their mobility, but most of the members were always punctual hence proving our mentalities wrong. Most of the disabled groups I worked with dealt in the cake baking business. One of the groups had their meeting point in town and yet their homes were up in the hills. During rainy seasons for instance, we wouldn’t be able to meet them because of the risks and dangers that they faced coming down the hills over the rainy season. Some feared getting unwell in their present condition and slipping down onto rocks. Communication was also a challenge to the hearing and visually impaired, especially

when it came to interpreting social cues in a conversation. The deaf needed to have a sign language interpreter but unfortunately, most groups we worked with didn’t have an interpreter making it difficult to follow our conversations. Those who couldn’t figure out what we were saying felt left out hence not seeing the need of giving us their attention.

My interactions with the disabled community revealed that public perception seems to be also against the disabled. While the public perception of the disabled is getting better, there are still those who are not tolerant of the disabled. They perceive the disabled to be unfit in every way hence cannot contribute to anything. This explains the high number of unemployed disabled people in the Machakos community. This leaves a lot to be done by the organizations that are representing and fighting for the interests of the disabled, starting with myself.” Doreen-Kenyan Volunteer

An interview excerpt with Duncan-Light of Hope Youth Initiative Placement Supervisor



So Mr. Duncan, what does Light of Hope Youth Initiative deal with?

Light of Hope's mission is to nurture, empower and transform young people and women to be self-dependent and crucial players in developing their community. The reason why we are concerned with young people and women is because they suffer the most due to inequalities. Hence I and other like-minded young people saw it fit to form a youth group to address the suffering of the youth and women, and the youth group later grew into a Community Based Organization, as the level of needs to be addressed increased.

So how did you find out about VSO and ultimately get to be chosen as a placement?

I found out about VSO through my many searches in the internet. I was attracted to the wonderful work that VSO is doing hence I sought to know more about it. I read about its intentions to roll out a program in Machakos, so I submitted my profile to them. I talked to the program coordinators and they appreciated and liked what I was doing. I attended the trainings and next given some volunteers to work with.

What would you say are the best things about working with the VSO volunteers?

I like their teamwork. They are all placed in different organizations but when called upon, they gather so fast and work together. Secondly, they are good in networking. They are so good in channeling with other people and this has actually

spread the identification of Light of Hope in Machakos. They are a disciplined lot and well behaved, which means you do not have to constantly supervise them. Their creativity is also on another level. This combines with their planning and organization skills which really helped Light of Hope in rolling out a number of projects. All these things that they brought to Light of Hope really boosted the morale of the organization.

Most definitely there were also some challenging times while working with the volunteers. Any complaints or regrets maybe?

I barely have any complaints actually. The whole team was great, apart from maybe some, who should learn to be accommodative of other ideas. It is nice to have ideas, but then in a team one should learn to be tolerant of another person's ideas too.

Did you learn any lessons from the volunteers?

Yes I did. As an organization, we never stop learning from others. These volunteers have given us lessons in networking. They have taught us that to link yourself to other organizations you have to be aggressive and persistent so as to achieve the best out of that linkage. In other times they have also acted as our mentors and trainers, especially during the roll out of our training sessions in various primary schools. Specifically, Connie, taught us some website designing skills, and thanks to her now we have a website running. They also showed

us the need of transparency and accountability, as well as good communication.

Well said. Do you have any suggestions of improving the programme?

Yes of course. It will be so great if VSO increases the number of volunteers and the length of time to volunteer to a minimum of 6 months. The volunteers have been able to do wonderful things in 3 months, how much do you think they will achieve in 6 months or maybe even more months. Additionally, I propose that professionals, more so, placement supervisors should also be involved in vetting and recruiting the volunteers. Through this way, it will be easy to know the type of skills and person the supervisor will get in their placement. Furthermore, they should increase the amount of trainings for the placement supervisors for better preparation.

Points noted sir. Am sure they will look into this. If you were to rate the efficiency of the VSO programme in Machakos thus far in terms of percentage, what percentage would you give it? And why?

Hmmm. That's a tough one, but I would say 70%. The activities that we did with the volunteers were all successful. Talk of the charity-walk, the primary schools facilitations, and they have even left some other projects hopefully to be picked up by the next team. Overall, the activeness of the whole team has been amazing. The leaders have also been supportive in each and every way. I also loved the passion in the volunteers.

What advice would you perhaps give to other placements?

I would urge my fellow placements to be ready to sit with the volunteers and work as a team. They are not there to work for you but with you. Also, approach them professionally and show them respect. Respect will be shown to you only if you also show respect. There is also a need to reward these young people for the good work that they do. A placement should think of giving the volunteers certificates or letters of recommendations that will further boost their morale.

Your final words or thoughts Mr. Duncan.

What I can say finally is this: One person alone cannot make a change but as a team joining hands, we can make an impact. This is what the VSO programme is trying to embrace.

Compiled and written by the Media Team.