

Empowering Dzaleka Refugee Camp Youth through Education: An Intervention Method
Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi
Kalamazoo College
Shukurani Ariane Nsengiyumva

Section I: Narrative

Empowering youth through education is a project that was created in response to the limited educational resources in the camp, hence one of the biggest goals was to create educational opportunities and resources to the youth in Dzaleka refugee camp. Beyond this, as the title of the project insists, we were also wanting to empower the youth by providing them with leadership skills (through our Leadership and Personal Development course) as well as computer skills that were being taught in both our General Computing Course, and our Microsoft Instruction Course. Last but not least, our most important goal was to boost our youth's self esteem, sense of hope, dignity, and purpose.

This project was strictly funded by the Davis Projects for Peace; no other funding was involved in the launching of this project.

In 2019, I went to do some research for my senior thesis in Dzaleka Refugee Camp. During my time there, I created some trusting relationships in the camp which resulted in some residents approaching me and notifying me of the limited educational resources in the camp, as well as the effects and impact it was having on the youth. The year before, in 2018, one of the only public schools (which is free) had only admitted 150 students of over 4,000 applicants. Some of the youth are unable to attend the private schools that require tuition money, because like many refugee camps, education is not the only limited resource--there is limited employment access and any income generating means, as well as affordable, and effective healthcare, etc. If there are no means for parents to make a reliable income, then they are unable to send their children to the private schools to acquire an education. To make matters worse, countries are not obligated to resettle refugees out of camps to provide them with more stability and certainty in their lives. The average refugee will spend an average of 10-15 years in the camp. Most are uncertain of when they may be resettled from the camp, and this uncertainty has been associated with a depleted sense of hope. One of the ways this has been addressed within the refugee community is through acquiring an education as it at least gives them some hope that they may escape the confines of the camp once they acquire some desirable skills for the workforce or perhaps even be able to be selected to study abroad. The residents had found that the students who were not enrolled in school were engaging in harmful behaviors and they wanted some help with tackling this problem, which is how we sat down and worked together to create this project.

Dzaleka refugee camp has been my community since I was 5 years old. I was resettled from Malawi along with my mother in March of 2013. I am always working on projects that focus on improving the lives of refugees, be it through mental health services, or creating educational and employment opportunities for refugees, wherever they are--resettled or still living in the camp. I enjoy advocating for my community because I understand firsthand what it is like to live without access to such important resources. Going to Malawi and working in the camp felt natural to me because it is, and will always be home for me. The community is warm and welcoming.

I speak four languages fluently. Communication was not much of a barrier, especially given the team spoke English fluently. The team also helped me be able to communicate with our students as some of them spoke languages that are not one of the four I speak. It was nice having a team that was supportive in communication. However, I understand the culture and what some of the communication cues are--dos and don'ts.

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Peace to me means creating and providing equal access to resources to all communities. Access to education. Access to healthcare. Access to employment and income. Access to all resources that ensure that all communities are able to thrive and develop beyond their current circumstances. It is especially important to ensure that resources are provided to our extremely vulnerable communities, like those faced with displacement.

Education is an escape. It was for me, and it especially is for the refugee youth in Dzaleka refugee camp. It is an escape from hardships they face on a daily basis. It creates a hope that one day, they too can rise above their circumstances and become contributing members in their community, and others. This project promotes peace because it has created some access to education for some youth. It is hopefully intervening between them being out of school and possibly engaging in harmful behaviors that may affect them as adults, to them acquiring leadership skills and valuable computer skills. In the short term we are hoping that our students can acquire the basic computer skills, and hopefully have their sense of hope and dignity increase. In the long-term, we hope to partner with organizations that offer more advanced computing courses, where we can have our students transfer to and get exposed to much more complex skills that are currently very valuable in the workforce. The plan is to also have some of the students be able to return and teach others the skills they acquired--hopefully they can get employed by the organizations that will be associated with this project--further exposing them to income generating means.

This project has only further nurtured my passion and drive for advocating and working with communities faced with displacement, especially the refugee community. There is so much work that needs to be done to ensure that all persons, regardless of immigration status, age, color, sex, etc., have been provided all the resources they need to become successful, contributing members in their respective communities.

When I received the news that our project was chosen for Davis Projects for Peace, I was beyond excited and immediately informed the team about it. We were all excited. At the time I was a senior at Kalamazoo College, completing my Bachelors of Arts in Psychology. The plan was to do the project, return and then start looking for postgraduate opportunities. Then COVID-19 hit. It was devastating. I had to break the news to the team and also have to figure out my postgraduate plans immediately. The team was very disappointed but understood that many things had been affected by the pandemic. I went on and secured a job working with a non-profit where I mainly work with refugee families and help them gain access to community resources such as employment, education, etc. My biggest concern about the cancellation of projects due to the pandemic was the uncertainty of when the projects would resume, or if even at all they would resume. When we were finally informed that we would be able to run the projects in 2021, I was both excited but confused at the same time. I wanted to still implement the project but also understood that I had so many responsibilities I had acquired once I got my current job; I was now paying for rent and other bills that were originally not a problem. Doing the project meant leaving work and possibly losing some income and financial stability. In the end, I chose to implement the project. My job allowed me the time off, however it would be unpaid for 3 weeks out of the 4 weeks they allowed me off. I had to make so many changes to the budget to ensure that it was implemented as originally planned, but also that I was able to afford it financially. It all worked out and was worth it in the end.

My advice to future PfP grantees given the pandemic challenges is to be very intentional with the budgeting. Be aware of personal barriers and if at all you are able to promote peace with your project, while also sustaining your own life at home. You cannot promote peace when you yourself are not at

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peace. Your well-being will ensure the success of your project. Find the reasons you decided to implement the project you chose, and let those reasons guide you. You will do great work. Be kind to yourself as the pandemic has affected many things.

Projects for Peace allowed me to promote peace through the creation and implementation of educational resources for youth in Dzaleka refugee camp. As I mentioned earlier, education is an escape for many. There is so much uncertainty in the lives of those who have been forcibly displaced. Creating projects that intervene and create more resources for these communities, helps decrease the uncertainty, and also helps increase their sense of hope, dignity, and purpose.
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Section II: Photographs

