I woke up to my phone ringing this warm September night in 2022. My best friend from high school had just gotten a phone call from a stranger to come to pick up what was left of the belongings of his younger brother from his college apartment in Enugu state, Nigeria. His 19-year-old brother (whom I’d refer to as Chiadika), who had gotten into the habit of using drugs in his high school days some years ago, was unconscious, mentally incapacitated, and in need of urgent medical rehabilitation. Chiadika is not the only Nigerian teenager currently in this unhealthy and regretful state. The consensus is that there is an epidemic of hard drugs in Nigerian society. Since the 1980s, evidence has shown that Nigeria is not just a transit but a consuming country of hard drugs. Out of 248 students at a rural secondary school in Nigeria surveyed by Nwagu et al., 76.3% lifetime prevalence of psychoactive substance use was found- with alcohol, cannabis, nicotine, and some inhalants all in play.

The effects of drug and substance abuse in Nigeria are numerous. According to Nwagu et al., drug abuse is associated with poor academic performance of Nigerian students, low self-esteem, chronic health conditions, low productivity, and the creation of an inadequate environment for investment, leading to low national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Over the five years between 1988-1992, 17.6% of the admissions to Enugu Psychiatry hospital were caused by substance abuse. It has gotten a lot worse since then. Recent projections from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) give that there would be a 40% increase in the use of drugs in Africa by 2030, translating to about 20 million added drug users in Nigeria. The use of drugs has also greatly exacerbated gang activities in the country, especially in Enugu state, where Chiadika lives and where I grew up. The Daily Trust Newspaper reports that in 2022, 57 gang-related clashes led to 166 documented deaths, including the lives of non-gang members. These gangs are sustained by the need for teenagers and young people to be “protected.” Drug use in Enugu makes most teenagers dangerous, unpredictable, and erratic. To find solace and protection after being victims of rape, intimidation, exposure to gang/crime-related movies, child abuse, or bullying, other teenagers, therefore, join other gangs. These gangs, unfortunately, have a deep-rooted culture of drug use and violence. And the cycle keeps going on.

Sadly, not much is being done by relevant stakeholders in the state to address the risk factors that push young people into drug abuse and violent activities. Researchers at the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research developed the Community Readiness Model to help communities be more successful in addressing various issues, such as drug and alcohol use and HIV/AIDS prevention. Using

---

7 https://dailytrust.com/fighting-drug-abuse/
this model, Nwagu et al. found that the Enugu state communities were at a low stage of readiness to prevent drug abuse due to “inadequate professional and energetic workforces.” The study identified that community members of Enugu state have little knowledge of drug abuse prevention methods but are aware of the various disruptions and disadvantages they cause. They also find that the communal lifestyle in the Nigerian society would serve as a great tool and make it more feasible to make a community-wide impact.

I will partner with Busaosowo Foundation10, an NGO in Enugu, Nigeria, to actualize the “ENGAGE NOT DISRUPT” project. “Engage Not Disrupt” is a project similar to some others Busaosowo Foundation has done in some other communities. It targets vulnerable young people in violence-prone communities, seeking to provide them with the opportunity to learn life, vocational and social skills that will help them deal with everyday challenges without turning to violence(gangs) or substance use. This project will be carried out in the secondary schools of the Isigwe and Ubakwa communities of Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. It will adapt the Scout method of peer training. We believe that by targeting secondary school students and involving their teachers and parents, we would follow a community-centered approach, which Nwagu et al. found to be a strength when dealing with the Nigerian society. I will leverage the foundation’s current relationships in the country and state by partnering with the Police Campaign Against Cultism & Other Vices, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), and the Guidance & Counselling Department of the Post Primary School Management Board, Enugu State, Nigeria, all of whom they’ve worked with in the past, and continue to work with.

Through weekly classroom sessions, participants in the project will learn how to develop positive self-esteem, practical social skills, community service ethics, and decision-making/problem-solving skills, which will help them become better members of their community. Parents and teachers will also learn how to deliver these sessions at home and in schools, and they will be infused into their curriculum.

### TIMELINE OF EVENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>REMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>February-March 2023</td>
<td>Stakeholder/Community Engagement with Umuisi-Ugbakwa Community, Police Campaign Against Cultism &amp; Other Vices, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, and the Guidance and Counselling Department of the Post Primary School Management Board Enugu State. Engagement with benefitting schools</td>
<td>This is to facilitate our collaboration and discuss each partner’s role and the project delivery time and structure so that it doesn’t disrupt the school’s academic calendar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2   | April 2023 | 1st Week: First contact with the beneficiaries  
2nd – 4th Week: Development of lesson plans for the classroom sessions | The project will be introduced to the beneficiaries (schools) and their consent will be obtained to participate in the project. |
| 3   | May 2023 | Classroom Sessions begins.                                                | The classroom sessions will hold once a week. Each session will be for 60mins. The rest of the week will contain experiential activities like debates, and excursions. |
| 4   | June 2023 | Community Service Activity Skill Acquisition begin  
One Radio Awareness program                                                                 | Participants will carry out cleaning activities in the community |
| 5   | July 2023 | Parents and Teachers Training  
Closing Ceremony/Presentation of Certificate to participating schools | This is to equip 50 parents and teachers to be able to deliver the training sessions at home and in school |

10 https://www.facebook.com/BusaosowoFoundation/