

Title of Project: Kaa Rada (Be Aware)
Country: Kenya
Sponsoring College: Bryn Mawr College
Website: <http://kaarada.org>

Project Leader: Millicent Auma
Home Country: Kenya
College/ University: Bryn Mawr College

Project Goals:

The immediate goal of project Kaa Rada is to sensitize teenage girls on different forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and to inform beneficiaries of the program about resources available to victims of GBV. Through practical self-defense training sessions, Kaa Rada also aims to equip teenage girls with basic self-defense skills that may help them raise alarm and escape from perpetrators of GBV. Additionally, the project targets to initiate conversations that will unnormalize violence against women and encourage healthy reproductive health practices among the girls. The long-term goal of Kaa Rada is to contribute to reduction of prevalence of GBV in rural Kenya.

Due to ongoing changes in the Kenyan educational calendar and curriculum, I had to adjust the program's schedule. Instead of weekly meetings, Kaa Rada was carried out in two phases. The first phase was a consecutive five-day intensive training and the second phase focused on follow up meetings and development of structures that would ensure the sustainability of the project. Since the school could only allow us two hours each day to avoid falling back on their academic schedule, my team and I had to revise activities to fit the period allowed by the school and the five-days permit we received from the education office. Despite the time constraints, I was able to negotiate for weekly follow up meetings with the participants and the headteacher agreed to this bargain. Thus, the second phase of the project which entailed five follow up meetings on Fridays. As a result of the major schedule changes, and delayed disbursement of funds, I was not able to purchase some materials that needed advance purchase such as a digital camera. While these challenges shook my faith in the success of the project, the implementation of Kaa Rada turned out to be a success. Besides the funds from Davis Project for Peace grant, my team and I received items such as football jerseys, regular clothes, and soccer balls, from well-wishers. These donations encouraged the students to participate in the program. Kaa Rada officially began on May 20th, 2019 and run through July 12th, 2019. My team consisted of two martial arts trainers, four volunteers and two members of staff from our partner organization, YADEN East Africa. The project was implemented in two phases.

Phase I 05/20/2019- 05/21/2019: Staff Training

We held a two-day intensive training for staff to get all team members acquainted with the content and complexity of the project, because we expected to interact with students who could be vulnerable to our content or triggered by our activities. Furthermore, in order to be of possible assistance to the self-defense trainers during the project's implementation, the team trained in the self-defense techniques. Throughout these sessions, we repeatedly emphasized confidentiality as a key value of the project.

05/26/2019: Teachers' Training

As per our project plan, we spent the first day training the teachers who would later be the Kaa Rada club patrons in the school. To get a sense of the community's understanding of GBV and the school's efforts to support the student victims we inquired about the school statistics of GBV victims and pregnancy rates. To our dismay, the teachers reported that they receive at least 3 cases of pregnancies each term. According to the teachers, more than 50% of the students we were going to be working with had experienced GBV either personally or vicariously. Some students came from homes where it was normal for the mother to be battered by the father.

05/27/2019: First day with students

We spent the first 30 minutes of our initial meeting with the students introducing the team members and the project goals. Then the students were given a questionnaire to help us understand how aware they were about GBV and resources available for help. Since we only had two hours, we jumped straight into the discussion topic. After a brief introduction of GBV, the students were split into 9 groups and a Kaa Rada team member assigned to each group. The groups were given a vignette to discuss. The vignette was extracted from a recent news report about young girls sexually violated by a religious leader in Nairobi. We wrapped up the day by the students defining key terms such as victim, perpetrator, cause of abuse, the form of abuse and steps taken after abuse as seen in the anecdote.

05/28/2019-05/30/2019: Intensive Training

For the next three days our schedule was divided into two parts with a 20 minutes break between sessions. During the first 45 minutes the students were taken through the self-defense module of the project. The training was heavily focused on using voice and body language to raise alarm, escape skills and being aware of one's environment. The other half of the time was spent in small group discussions. Although there was little contribution on the first day of the project, I observed that the student participation in small groups was much better and the students were very respectful of each other when sharing. While students were willing to talk about the abuse that may have happened to their family members, my team and I observed that students were reluctant to admit that anyone in the school had ever been abused. Similarly, most of the students believed that when "mother is wrong", it is justifiable for "father to discipline her".

05/31/2019: Community Event

On the last day of our on-site implementation, we held a community event where parents and other community members were invited to join in the conversations we had been having during the week. Contrary to our expectation, the turnout was very large. The parents were impressed with the objectives and activities of Kaa Rada. Whereas we had expected the parents to be opposed to students sharing about their domestic upheavals, parents appreciated the efforts of Kaa Rada to encourage such conversations. Furthermore, they requested the Kaa Rada club to offer counseling services to student since the disputes at home and early pregnancies that result from sexual assault were some of the factors that affected their children's performances in school. In response to this, YADEN east Africa committed to assigning two counselors to the school who'd act as counselors to the students. Following the intensive training, the Kaa Rada club was inaugurated. Each club member was given two 16-pack sanitary towels and a Kaa Rada T-shirt. The club also received manuals that were provided by YADEN.

Phase II 06/01/2019 - 07/12/2019

I held 5 meetings at the school post the training week to follow up on club activities and plan for the counseling program that would be championed by YADEN. During these meetings, students would present on advances they had made throughout the week in terms of creating awareness to GBV. The students agreed upon weekly discussions for each class and art projects to create more awareness of GBV in the school. When I was not at the sites, I worked to the Kaa Rada website to reach more people even after the summer and for sustainability of the project. The impact of Kaa Rada crossed county borders and my team and I were invited to two other schools to talk to students about GBV. This brought a lot of fulfillment to me as a project leader. It showed me that Kaa Rada was not limited to Simbi and that even after I come back to school the message and mission of Kaa Rada will continue to reach more people in Kenya.

Defining Peace

Peace is a state in which a person, regardless of their gender, is assured of their physical safety and has ready access to help when in danger. Peace also means that one can express themselves and speak against vices that may violate this state without being condemned. While communal peace is key for societal development, I believe that this state can only be achieved when individual members experience both physically and emotionally at peace within their environments. Project Kaa Rada contributes to the establishment of peace as it creates a platform for community members to speak up against the vice of Gender-Based Violence. By encouraging conversations about GBV, Kaa Rada contributes to eradicating the normalcy with which violence against women and girls is treated among the people of Kendu Bay. Besides ensuring that the students get skills that would help them stay safe, Kaa Rada also encourages personal peace by providing the students with channels that would help them recover from the trauma caused by abuse that could, in turn, lead to depression, self-spite, self-blame and other behaviors that may cause one to lack personal peace.

Through the implementation of Kaa Rada, my opinion about the world's views on GBV were challenged. From discussion with teachers and parents I realize that to completely eradicate GBV, there is a need to shift the spotlight from victims alone. Instead there should be more emphasis on holding perpetrators accountable for their actions; accountability is especially crucial in situations where the perpetrator is a family member or is someone who has authority over the victim. Holding perpetrators accountable will not only protect women from GBV but also teach boys and men the unacceptability of GBV in society. This will prevent the shaming and self-blame that victims of GBV sometimes experience.



Teacher's Training Day



Club Members



Community Event