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Tujikaze Project

Rift Valley, Kenya.

Project goals:

The aim of Tujikaze project was to empower and educate high-achieving young female athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds in Rift Valley through leadership training, educational empowerment and talks on sexual, mental and reproductive health. The project also seeks to promote a good sporting culture among its mentees by providing opportunities and resources for sporting and physical exercises.

Project summary:

In Tujikaze, as in most African communities, we believe in the idea that it takes a village to raise a child and this greatly influenced how we run the project. One of our main focuses was to utilize the local communities as a resource during our search for mentors. We wanted to expose our mentees to successful people in their communities who had grown up in similar circumstances as them and whom they could easily relate to. By doing these, we sought to inspire them to utilize their full potential for they too could reach for the stars. Our mentors comprised of award-winning athletes, medics and educational officers who were experts in their fields, community leaders and high-achieving high school graduates from Rift Valley.

Topics related to sexual mental and reproductive health are hardly discussed outside school in most communities in Rift Valley because they are considered taboo. Young women often find it challenging to educate themselves on these subjects and are often at loss on where to even seek help when needed. As part of the project's initiative to address these challenges, we partnered with some medics from the Moi teaching and referral hospital in Eldoret to educate

the mentees on these topics. The medics also gave talks on drugs and substance abuse and exposed the young athletes to a wide range of mental and sexual health resources that were being offered by the hospital.

Part of the funding from the Davis Projects for Peace was used to purchase high school revision materials for the students most of whom would have otherwise found it difficult to purchase them on their own due to financial constraints. Visiting officers from the Kenya Centers of Academicians also served as a great academic resource for the students. During the last days of the project, coaches and athletes from the region were invited to give talks and offer sporting advice to the young athletes. The mentees were also gifted with sporting gears during the event as a way of encouraging them to continue pursuing their talents in sports.

At the end of the program, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the community. Some of the people who reached out to us to express their gratitude on behalf of the parents were social workers who were overseeing some of the families the students hailed from. A number of local community organizations and community members also reached out with the desire to support the program in the coming years and also help in expanding it to other parts of the country.

One of our main concerns from the beginning was the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the project as we planned to launch it in the summer. Our team put in place safety guidelines prior to the start of the program. What we were not sufficiently prepared for was how it completely messed up the Kenyan school calendar. Students were only allowed a one-week holiday before schools reopened again. That was the only time we were given to host the students at our program. Luckily, we received overwhelming support from county sports officials and school heads during this period who were more than willing to help facilitate the transportation of students to the project's venue.

Peace

Fostering peace involves giving power to the people. That is exactly what we strove to do at Tujikaze. This idea of peace was realized through mentorship sessions geared towards female empowerment in a community whose cultural beliefs and gender norms greatly undermine the positions of women in the society. We believe that peace thrives in a place where all people regardless of their gender, tribe or economic status have equal opportunities and resources to utilize their full potential.

Personal statement

“I believe that women empowerment in a community like my own will contribute greatly to its socio-economic prosperity. I am happy about the impact we were able to make in my home province through Tujikaze. I grew up in the same conditions as most of the girls in the program and it was as if I could see my younger self through them. I would have loved to have been part of something like this in high school.”

-Naomy Chepogeno, Wesleyan class of 2024.

