

Mkombozi

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DAY CAMP FOR YOUTH IN ARUSHA:

Learning about HIV/AIDS, health and life skills

During the last week of June, youth from Mkombozi joined Arusha Meru Secondary School students for a five day workshop in matters of reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and life skills, facilitated by volunteers from Global Service Corps. The "HIV/Aids, Health & Life Skills Day Camp 2008" offered tools for self-protection and personal development, and overall, it created a desire for further learning. The lessons were based on the principle that youth need more than just knowledge in order to protect themselves; they also need the ability, confidence and inner strength to live a healthy and conscious life.

The Mkombozi youth who were selected to join the training at Arusha Meru Secondary School make up a diverse group of teenagers and young adults. Some have the experience of years on the streets, some live independently in different locations around Arusha and others reside in homes as members of families and communities. What many of them do have in common, however, are young lives marked by the experience of standing alone, or having to make difficult decisions long before they reach adulthood. Importantly, if these youth are equipped with skills that enable them to face their reality as strong and conscious people, then they can grow into adults who live responsibly with care for themselves and others.

"Does anybody know what peer pressure means?" asks facilitator Conner Brannen during a morning session. "Can anybody give me an example of bad peer pressure?" One of the boys from Mkombozi raises his hand and answers "smoking", after which another boy suggests "stealing". The facilitator continues by asking how poor self esteem can affect our ability to resist bad peer pressure, and one of the boys provides the group with an answer: "A person with low self esteem might get confused about what they want and about what to do, and if they start thinking too much, they might just start drinking. But someone who has good self esteem could just know what to do and say: I'm going to do like this!"

This past June, Arusha's youth benefitted from the **HIV / AIDS, Health & Life Skills Day Camp 2008**, facilitated by Global Service Corps volunteers.

In effect, by teaching “life skills”, the teacher touches on real, everyday matters ranging from peer pressure to making choices that are suitable for a person's well-being. Developing these skills is significant since it enables young adults to adjust to a difficult life situation, to define goals and to change their behaviour in positive ways.

Upendo Ramadhani, Non-Formal Educator at Mkombozi in Arusha, is one of the staff members who spent several days in the classroom together with the selected youth from Mkombozi and Arusha Meru Secondary School. She says that it was good to see that boys and girls were placed in the same classroom, discussing sensitive issues such as reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. “They really learnt from each other.”

Upendo observed that the group of participants was quite diverse in terms of knowledge and experience. The students from Arusha Meru already had a theoretical advantage when it came to some of the topics in the workshop, but considering their young age and the fact that they seem to live in a protected environment, they lacked real life experience on the topics which were covered. The youth selected by Mkombozi, in contrast, showed a lower level of theoretical knowledge but higher levels of experience. This can be explained partly by the fact that their average age exceeded that of the other students, but also by the reality they have faced and continue to encounter in their everyday lives. “For example”, notes Upendo, “the youth from Mkombozi know all about how to use a condom, while some of the students from Arusha Meru had only seen condoms from a distance”. Overall, though, the diverse group actually worked well together in the classroom, and asked numerous questions during each and every session.

Twenty-four year old Fatuma from Sombetini, Arusha, expresses that the training increases her ability to believe in herself and protect herself: “It will help me to teach the people of my community useful things about good habits and about HIV/AIDS”. Twenty-one year old Halima from Ngarenaro, Arusha, agrees and says that many people are in need of increased knowledge about the virus. “A lot of people don't know how you can get HIV”, she says. “Some people seem to think that you can get it just by shaking hands with a sick person.”

The day camp was closed on Saturday the 28th June to facilitate a ceremony wherein Mkombozi youth performed acrobatics and sang -- something which helps to advance Mkombozi's mission to challenge the stereotypes of vulnerable and street children which label them as “less valuable persons”.

In the end, after final speeches were made, and after certificates were handed out to the Day Camp participants, some returned to their homes and others returned to the streets, and everyone was equipped with new skills for the future.



All Day Camp participants were equipped with new skills and knowledge on sensitive issues

