

Kayla Bruce

Summer 2014

### KFSP Volunteer Report

This summer I worked with the Girl's Health Program of the Kasiisi Project. I had visited Kasiisi in 2009 with Weston High School, working on a few small projects but mostly just visiting the many schools affiliated with the project. I really enjoyed my experience but I remember leaving feeling frustrated that I didn't get to do much. I also didn't really gain a very complete understanding of how the Kasiisi Project actually worked. I knew I wanted to come back for a longer period of time and to be involved with the project in a more significant way. I had a friend who was there for 2 months trying to work on a girl's health program and I was most interested in participating in this part of the project. When I got in touch with Debi and found out that there was so much going on with the girl's health program this summer, I was very excited to get involved.

I spent most of my time working with Eve, the project nurse. She had already been doing a lot with the girls, giving talks on important topics like early pregnancy and personal hygiene. The first thing I started working on when I got to Kasiisi was a women's empowerment talk. I really enjoyed doing this talk because it forced me to think of women's empowerment in a very critical and cross-cultural way. Writing this talk for a group of young girls in my own community would have been very different than writing it for the girls in the KFSP schools. I had to work with Eve to make sure that the talk was culturally sensitive and to find the best ways to get the

messages of women's empowerment across, making it as specific to their communities as possible.

We started by having them introduce themselves and say what they hope to be when they grow up. Then I began by telling them about my own mother, a powerful and independent woman who is an important female role model for me. I hoped that sharing a somewhat personal story myself would help them feel comfortable sharing their own stories as well. I had them think of female role models in their own communities and luckily, several girls in each school were excited to share. Next we discussed gender roles in their families and communities. We made a T-chart with one column for "Roles of Men" and the other for "Roles of Women". After filling in the column, we talked about how many of these roles are changing and women are now doing more things generally thought of as "masculine" and vice versa. We also talked about famous and powerful women across Uganda. I had done a lot of research for this section and after having the girls come up with a few examples on their own, I shared what I had found and left an outline with each head woman teacher. Finally, we discussed challenges that girls face in finishing school and achieving their goals that boys may not encounter. I did this talk on the same day that Eve did the Life Skills talk. These were the two topics to be used for the Music Dance and Drama Competition at the end of the summer.

In my third week, Eve and I administered the essay writing competition on Early Pregnancy and Growth and Development in Boys and Girls. We developed a grading scale and after we had been to each school, I began grading the 280 essays. It was sometimes tough to do the grading. I didn't mind that there were so many of

them, but it was sometimes hard to read some of what these young girls had to say. For example, when discussing what puts girls at risk of early pregnancy, many of them said “a girl may be raped” or “a girl may sleep with a man who promises to help pay her school fees or give her basic needs”. Regarding the dangers of early pregnancy, many of the girls said that if you get pregnant your parents might chase you out of your home or kill you. While I knew about most of these issues beforehand, it was harder reading them in the handwriting of a girl who was only about 12-15 years old than reading about them in a development report.

One week we went around the 5 core schools to give out sanitary pads and do short review talks. Eve did a talk on sex and I did a talk on STDs, topics that Eve had touched on before. I was impressed by how willing they were to talk about these touchy subjects. I was worried that the girls wouldn't feel comfortable speaking up, but at every school there were girls raising their hands and answering questions about HIV/AIDS and other STDs. I was also impressed by how much information they had retained from the first talk. Eve had clearly done a great job getting this information out to the girls, and I hope this review was useful in reinforcing those messages.

Another big part of my summer was planning for the Girl's Health Program Music Dance and Drama Competition. I have planned a lot of events like this one in the US, but, of course, planning something like this in rural Uganda is a *very* different process. For example, say you want to get a big tent for an event in the US. You would simply look up tent rentals in your area, compare a few prices online and then call and make a reservation. In Kasiisi, first you find someone who has a friend

who knows someone who has a few tents. Then you get someone to walk over to his house and ask about prices and availability. Then this person walks back to the office and we wait to have another meeting to discuss whether this is within our budget. Once its finally approved, someone has to go back and make the reservation for the tent. And all that happens before you even start to think about transportation, one of the biggest challenges of working in Uganda in general. The point is, I learned that organizing events is much more challenging in this kind of setting. It helped me better understand “Uganda time” because often times, moving fast isn’t even an option. I think helping to plan this event helped me better understand the structure of KFSP and the challenges it faces as an organization.

Overall, I gained so much from my experience this summer. Even on my third trip to Uganda, I felt that I was learning new things every day. I learned a lot about the NGO structure and was gained a better understanding of how an international organization like KFSP works on the Uganda side of things. I was able to be a more active participant in the organization and I hope I made a positive contribution to the Girl’s Health Program. I do hope to be back in Uganda soon, whether with KFSP or another similar organization.