

FOCUS MULAGO CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER PROJECT

BI-MONTHLY REPORT-MARCH-APRIL 2010

A community survey in the first quarter of the year revealed that there is rampant child abuse affecting all ages. We have been visiting schools in the area and other child support organizations to talk about this problem and discuss what the children can do about it. As a result, we are planning to do a major advocacy campaign on 12th June with 240 children representing 9 surrounding slums (Mulago, Kalerwe, Katanga, Kifumbira, Kyebando, Bwaise, Kamwokya, Kivulu, Kavule) on "Stop child abuse!" We invite anyone that can come on that day to be there and help us stand with these children against this atrocity. (If you are interested in the details of the findings of this research, please contact me for details.)

FOCUS is a part of the Children At Risk Network (CRANE), a network of organizations and churches that work with "at risk" children in and around Kampala. One of their staff, Elise, spent a day at the center and wrote the article below. We have asked to use this article so you can get input from someone other than myself about the news from our program.

Also, during this period, we lost 2 parents to cancer and we have 2 pregnant girls who have dropped out of school one of whom was raped.

136 children are in the FOCUS Child Development Centre and will be supported until they are mature and fulfilled Christian adults. This might be at the completion of university or vocational training or when they find employment. FOCUS are continually ensuring they work alongside community members so as not to challenge the existing order or become heavily relied upon, but an organization facilitating change. This means that they continually network with others in the community, and local council members and parents are represented on their board.

Aiso 9: "At FOCUS we learn life skills, we talk about God. For health, they taught us about cleanliness. I don't want to be in a dirty environment so I help pick and burn rubbish at home. My area has litter; the LC should help us clean it up. I have the right to eat. Posho and beans is my favorite meal. That is what we eat at school."

Paul 11: "We had the meeting for parents and they told them about our rights. Some parents didn't take it as serious especially the right not to be beaten. Because FOCUS also teaches us about rights, I know things that my friends at school don't know. I have the right to learn and have a future. I want to be an engineer."



We have learnt that children need to be their own advocates. Uganda is lucky; it has its own laws and lots of them. The advocacy program has showed us that we don't need more laws but we need to ensure that they are implemented for the children. Society has failed a generation of children because they haven't implemented the law. Sometimes I wonder how we will make humans do the right thing, but I guess it will be God who will do that.

For children to be their own advocates, we need to teach them to do the right thing and make good choices. They need to know they have a voice, and that staff here at FOCUS will listen when others don't. They need to stand up for themselves and not just allow adults to represent them. If a girl goes to her Mother about being abused, sometimes the culture here in Uganda often means that the Mother will tell the child to keep quiet and not let personal business be public.

Mark 14: "We were given the UN Convention about rights. Each class got their own list. Uncle Ernest taught us. I know that I have to be protected by older people, I shouldn't participate in war. I have the right to study, to belong to a family, to have my own religion. That means that my parents might tell me but I choose too. I think our rights means we should be living a good life, but sometimes we are starving at school as we don't get good meals and we have rights but it is somehow hard to live that good life. Some children don't know their rights and so they are lagging behind and suffering through something that they don't know they can change."



The FOCUS life skills project takes place every Saturday. It is a fun club where lessons on self esteem, HIV, leadership and Christian maturity are taught and encouraged.

Martha 12: "At FOCUS, we learn Bible study, English, health and life skills. In the last life skills lessons we learnt about our emotions."

Harriet 13: "I have a right to be cared for. That means adults should pay my school fees, buy my clothes and things like that. We eat nice food at FOCUS. Every type. They give us a balanced diet."

FOCUS changes its Saturday lunch menu every week and children get fruit with each meal. Children's worker Nelson says, "If we give them a plate of food in the queue, they don't move until they get their piece of fruit. They know what healthy eating is!"

Because of the trust built between the children and the staff, children are increasingly reporting to them incidents when child abuse occurs. Ian (name changed) is a member of the program and his FOCUS friends noted that one teacher was constantly picking on him at school. Ian told his parents, but they did not want to complain to school in case worse things happened to him or he was told to leave the school. So the children went with Ian to FOCUS and told them what was happening. FOCUS took the children to the Head Teacher and resolved the issue. "The abusers knew that someone was looking out for the children and they couldn't continue to act in such a way," explain the staff. "It was wonderful for the children. They came running to the next Saturday club saying, "All the other children are calling Ian a star because he

stood up for himself and they all want to be FOCUS children too!” We have since engaged the teachers in the advocacy program and completed training with them.” Being a member of CRANE assisted in this because FOCUS was able to send some teachers to ‘Positive Discipline Training’ (in partnership with Raising Voices) and Mukisa Foundation (a project who works with children with special needs) have run a seminar on working with children with learning difficulties.”

FOCUS also work with Uganda Christian Lawyers Fraternity (UCLF) who have re-established an old partnership, because of the connections made at Hear the Child. As well as training 90 Pastors in identifying abuse and also speaking with parents and children about their rights. However, advocating for the child is not without its challenges. We can use UCLF when we need legal representation but sometimes it is hard for justice to be received. We had two teenage girls who were both pregnant because older men took advantage of them. We worked with the families but they don’t want to report it. When a family can keep quiet and the father potentially agrees to pay for some of the upkeep of the child, what is the alternative? You pursue the case, put the father behind bars and leave the teenage girl and baby daughter to fend for themselves. What do we do? We know other organizations are having similar problems, so it is good to be part of Hear the Child and share such experiences and face such challenges together.



“I am glad the network is engaged with advocacy. FOCUS will not be listened to because we are helping 136 children, but when thousands of children lend their voice, know their rights... Uganda will take notice,” Audrey says.

Claire 13: “I know I have the right to education. This is because if we get educated, in the future I know I’ll be fine.”

Nelson is a happy, young man full of energy. He is a strong role model to FOCUS because of his witness for Christ, his commitment to the children and the fact he always takes them seriously. “It is all really about love. We teach them, love them, and play with them. If I can see a child grow up smiling because FOCUS has supported them all the way to that smile, I’m happy in my work. I should have started working in a bank when I graduated. But why work in a bank when 20 children can chase me around the office and climb on my shoulders?” Nelson grew up 1km from the FOCUS program and graduated from it. He has returned to ensure that more children receive the opportunity in life that he did.

Until next time

Audrey Karuhanga
Program Director