

# FOCUS MULAGO CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER PROJECT

BI-MONTHLY REPORT-MAY-JUNE 2010

Every year, FOCUS undertakes a community outreach project and for 2010, we partnered with children from 7 schools and 5 child support organizations to do an advocacy campaign on child abuse. The children were all from the areas of Kalerwe, Mulago, Bwaise, Katanga, Kivulu, Kifumbira and Kyebando. Our campaign slogan was "Stop child abuse!"



interviewed and held focus group discussions with children from 6 schools and 3 child support organizations (including the FOCUS supported children) in the slum communities where we work. We asked the children about what they found

challenging in their lives, what they knew about abuse, what they would want done about the bad things they see happen in the community around them or in their lives. The biggest challenges among the younger children were; they felt unloved by their parents and guardians; they were constantly told they were a burden and inconvenience and the reason their parents' lives hadn't worked out. The other highly ranked problems were; lack of

## The Strategy

education opportunities, denial of basic needs, poor sanitation at home and in the community, unemployment of parents which brought a whole lot of other problems, physical and sexual abuse, and accidents at home. Among the youth, apart from some of the problems already mentioned above, lack of life skills and unemployment were ranked high among the issues that need to be addressed.



Because of increasing reported cases of child abuse in the press, and in our community, we undertook a research about how deep the problem might be around us. We

Of the urgent and important problems identified when all the information was ranked, we came up with child abuse because as indicated above, most of the problems mentioned, have elements of child abuse and can be addressed in the same advocacy strategy thereby enabling us hit many birds with one stone. When asked, some of the children said they would want the following categories of people to listen to what they have to say: Parents; Teachers; The Government/Ministry of Education; Local Council leaders; District leaders, Church leaders; Community elders, NGOs; Police and friends.

We therefore decided to undertake an advocacy campaign to create further awareness about the problem of child abuse. We understand advocacy as speaking with or on behalf of another to bring about justice. It involves defending or recommending an idea before other people and directing decision makers towards a solution. A big component of advocacy involves empowering people to speak for themselves and see themselves as change agents. Even children! We are learning that an essential part of good development is allowing and giving children an opportunity to influence issues affecting their lives. Also, in order to encourage children to serve others, we need to ensure that they participate in

family, church and community life. Under international law, children have a right to be consulted in all decisions concerning their lives. Making decisions about them based on information provided only by adults may leave critical gaps.



Some recent newspaper articles on child abuse



From the month of April, we started teaching children about what child abuse is, and also taught about children's rights and responsibilities. We planned to, but were unable to conduct an advocacy skills training for other organization staff and school heads and teachers on child advocacy and participation because of a lack of resources. Instead, we photocopied and circulated the training material to the participating groups to enable them do a better job of teaching their children.

The children were also taught a number of life skills to help them know how to deal with and avoid abuse. Some of these included; decision making, assertiveness, and dealing with peer influence.

The overall GOAL of the campaign was; to empower all selected children with key information about child abuses which will help them avoid abuse, or know how to deal with it.

The OBJECTIVES were;

1. To empower all selected children and other children in their schools/projects plus their parents with knowledge on child abuse and how to deal with it.
2. To help children internalise the key information and articulate it.
3. To give the children a chance to articulate and share the information learned through their God given gifts and talents.



## *Reactions to the presentations*

The children said they learnt a lot about abuse in the process of preparing for this day.

Some of the younger children found some of the scenes in the plays terrifying and said they are more scared about the possibility of being hurt in all the various ways portrayed since then. Many children said the things acted out are the usual experiences they go through daily and it was a sad reminder about their reality. The children were excited about having been a part of this event and want another opportunity at it.

The parents had divided views. All parents agreed that it isn't a parents dream or desire to abuse their child, but it happens sometimes unknowingly. Many parents were themselves abused as children so how they discipline children is a response to what is happening around them.

Other social economic factors inevitably result in abuse. Some parents agreed that child abuse is a vice that should be stopped and are sorry about the role they play in allowing it to happen. However, others resented the whole campaign and said we were putting wrong thinking in the children's heads. They don't think a child has rights or should have anything to say to adults. They feel that this kind of behavior will start a bad precedence and children will challenge their authority.

## *Details of children's presentations*

All the presentations were directly about the theme. Each group presented 2 original songs, a play/skit, art pieces, poem and a few recited scriptures relevant to the day's topic.

We can only access a limited number of parents in our community for training, but we will continue to teach about parenting in all available forums.

Our desire was that this key message strategy will be emulated in the various schools and organizations that were represented. We would like the selected group of children to pass on the information to other children and parents and administration of their schools at key events.

We expect that all the information gathered and learned can be shared with anyone that needs it.

## *Resources*

Schools/projects were expected to give support to children in terms of giving them time and space to prepare and availing them with any other support they need. We encouraged that as much as possible, locally available resources are



*Some of the children's art work presented on the advocacy day*

used. We also requested that every group arrange its own transport to FOCUS on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2010 for the day of advocacy.

The schools were very supportive towards this campaign and indeed helped prepare their children for the day. They also ensured that children were availed time and transport to the FOCUS center. Some schools had to be provided with art supplies to make their pieces. We commend the schools greatly for the work they did.

## *Presentations*

A total of 450 people attended the advocacy campaign (300 children and 150 adults). The

adults constituted among others; parents, staff of child support organizations, and officials from government. The children very ably presented a grim view of abuse in the lives of children. Since the children were from the surrounding communities, many found it easy to walk to the FOCUS, however, the children from the furthest organization walked for 2 km to participate. There were a lot of feelings on that day; excitement, tension, resentment, anger, and bitterness.

## *Reality check*

David, aged 11, is the eldest of several children that live with their very elderly grandmother. He hawks vegetables after school till late in the night and is almost always asleep for a bigger part of the time he is in school. The family relies on what he makes. He and many other children like him must work to contribute to putting food on the table.

Many single mothers and poor families are forced to make their children work because every extra pair of hands makes a significant contribution to the family's income. Not for luxuries, but necessities of life, like



food, shelter and clothing. Unless we have an alternate solution to feeding the family, how do we condemn this kind of child labor?

Many abused people if not helped become abusers themselves. The mental and social health of parents becomes a key factor in the vicious cycle of abuse.

Parents who themselves have been abused sexually or severely criticized and unable to please their own parents more than their own needs develop low self esteem, internalized high expectations, together with inability to please. Children of such parents remain sustainable to abuse.

Passive, sick, disabled and absent parents leave no protection for children.

Poverty triggers off all sorts of other problems which may expose children to abuse. These and many other reasons do not excuse abuse but are some of the reasons why it continues to happen.

We have many protection laws in this country but very weak law enforcement. We do not have a working foster care system, so no matter how much we report or may want to report cases, unless we can remove children from abusive environments, we make their circumstances worse when a case is reported. We were teaching about how the children should report abuse when one of the children asked, *“what if the person abusing you is your Father and he is the policeman to whom you should go for help? Where else can you go for help?”* There are no easy answers to these and many more such questions.



## *Impact assessment*

It would be very difficult to measure how effective the campaign was at this point. The immediate success of the project is measured in the numbers of the participating children who attended along with other invited guests. We also consider as a success the information on child abuse that was availed to children. We hope that in the future; all participating schools and organizations can take up the same message and more people can get to listen to the message on child abuse as everyone reaches out to others in their sphere of influence.

## *Ongoing project efforts to address child abuse*

Many of the children under support in the child project have been through various aspects of abuse. Some of them are;

Fred and his siblings were not only neglected, but abandoned by their Father after the death of their Mother. Fred's sponsor's support ensures that Fred is getting an education while another friend to FOCUS, is providing food and rent money to Fred and his siblings.

Michael and Syprine are orphans. 2 families in the neighborhood took them in after an uncle abandoned them. The Uncle had hoped to collect their late Father's insurance money after his brother's death. He insisted he was the children's guardian and needed this support money. When the money wasn't forthcoming, he

abandoned them. The sponsorship they get means they are getting both formal and informal education and now have places to call home.

Emmanuel's' sponsor like some other sponsors helped the family start a business that has gradually grown and instead of having one meal a day like was the case before, the family now gets better care.

Miriam was not getting medical care because when she got seizures, the mother assumed she was bewitched and wouldn't take her to hospital. When Miriam was registered in the project, she was taken for a medical check, where it was found she had epilepsy. She is getting ongoing treatment and is in school.

2 girls were recently defiled and over the years, some other children have been victims of sexual abuse. Such children are able to get counseling and treatment and are helped to move on with their lives.

Many of our parents sometimes vent their frustrations out on their children because they are not able to provide for them. Being in the project helps ease some of the financial pressures at home and in some cases saves children from abuse.

Together we are making a difference in the children's lives.



On a light note, a highlight for the children was going for the annual outing on 18<sup>th</sup> May. We visited the Wildlife education center in Entebbe. Thank you for your continued support that makes such things possible.

Until next time

*Audrey Karuhanga*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR