

A VISION OF A HEALTHIER KENYA: FOR STUDENTS AND INSPIRED BY STUDENTS



XXXXXX: Health For Life Kenya founder Eliana Field-Marsham with pupils after they attended the pilot course.

BY WYCLIFFE MUGA

A youth-driven project aimed at preparing Kenyan youngsters to face the health challenges of the 21st century is attracting considerable attention as well as the support of senior academics.

Called 'Health for Life Kenya', it started with one teenage girl who had an idea, six others who added to it and 950 students who began the process of breaking through barriers to health education.

The girl is Eliana Field-Marsham, a Canadian student with Kenyan roots. Eliana benefited and enjoyed the Ontario school-accredited Health for Life course so much in 2012 that she thought it would be a good idea to adapt for Kenyan students. So last year she and five fellow students from Branksome Hall School taught the course to 950 girls at three schools - Precious Blood Riruta, Bright Girls Shella and Soy Secondary School.

The response was so positive that this year the HFLK team was expanded and now comprises university students from the US, UK, and Kenya, as well as Kenyatta University professors and researchers.

The academics endorsing the initiative include running legend Prof. Mike Boit, of Kenyatta University's School of Applied Human Sciences, whose area of specialty is



XXXXXX: The cartoon character, voiced by Kenyan athlete Charles Lokong, who features in a Kass FM advert popular with youngsters. It is hoped to develop similar cartoon messages to specifically tie in with the Health For Life initiative.

Education in Curriculum Instruction and Physical Education. He is joined by Dr. Festus Kiplamai, PhD, a Lecturer of Exercise Science & Nutrition in the Department of Recreational Management and Exercise Science and Dr. Gitahi Theuri, PhD, a lifestyle diseases interventionist.

They are throwing their weight behind a formal proposal that 'Health For Health' becomes an integral part of the national curriculum.

In July of this year, Elgeyo Marakwet County, with over 130,000



XXXXXX: Pupils at Fluorspar Primary school in Kerio Valley enjoy the Health For Life lessons.

students, teamed up with the Health For Life team to pilot the programme in Kenya, thanks to the co-operation of Governor Tolgos and his enthusiastic officials.

The reaction of pupils and teachers has been overwhelmingly positive.

Particularly popular has been a cartoon produced by local video whizz Michael Muthiga of Fatboy Animations, who have produced commercial videos for a host of top name clients. The video features a character, speaking in the voice of

THE STUDENTS BEHIND THE PROJECT

Eliana Field-Marsham is founder of HFLK and the author of the formal proposal recommending the programme as part of the national curriculum. She is a student at Branksome Hall in Toronto, Canada.

Sharon Koimett recently graduated from the University of Sheffield. She joined HFLK's team on the ground in Elgeyo Marakwet in July 2014, taught classes, conducted information sessions, and is coordinating the program out of Nairobi. (Former student of Braeburn and the International School of Kenya)

Cecilia Jakobsson is a pre-med student at New York University. She joined HFLK's team on the ground in Elgeyo Marakwet in July 2014 and gathered grassroots data from students, teachers and clinicians. She experimented with teaching a fact-based class on female circumcision, assisted by Yale University students Millie Chapman and Nihal Kayali and Fluorspar school's head teacher Caroline Koskei.

Esther Njoroge is a student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and the National Ambassador of Kenya's Youth Senate for Education for Kenya's Youth Senate. She joined HFLK's team in May 2014 and brought Kenya's National Youth Senate on board with HFLK's initiative. In July 2014 she taught classes and conducted information sessions in Elgeyo Marakwet in July 2014. (Former student of Mugoiri Girls High School, Murganga County)

Precious Jebet Kilimo is a student at Dartmouth University. She joined HFLK's team in May 2014. She collected and provided valuable educational material of female circumcision. (Former student of Precious Blood Girls Secondary School, Riruta)

athlete Charles Lokong. Says Michael: "It is great to see the reaction of the kids. Cartoons are a fantastic way to engage with them and get important messages across. We are examining how this can be developed for Health For Life."

Some of the health challenges addressed in the programme include transmittable and infectious diseases, depression, insufficient exercise, improper use of medication, inadequate sleep, poor hygiene and sanitation, poor nutrition, stress, improper use of medicines.

Topics covered in the classes include:

- Regular physical activity (habitual or purposefully designed exercise (activities of daily living and structured exercise).
- Nutrition (healthy eating-making the correct nutritional choices to avoid
- malnutrition, obesity and susceptibility to disease).

- Hydration.
- Sleep and resting.
- Personal care, hygiene and grooming.
- Self-concept (positive body image, confidence building, being your
- brother's/sister's keeper, self-reflection - noticing your strengths and weaknesses).
- Student access to health information, the right to prevention, treatment and
- control of diseases are a human rights.

A final word from Eliana:

"Our mission is a call to action to all Kenyans to take seriously the health of students by helping them lead healthy and productive lives. Our aim is to develop a health and physical education curriculum to inculcate lifelong positive attitudes towards healthy and active living. Kenyan students have a fundamental right to information on all aspects of their health."