



PEER EDUCATION KABAROLE

End-of-year Report January 31, 2021

Peer Education Kabarole (PEK) is a school-based peer education program in the Kabarole District, western Uganda. The program aims to improve student reproductive health knowledge through the use of student Peer Educators.

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An initiative of

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of all Peer Education Kabarole (PEK) activities for the fiscal year 2020/2021 ending on January 31, 2021. More details on PEK activities can be found by contacting the PEK Office in Uganda at Kabarole District Health Department in Fort Portal, Boma or H.E.A.L. International in Canada.

PEER EDUCATION KABAROLE OVERVIEW

First and foremost, we take the opportunity to thank God for having kept us alive, healthy and together as a team throughout 2020. This year has been very challenging with COVID-19 and its effects. Many people have lost their dear ones, businesses were shut down and schools were closed. In-school programming was not possible between March 2020 till the end of January 2021. Despite schools partially re-opening for candidate classes, we were not allowed to conduct our activities in those schools but hope to resume as soon as possible. However, we did not close our office and did not stop our activities. As you read the report below you will find out how we adapted to the situation.

Peer Education Kabarole Administration

Peer Education Kabarole has been running for close to 13 years now. Peer Education Kabarole consists of three part-time staff: Director, Banura Lilian; Programme Coordinator, Mwesige Richard; and secretary, Aliraake Regina.

The Director is the general administrator of all PEK programs. Together with the Programme Coordinator, she ensures the proper, efficient running of the program according to approved work plans. From time-to-time, H.E.A.L. International provides volunteers and interns to help in projects. In 2020, we were not able to host any volunteers due to COVID-19 but through Dr. Arif from H.E.A.L. International, we were able to get support from volunteers in Canada to compose some important health education messages which we shared with Peer Educators through SMS messages, phone calls and WhatsApp messages.

Oversight of PEK is undertaken by a Board of Trustees who play a role in planning and overseeing PEK activities. The Board consists of six members and is currently chaired by Kemigabo Catherine, the Kabarole District Health Educator. The other board members are: Hajji Ray Bashir, Birungi Denis, Asaba Jennifer, Twesige Emmanuel and Arif Alibhai.

District Executive Committee.

This is a committee of student representatives who are responsible for monitoring and supervising the activities of PEK clubs in schools. This committee works together with the school administration to ensure that the program's objectives are achieved. The Executive Committee consists of five students who are elected to serve for a one-year term of office. This team met once to record some video clips on how they were affected by COVID-19, which was later shared with Dr. Arif through Denis Birungi. Through phone calls and SMS chats they have provided information on how some Peer Educators who live within their neighbourhood and through their other social networks have been facing life during this time when they were out of school.

The District Executive Committee for 2020 were: Chairperson Irumba Samuel (King of Kings S.S.), Vice Chairperson Katusiime Annet (Kitumba S.S.), Treasurer Karungi Esther (Fort Portal S.S.), Secretary Basemera Dorothy (Fort Portal S.S.) and Assistant Treasurer Ninsiima Gloria (Kitumba S.S.).

Matrons and Patrons.

This is a team of carefully selected teachers from every school. All 15 school clubs have either a matron or a patron depending on the choices each club made. Currently we have 6 female teachers and 9 male teachers who serve as PEK Matrons/Patrons. These Matrons/Patrons are responsible for monitoring activities and connecting students to the school administration and the PEK staff. We usually work with them to ensure that even in our absence all our activities can be implemented as earlier planned. During the COVID-19 lockdown we kept in touch with them through phone calls and SMS chats. Most of our Peer Educators do not have phones so our Matrons/Patrons used to communicate with parents and Peer Educators through the parent's phone. Matrons/Patrons would give us feedback immediately in case there was need for us to intervene. For example, we were frequently in touch with the matron of Kamengo SS, who used to tell us how she counselled parents to take good care of their children despite the challenges of being together with their children for long periods during the lockdown.

Finance and Accountability.

H.E.A.L International, a Canadian based charity agency, is our major funder. H.E.A.L. International plays a role in the planning of programs and ensuring the proper use and accountability of funds. A representative of HEAL International, Tom Rubaale, helps to check all our incomes and expenses on a weekly basis.

PEER EDUCATION KABAROLE ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST YEAR

A. Participating Schools.

Below is a list of the 15 schools that were part of the PEK program in 2019/2020:

- Nyakasura S.S
- St. Leo's College
- Kamengo S.S.
- St. Maria Goretti S.S.
- Kyebambe Girls S.S.
- King of Kings S.S.
- Kabarole Adventist S.S.
- Fort Portal S.S.
- Kahinju S.S.
- Mpanga S.S.
- Kibiito S.S.
- Rwimi S.S.
- Ruteete S.S.
- Kitumba S.S.
- Nyakigumba Parents S.S.

B. Orientation workshop.

In past years PEK has conducted annual orientation workshops for incoming Peer Educators and awarded certificates to outgoing Peer Educators. Though we were unable to conduct an orientation workshop in 2020 due to the COVID-19 lockdown, we managed to print certificates for the outgoing executive members to appreciate the services they rendered and delivered those certificates to them via their schools.

C. Radio programs.

Mountains of the Moon University Radio FM, a local FM radio station in Fort Portal town, donates a 60 to 120 minute slot once a month for Peer Educators to discuss health topics with their listenership. On 21st February 2020, we conducted one radio talk show, but lockdown regulations prevented us from conducting any additional radio shows.

D. Training and field visits.

Staff conducted field visits and trainings between February and March in all schools before the lockdown, Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, we were unable to provide any follow-up trainings. In place of field trainings, we moved to virtual training and information sharing through the following activities:

- **Phone calls:** We managed to talk to many peer educators or their parents/guardians depending on who had phones. During our phone calls we talked about how Peer Educators should find ways to stay productive and healthy during the lockdown and not succumb to bad social habits. We also encouraged parents /guardians to be responsible, kind to their children and not to allow them to associate with bad peer groups who might influence them negatively. Furthermore, parents were advised to share feedback with us on how their children were responding. The good news is that most parents stayed in touch with us, and for those who needed help, we called and counselled them accordingly.
- **WhatsApp and SMS messages:** We created a WhatsApp group to specifically share health information with Peer Educators who were online. We received some short messages on psychological, social and physical well-being from volunteers in Canada that we shared through this platform. These messages were well received and shared by Peer Educators with others in their youth networks. Below are some examples of messages we sent:
 - *Stress is a normal bodily response to a tough situation. When in times of stress, take a few minutes to write down what is giving you stress and ways in which you can reduce this. Ask yourself “what is stressing me out?” and “what things can I do to reduce this stress?” Even the act of acknowledging what is giving you stress can reduce this stress.*
 - *Managing peer stress can be difficult. Ask yourself questions like “do I want to do this?”, “could this be dangerous to me?” and “could this affect my health?” as a few examples.*
 - *Physical activity is very important. Remember to get in at least 2 and half hours of exercise per week! Some examples can be going on a run, playing a game or dancing. Practice a bit of physical activity each day.*

E. Newsletter

In past years, we used to print and distribute 1,000 (one thousand) newsletters to all 15 PEK schools. These newsletters consist of educational materials, testimonials and stories/poems from students. Last year, we did not print newsletters because we had not way of getting student submissions or distributing these with schools being closed.

SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHANGES:

- ❖ We were able to share educative messages with over 1,000 peer educators through phone calls as well as WhatsApp and SMS messages.
- ❖ We managed to visit the homes of 34 Peer Educators who needed psychosocial support; we met with their parents/guardians and involved any other relatives as long as he or she was important in a conversation that would help our Peer Educator(s).
- ❖ We were able to host Peer Educators to record videos about how they were finding life during the COVID-19 lockdown.

OUR CHALLENGES:

- ❖ We were severely limited in conducting our core activities due to the lockdown.
- ❖ We heard many stories of risk-taking behaviours by youth who were idle, including engaging in unsafe sexual activities, substance abuse and loitering with bad peer groups.
- ❖ Some parents were not receptive to our advice and calls as they didn't understand the challenges that youth were experiencing at this time.
- ❖ Some Peer Educators thought we were calling to help them financially, especially child-headed families who we found lacked basic needs. Unfortunately, our program was not set up to handle these issues.
- ❖ It was hard to get in touch with some Peer Educators because they had no phones, and their parents would not let them use their phone or pass on messages to them.
- ❖ The phone and internet networks were not always working and were turned off for some period during the recent country elections.
- ❖ Parents and Peer Educators who live in faraway places wanted us to pay them a visit to talk to their children, but this type of travel was not possible due to the lockdown.
- ❖ Peer Educators were asking for school study materials which we didn't have, but we referred them to their Matrons/Patrons for assistance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to extend our sincere appreciations to all our partners and supporters listed below:

- ❖ Health Education and Leadership (H.E.A.L.) International for funding and supporting our programs, especially our key supporters Karim & Shenaz Shariff and Diane Albrecht.
- ❖ Kabarole Local Government District Health Department for technical and leadership support on health education to Peer Educators.
- ❖ Youth and Women Empowerment (YAWE) Foundation for technical support, medical services to our Peer Educators and literature materials.
- ❖ Reproductive Health Uganda for providing medical services to our Peer Educators on low-cost basis, literature materials and health professional for sexual reproductive health training.
- ❖ Our Board of Trustees for their voluntary service to the youth in Kabarole District
- ❖ All Executive Committee members, Peer Educators and volunteers for their voluntary service to the mission of the organization.
- ❖ Mr. Tom Rubaale for his guidance and additional oversight of the funds disbursed to the PEK program.