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4Children
Coordinating Comprehensive Care for Children



Photo by Oscar Silverlight for CRS

DREAMS Hubs

Connecting Girls With Each Other and With a Better Future

“In our community, children suffer the most because they’re the most vulnerable. They suffer more violence because adults violate their rights. All children have the right to go to school, to play, to eat and some people don’t respect that. That’s what I learned. Children are children, all children have rights.” Those were Beverly’s words, a ten-year-old girl from Carrefour, a densely populated commune of Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince, who is one of over 5,000 adolescent girls, participating in the USAID-funded Coordinating Comprehensive Care for Children project (4Children) in Artibonite, West and North Departments of Haiti.

4Children increases access to an array of basic services, tailored to the individual child’s needs, so that each girl will become Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored and Safe – the DREAMS approach to HIV Prevention among adolescent girls. Project implementation is led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with AVSI, FOSREF, Maestral, and Plan International USA.

A PLACE TO LEARN

4Children operated a total of 72 DREAMS Hubs as part of the project, where girls were organized by age group -- 10-14 year-olds and 15-19 year-olds. Each group was led by trained mentors and overseen by a supervisor. The girls who participated in the project learned about prevention and treatment of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs); gender and power; their rights to education, reproductive health services, and a life free from violence; and about where to go for medical, psychosocial and legal support. “I thought that if someone violated you sexually, your life was over. As I took part in this program, I learned if you’re sexually abused, you need to go to the hospital to go see a doctor, take medication so you’re not infected with HIV, an STI or other sexually transmitted diseases. But you need to act fast. You need to immediately go visit a doctor,” Angina, 10-14 years old.

A PLACE TO DEVELOP LEADERS

At 16 of the DREAMS Hubs, committees were organized to increase the engagement of the adolescent girls in decision-making and to lead the development of an action plan to share with their communities through plays and dialogue what they had learned in the DREAMS Hub. The girls at these DREAMS Hubs also benefited from artistic expression activities to strengthen their ability to communicate what they had learned. 4Children Haiti partners, Plan International USA and Plan Haiti, led the development of this approach. Step-by-step guidance is available in the Haitian Creole language “Guide for the Establishment and Accompaniment of Girls’ Committees at DREAMS Hubs”.

Each group of participating girls selected five to six members to form the committee. Duthlie, a FOSREF Mentor Supervisor observed that the election process

resulted in greater engagement by the girls. “The elections were not easy because shy girls never want to stand and speak up. When you tell them to do something, they seem like they’d rather run. But I saw the evolution of girls who were really shy now beginning to speak up.”

The girls also had a very positive experience with the committee selection process. Angina (10-14 years-old), said “The elections went well because the girls are the ones who chose, not the mentors. I felt really good because the girls chose me as president. They trusted me.” And Marie Verlie (15-19 years old) said “I never thought I’d be chosen as vice-president. I didn’t think I’d be part of the committee when I volunteered. But I feel very proud because, as a young person, I found a training where all young people collaborate and there’s no division. We always work together to accomplish our goals.”



Photo by Bernice Morquette for CRS

Artistic activities in Carrefour, Haiti

A PLACE TO SHARE

Seven themes were available to choose from for the plays and dialogue: children’s rights and protection, self-esteem, roles of girls and boys, power, information on HIV, violence against women and girls, and personal hygiene. Beverly (10-14 years old) elaborated on the process, “We shared information about children’s rights in the form of a play, and violence against women and girls in the form of a dialogue. For the dialogue, we invited other schools in our community because we wanted to share what we had learned and we used the program flyers to discuss the topic.” Marie Verlie (15-19 years old) added, “The mentors helped us. We talked about gender-based violence, HIV and self-esteem. We had a session with boys. We asked each of the girls to bring a boy from their community. We spoke about gender and asked them what they know about it.”

The artistic activities were a real success. Both the girls and the mentors spoke very fondly of the activities and the sense of accomplishment and togetherness they brought

out of the girls. Duthlie, the mentor supervisor, pointed out that “The timing of the artistic activities was perfect because it encouraged a lot of the girls who had left to come back and they were very happy of the work; especially the group of 15-19 year- olds. They went above and beyond what was planned. They’ve already learned to make earrings and curtains with fabric and paint.”

Junia, a mentor, mentioned that the activity was likely to have a lasting impact. “The girls have been asking us where they sell the paints we used in the artistic activities. That means, even after the program ends, they want to continue with the artistic work. It’s evidence that the girls will continue using the skills they learned in the future. As a mentor, we don’t want the project to end, we would like to continue working with them.”

Everyone involved – the girls and mentors – wished the program would continue, spoke positively about what they had learned, and shared their hopes for the future.

A VISIBLE AND LASTING IMPACT

Willine, another FOSREF Mentor Supervisor, observed, “I’ve noticed a lot of change in the girls. We heard the feedback and they’re very positive. Some of the girls were shy, reserved, some had hard things done to them, but when they came to the center they befriended the mentors and turned us into their confidants. They were no longer afraid to speak up. They really made the club a place where they felt safe.”

Duthlie expressed his desire for the girls to build upon this experience to become leaders. “I’d like for the girls to remain independent. I’d like them to become leaders, girl leaders! Especially in underserved areas, we know girls are more prone to become victims. But when we have a strong group of girls who believe in themselves, the risks of early pregnancy and HIV will be significantly less.”

Duthlie’s aspiration was exemplified by Angina (10-14 years old), who added “I’m going to share what I’ve learned with girls in my community. I’m going to copy the materials and share them so I can teach them about self-esteem and different forms of violence. There’s gender-based violence and violence against children. It’s not only the girls. Boys are also victims of violence. I’ll give them some advice. I’d like to become a mentor.”

And Angina might have the opportunity to achieve that goal, and many others, since the DREAMS approach is expected to continue in each of these neighborhoods, supported by the USAID-funded Impact Youth project.

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