**WISER International.** Investing in Health and Education

WISER is a community development organization with a focus on the social empowerment of underprivileged girls through improved education and health.

**The Need for WISER**

“Should I stop having sex with the man who is paying my school fees? I am afraid of getting AIDS.” - 14 year old girl in Muhuru Bay

WISER’s primary project is in Muhuru Bay, Kenya, a fishing village on Lake Victoria. This community is calculated to have an HIV infection rate of 38%, in part due to fishermen having multiple sexual partners, and the need for many women to trade sex for fish in order to have access to this valuable commodity. Girls in Muhuru Bay want to become educated so that they have options other than trading sex for fish as they see their mothers and aunts do. They want to become professionals that can improve their community. However, many families won’t financially invest in their daughters’ education, leaving girls to look for other sources of income. This lack of investment leads to half of all sexually active 10-16 year old girls having transactional sex in order to pay school fees and buy necessary supplies, from books to sanitary pads, as this is the only way they can continue their education. This, of course, increases their HIV risk. Because of the lack of financial or academic support most girls in the community drop out of school by 14 years old due to pregnancy or arranged marriages for a few cows. The small percentage of girls who stay in school have historically done very poorly academically, in part due to sexual harassment in the classroom. Girls often become pregnant by primary school teachers. Only a few girls graduate from high school.

Girls deserve to be able to go to school in safety and without risking their health. Beyond a human rights issue there are multiple value added components to having educated girls in a community, from healthier children to more rapid economic development. Every health and economic indicator that can be measured is improved in a community by educating girls.

WISER’s partnership with Muhuru Bay, Kenya started in 2006 when WISER began identifying the challenges facing girls. Since then we have developed robust community programs that have doubled the number of girls finishing primary school, greatly reducing child pregnancies and early marriages. Within a few short years our primary program has made girls as competitive as boys academically. We have built the first all-girls secondary school in the region and in 2010 enrolled the first 30 girls. In 2013 we will be at full capacity with 120 girls in residence. 30% of our students are AIDS orphans and all are the first girl in their family ever to enroll in secondary school. Our students are...
extremely successful academically and often outcompete their male peers at long established schools. There are now 120 households in Muhuru Bay that have daughters they are proud of. And at the end of 2013 we will graduate the first class of girls from secondary school and have the first girls go to university. After 6 years of education and program development, WISER is ready to show that girls who had been dismissed as being only worth a few cows in marriage can become successful leaders.

WISER holistically approaches health, education and economic development. We don’t just build schools, which may not function, or provide scholarships without providing emotional support and health care. We don’t just want girls in school; we want them healthy, supported, and successful. We want our students to become leaders and change how girls are valued in their community.

Muhuru Bay has other health and poverty challenges besides a high HIV rate. There is no clean drinking water, leading to frequent outbreaks of typhoid. Many children are malnourished, making it difficult to learn in school. Thus WISER works with multiple sectors of the community and has built external partnerships to provide clean drinking water to over 5,000 people; establish and measure the impact of school gardens and nutrition programs; and develop culturally-anchored family based HIV risk reduction programs.

**WISER PROGRAMS**

**Education**

Our flagship program is the WISER School in Muhuru Bay, Kenya, a secondary boarding school. The WISER School provides strong female role models with a presidential award-winning Principal and dedicated teachers. Our educational model has enabled girls to excel academically and be top ranked students in the county. The WISER School provides safe housing, healthy food from a sustainable school garden, and free healthcare to ensure that students thrive. We also provide all sanitary products so girls do not have to miss school when they menstruate, unlike in other schools. Most importantly, the WISER School treats girls with dignity and encourages them to develop as the next generation of women leaders in Kenya. We don’t measure success simply by enrolment, but by academic outcomes.

WISER has developed the WISERBridge program, part of an educational pipeline to support girls and reduce pregnancies that lead to dropping out before they enter secondary school. WISERBridge works with all students in grade 8 to retain girls in the school system and improve scores on the mandatory national exam that must be passed to enter secondary school. All girls in the community taking national exams are provided with a year’s worth of sanitary pads so they don’t have to miss school. WISERBridge
provides professional development for Kenyan teachers, does rigorous benchmarking of progress, and recognizes and celebrates improvements in students, teachers, and schools. WISERBridge is firmly embedded in the public school system throughout the district and currently works with 14 schools.

Health
Many girls arrive at the WISER School emotionally or physically battered. Some have been sexually harassed or raped, sometimes by their primary school teachers. The WISER School provides counseling and psychosocial support for its students while also helping them realize their talents and leadership skills.

In many rural areas in Kenya when a girl starts menstruating she drops out of school. Most schools lack water, bathrooms or privacy and very few girls have easy access to sanitary pads making it challenging for them to stay in school. However, girls know that education is their way out of poverty and are determined to stay in school. In the WISER community, 50% of sexually active girls between 10-16 years old have sex for money and they often use that money to buy sanitary pads. ‘Sex for pads’ leads to greatly increased HIV risk. Other girls try to block their flow so they can stay in school by filling their underwear with mattress foam, rags, paper, or anything absorbent. This can lead to vaginal infections that also increase HIV risk. WISER provides free sanitary pads to all girls in its primary and secondary school programs.

To reduce the risk of HIV, WISER has partnered with Duke University to create the READY Program, which improves family communication skills and interactions to promote healthier lifestyles and mental well-being. The READY Program is implemented by community members at local churches. After two years the program has reduced HIV risk factors, improved family interaction strategies about sex, reduced belief in myths about HIV, and altered family financial decisions to better support their children.

Clean Water
Muhuru Bay residents get drinking water by scooping it up in a bucket from Lake Victoria or from ditches and gullies after it rains. Few households have latrines and water is frequently contaminated with fecal matter, leading to outbreaks of typhoid. In partnership with UNICEF-WASH and the Government of Kenya WISER built and maintains a clean water system that provides potable water to 5,000 members of community via a series of water dispensing kiosks, including one at the Ministry of Health clinic. Prior to installation of the water dispensing kiosk the clinic did not have clean water to wash its tools or provide to patients. The community water kiosks are run and managed by AIDS widows, providing much needed employment for this vulnerable population.
WISER’S INVESTMENT PROVIDES DRAMATIC RETURNS

WISER has a proven track record of successfully working with a traditional community and using rigorous metrics to assess the impact of its programs. WISER works with an entire school district and build capacity in Kenyan teachers to improve education for all. Over 700 students are enrolled in our primary school programs each year. Both boys and girls are supported so that we develop gender allies and boys learn to respect girls’ abilities.

Our primary school program has elevated the scores on national exams for all students as well as completely eliminating the gender gap in scores. Since implementing our primary school program we have doubled the number of girls staying in school, dramatically reducing the number that drop out from pregnancy and early marriage.

In 2013 WISER will have 120 girls in its secondary school. Prior to this there has never been more than 50 girls in secondary school in the community. WISER has had zero attrition for pregnancy from our secondary school, unlike the 30% attrition documented in neighboring schools. While keeping girls in school, preventing young pregnancies, and improving health are critical milestones for WISER, we are also extremely proud that our secondary students are also outcompeting on government exams boys who’ve been educated at well-established schools. Girls that were not considered worth educating are now the top students in the county in math and science. WISER works.

WISER’S NEEDS

The WISER Secondary School provides everything a girl needs: clothes, sanitary pads, books, the first bed she have ever slept in, healthy food, supportive teachers, mosquito nets, and medicine. WISERBridge builds capacity in the local school system by training Kenyan teachers, monitoring achievement, and rewarding growth. WISER builds management capacity in community members to sustain clean water systems. We are expanding our programs to include feeding and deworming programs for students in our primary school programs as well as school gardens to improve nutrition.

Your donation will help WISER expand its programs to full capacity and provide scholarship money to support more girls whose only other options are early marriage.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Invest in girls and the future of a community. When you educate a girl you have an intergenerational impact as an educated mother is more likely to have healthy, educated children. Thus your donation goes beyond one person. To maximize that impact WISER

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spends over 90% of all donations directly on our programs, with less than 10% going to administrative support.

HIGH IMPACT GIFTS

$3000 Provides a full scholarship to the WISER School for a year.
This provides everything a girl needs for a year in boarding school, plus helps us keep the lights on and provide the first clean drinking water and indoor toilets to our students.

$1000 Provides a safe place for 25 girls to live.
Most girls in the community sleep on the ground and have never been on a bed. WISER provides safe and healthy living accommodations including mosquito nets. Your donation will provide 25 girls with beds and all dormitory furniture so they have a safe place to live.

$500 Provides all school supplies for 25 girls for one year.
WISER was recently ranked fourth out of 38 schools in the county for math ability! It was the top girls’ school and beat many all boys’ schools.

$400 Feeds one girl for one year
Most of our students have never had three meals a day, never mind a healthy, balanced diet that includes fruits, and vegetables. Your donation helps WISER keep our students strong and healthy.

$300 Provides desks for 10 girls to study on.
Each girl at WISER gets her own desk in the classroom, a rarity in many schools. WISER also has a student-centered educational philosophy, which empowers girls to actively manage their own learning.

$200 Provides clean water for 4 girls for one year.
In partnership with UNICEF-WASH, WISER has built the first water purification system in the area, not only for our school, but for the surrounding community.

$100 Provides health care for 10 girls for a year
One year of medical costs for 10 girls. Many of our students do not receive regular healthcare. WISER is the only school in the region that provides medical care - including ARVs, antimalarials, and psychological services - when a student is ill. In a region with the highest levels of malaria, cholera, and typhoid in Kenya, this is critical.
$50  Provides clothing for 2 girls for one year
Clothing for four girls includes two pairs of skirts, blouses, socks, sweaters, a tie, and a pair of shoes. Most of the students in our primary schools come dressed in rags; clean, new clothes provide them with dignity and pride.

$25  Provides all textbooks for one girl for one year
All textbooks necessary to educate one girl for one year. WISER covers all costs for its students, most of whom could not attend school if they had to purchase their own books, as they do in other schools.