



OPENING SPEECH BY KENNETH KAMAU – FOUNDER, ART FOR CHILDREN FOUNDATION, ON THE LAUNCH OF 3 KEY PROJECTS AT NAIVASHA GATE HOTEL, ON 11TH SEPTEMBER 2021

WELCOME

Protocol observed, good morning everyone.

As you have heard, my name is Kenneth Kamau, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you; for sacrificing time off your busy schedules, to join us today for the launch of our 3 key projects. That is; NACAMP, Ubunifu Centre, and HISANA.

VISION and MISSION

Here at the Art for Children Foundation, we are guided by our vision and mission.

As you can see, these two are aimed at utilizing art and mentorship in preparing the underprivileged children for the future. This is a future where they are able to identify and utilize their artistic abilities, as a form of expression and self-therapy, where they are able to grow into responsible citizen leadership.

We are using art to raise a generation that will be able to identify challenges within their environment, and creatively come up with sustainable solutions to these challenges. This is a generation that will be a driving force towards the achievement and sustainability of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 4. of Quality Education, 5, of Gender Equality, and 16 of Peace Justice and Strong Institutions.

THE WHY

And so, Art for Children Foundation. Why art? ... and also, why children?

I have been a victim of sexual abuse, and I have also been a recipient of the benefits of art.

In 1996, a year before I joined primary school, I was sexually abused by a primary school girl, right inside the school compound where we used to live in.

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Again, in the years 1997 and 1998, 2 other children and I were constantly sexually abused by another primary school girl, right inside the same school compound.

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Because of these 2 acts, I grew up with lots of hate and resentment against school, education, the society, and of course afraid of girls. I was constantly fighting my own suicidal thoughts.

The results? I was always the last in class, and at times the last in all classes combined.

But while in primary school, I did note something. My situation was not much different than most of the children. There were those who engaged in drugs, and others in sexual activities. Some of the girls had boyfriends who were way way older than them. Surprisingly these children took pride in it. The girls saw having sex with the grown-ups as a sign of maturity.

But then, what they did not know, was that they were victims of child abuse, and that this abuse reflected in their social life and also academics.

Unfortunately, some of them ended up being under-age mothers, while some ended up being drug addicts.

And a few years after primary school, one of my former classmates got gunned down by the police, due to his involvement in crime and gun violence. Another one was lucky to escape the same fate, when police cornered him and an old man had to intervene.

Personally, I first realized my artistic abilities in class 6, and the more I practiced these talents, the more I regained my interest in education. The more my grades improved. The more my social life improved, and the more my mental health improved.

For me, art was an escape route and a stepping stone to accessing the benefits of education. Because of art, I managed to study all the way to university, of course with a few hic-ups here and there.

But it doesn't end with me. Every now and then, you will see and hear on the news of stories of child abuse, children high on drugs, others drunk, and so many other negative stories.

These stories continue to hit closer and closer to our homes. And am sure that you all know of your child, a nephew, a niece, a relative, or a neighbour's child who is undergoing or has undergone such ordeals

ACTION

And so, after years of absorbing this much negativity about children, I got fed up with how much we are losing as a society. Something needed to be done, and as my mother always taught us, to always look at what we have at our disposal. I looked within myself. Whereas I did not have much, I had art, and that was enough to make a change in this world.

In 2016, I founded the Art for Children Foundation.

VISITS

I shared this idea to a few friends, and luckily they were ready to step in and be part of the change. On 2nd of July 2016, a few friends and I made our very first visit to Naivasha Children Shelter, and I am forever grateful to the shelter, for allowing us the opportunity to share our talents with the children,

What started as a single visit, grew to another visit, and another one, and a series of lots more. We have since visited various children's homes, centres, and schools within Nakuru County.

VOLUNTEERS

Along the way, we have had the privilege of tapping into the vast power of volunteers, whereby most of them either saw or heard of what we were doing, and were more than glad to be part of the team. These volunteers came together and recorded 2 songs for

the foundation. These songs are on the foundation's youtube channel. The highest number we have had was 38 volunteers, in the year 2018.

Registration

This made us see the need to have the organization legally registered. In September 2019, we received our registration certificate from the NGOs Coordination Board. In the same year, we also were recognized by the Department of Children Services, Naivasha Sub-County office.

IMPACT

As part of our impact, between the years 2016 and 2020, we managed to reach out to an estimated 800 children.

Out of this number, about 50 of them successfully identified their artistic abilities.

17 children were selected to various leadership positions in their respective schools, after showing positive change in their behaviors.

We have had 5 girls seize their friendship with older boys who were already bringing up the conversation of having sex.

We have had 1 boy creatively face his bully in school, and they made friendship.

Early in the year, there were about 7 children who opened up on their mental health issues.

Another one recently came forward seeing help on his already growing alcohol addiction.

These are just but a few of our little success stories.

Challenges

But all has not been a smooth landing for us, more so during this covid-19 pandemic. We have had high rates of volunteer retention, due to financial challenges.

As you may be guessing, our visits have drastically reduced.

Funding

However, we have had one or two well-wishers, who have been donating to us at least 10 dollars, which have gone a long way to ensuring we have books, pencils, and rubbers for the children.

We also have one well-wisher company which stepped in, and have been donating at least 4 dozen sausages every month, for the children.

And when we had to close down our office, due to financial constraints, the *chama cha Maendeleo ya Wanawake* - Naivasha Sub-County office came to our rescue and hosted us.

Covid-19 pandemic

Despite the vast effects covid-19 pandemic, and the reduced visits, we for once had enough time to reflect and strategize the way forward.

In September of 2020, we officially established an Advisory board, which consists of professionals from various industries coming together to form a think tank for the foundation.

For the very first time, we have our very first Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025. Through the strategic plan, we categorized our functions into 3 key projects. These are the projects that we are launching today.

Conclusion

As I conclude, ladies and gentlemen, if art turned around my situation, imagine how much it would do to these children? And of course combined with mentorship on life skills and governance.

That is the reason the Art for Children Foundation exists. That is the reason we are here today launching this projects.

Once again, welcome to today's launch of our 3 key projects.

Thank you.