

# **A Pilot Peer Supporters Programme for the Africa KidsSAFE Network**

## **- Achievements, Challenges and Recommendations**



**Sue Gibbons**

**Africa KidsSAFE, Project Concern International,  
Zambia**

**October - December 2008**





## **A Pilot Peer Supporters Programme for the Africa KidSAFE Network**

### **- Achievements, Challenges and Recommendations**

**October - December 2008**

Project Concern International  
9 Chitemwiko Close,  
Kabulonga  
PO Box 32320  
Lusaka  
Zambia

Tel: +260 211 266232  
[info@pcizambia.org.zm](mailto:info@pcizambia.org.zm)

Dr. Sue Gibbons  
Community Clinical Psychologist  
Lusaka  
Zambia  
[suegibbonsnow@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:suegibbonsnow@yahoo.co.uk)

*With thanks to the peer supporters: Juliet, Steven, Joseph, David, Yvonne, Chiza, Reuben, Namonda, Chama, Rodrick, Jackson and Mary.*

*Whose enthusiasm, energy and belief in what's right was a constant inspiration.*

*And with special thanks to Tony Hoffman, who voluntarily and tirelessly dedicated his time and energy to making this programme a success.*



# **A Pilot Peer Supporters Programme for the Africa KidSAFE Network**

## **- Achievements, Challenges and Recommendations**

**October - December 2008**

1. Background to the Peer Supporters Programme	6
2. Group Facilitators	7
3. Focus Group Discussion	7
4. Selection of Peer Supporters	8
5. Information to Partners about the Programme	8
6. Peer Supporters Meetings and Workshop	10
7. Evaluation of the Programme – Achievements & Challenges	14
7.1 Results of Evaluation with Participants	14
7.2 Other Achievements of the Programme	16
7.3 Challenges faced by the programme	17
8. Next Steps – Recommendations	18
9. Conclusion	21
References	22
Appendix     Peer Supporters Programme Evaluation	23

## 1. Background to the Peer Supporters Programme

An assessment of psychosocial care and support carried out across the KidSAFE network in 2007 (An Assessment of Psychosocial Care and Support to Children in the Africa KidSAFE Network, Sue Gibbons, September – November 2007) revealed a number of ways in which there is a need for more intensive psychosocial support for the children and young people in the network. One of the recommendations was to develop a peer counselling programme to empower young people in the network to better support each other.

Upon researching the peer support literature further, (refs) it was found that the research tends to favour a broader psychosocial support approach when working with young people, rather than trying to train peer ‘counsellors’ as such. That is: equipping young people with skills to support themselves and their friends, such as decision making skills, communication and listening skills.

*The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out children and young people’s right to participate in issues and decisions that affect them. Peer support is one method of enabling children and young people to participate.*

*Peer support:*

- *Builds on a natural willingness of people, it is a voluntary activity*
- *Takes place between those of a similar age, role or background*
- *Provides positive benefits in schools, youth groups, workplaces and other settings*
- *Enables those who participate to gain life skills and supports their emotional development.*

Parsons and Blake, National Children’s Bureau. 2004

This project set out to develop a pilot peer supporter’s scheme and to assess the feasibility of such a scheme in the longer term. Through this programme we could also begin to assess the appropriateness of this intervention, or whether approaching the peer support issue in a different manner, such as training peer counsellors, might be more appropriate for this context.

The programme aimed to run a short workshop followed by a series of follow up sessions with up to 10 – 12 young people from some of the Lusaka based KidSAFE centres.

## 2. Group Facilitators

The initial plan was to develop this programme with two counsellors from the KidSAFE network – one female and one male. However, at the beginning of the programme one was unable to continue their involvement due to other work and personal commitments, and the other only managed to attend two of the meetings due to other work commitments. However, I was joined in my facilitation by Tony Hoffman, a visiting child psychologist from University of Santa Cruz, California, USA, who was on a three month sabbatical to work with vulnerable children in Zambia.

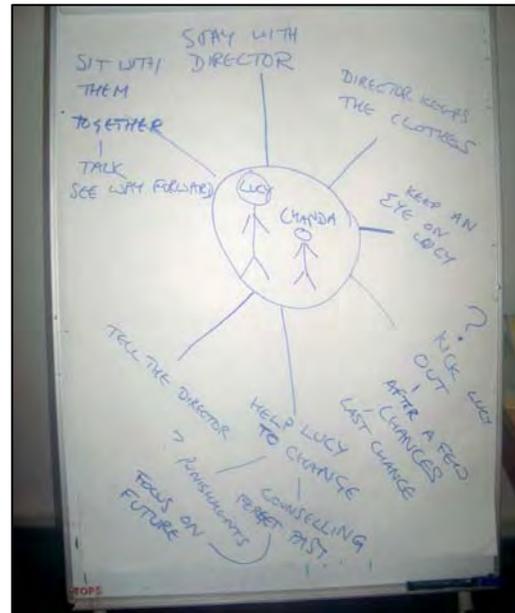


## 3. Focus Group Discussion

Our first step was to invite some young people from the centres to take part in a focus group discussion. This helped to establish the young people's interest in and support for the programme, as well as a definite need for such an approach. The group confirmed that for certain difficulties or dilemmas, they and their peers were unlikely to seek adult help, and more likely to rely on their friends or peers for support, advice or guidance. Thirdly, the FGD confirmed our belief that the young people would be more than capable of discussing and problem solving difficult issues. One example we asked them to brainstorm was as follows:

**Group Discussion.**

Chanda is your friend in the centre. Every time she gets something new to wear, a bigger girl, Lucy, tells her she must give it to her or she will beat her. Chanda tried not giving her new top to Lucy, but she was beaten very badly by Lucy. She has told you what is happening. What do you say to her?



Summary of the group's responses

#### **4. Selection of Peer Supporters**

Following the FGD, we discussed the peer supporters concept with a number of KidSAFE partners, and asked six Lusaka based partners to work with their young people to select two appropriate young people – a boy and a girl (if their programme was mixed) – to attend the meetings. The information below was shared with the partners to help them select appropriate young people:

#### **5. Information to Partners about the Programme**

##### **A Pilot**

### **Peer Support Programme**

#### **for Africa KidSAFE**

After looking into the psychosocial support needs of the young people in the KidSAFE network, we are hoping to start a pilot 'Peer Support Programme'. This is something that was specifically requested by a number of young people and caregivers.

This programme aims to work with a small group of young people who have been chosen by their peers as those who are natural leaders and those to whom others turn for support.

#### **What is a Peer Supporter?**

Peer Supporters are young people who are regarded as trustworthy by their elders and their peers.

A peer supporter is a person that other young people would naturally turn to when they are facing a dilemma, someone they respect and listen to.

Their role is to support their peers (their friends, or other young people) with whatever challenges they are facing.

A peer supporter is not expected to solve their friend's problems for them. They can support their friend through listening, acting as a sounding board, and helping them through the process of finding their own solutions to their difficulties.

A peer supporter would know when it is necessary to ask for help from an adult.

### What is the KidSAFE Peer Supporters Programme?

This is a pilot programme to develop a peer support scheme within Africa KidSAFE. We hope to work with 10 - 12 young people initially.

They will participate in an introductory workshop covering self development and basic communication skills.

There will be no remuneration or financial allowances for peer supporters. It is a programme for young people who enjoy helping and supporting others and who would like to develop themselves and learn new skills in this area.

The pilot programme will run from October to December 2008.

In December we will report back to KidSAFE about the programme.

### Who can be a part of this programme?

We are looking for 10 - 12 young people who fit the following criteria:

- ❖ chosen as peer supporters by their peers
- ❖ Respected by their peers
- ❖ Those who other children turn to when they have a problem
- ❖ confident in themselves
- ❖ reliable and trustworthy
- ❖ keen to help others
- ❖ aware of their own issues (i.e. past and current challenges)
- ❖ good problem solvers
- ❖ fluent in English (English is needed for this first programme, if it is successful; we hope to run future programmes in local languages.)
- ❖ good communicators
- ❖ enthusiastic to learn new skills and develop old ones
- ❖ willing to talk about themselves and their experiences within the peer supporters group
- ❖ Stable members of your community who are not likely to move on in the coming year.
- ❖ Aged between 14 - 18 years
- ❖ a male and a female from each of six centres (or two girls or boys if you are a single sex centre)

Ideally, peer supporters should be chosen by their peers. Can you involve your young people in selecting who they feel would make a good peer supporter?

Sue Gibbons  
 suegibbonsnow@yahoo.co.uk  
 0977 461815  
 October 2008.

### 6. Peer Supporters Meetings and Workshop

The main focus for our initial meetings was to work with the group of young people to develop their potential to support their peers. This meant helping them to develop their own self esteem and ability to manage their own lives. See table 1 below for list of topics covered during our meetings.

*In our final meeting, the group summarised the topics they had learnt about over the weeks*



	Meeting Dates	Topics	Number of attendees
	7 <sup>th</sup> October	Focus Group Discussion Introduction to the concept of peer supporters	
1	Weds 15 <sup>th</sup> October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Peer Supporters,</li> <li>• the difficulties we face,</li> <li>• What do we want to learn?</li> </ul>	9
2	Weds 22 <sup>nd</sup> October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group collaboration exercise (the orchestra)</li> <li>• Recap for newcomers,</li> <li>• Ground rules and expectations of the group</li> </ul>	13
3	Weds 29 <sup>th</sup> October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning the Peer Supporters workshop</li> <li>• Clarifying and Prioritising learning topics</li> </ul>	6
4	Mon 3 <sup>rd</sup> November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Who am I?' collage exercise</li> </ul>	11

5	Mon 10 <sup>th</sup> November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Who am I?’ collage exercise continued</li> </ul>	9
6	Tues 11 <sup>th</sup> November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Road of Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- events in the past</li> <li>- what has helped me?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	8
7	Weds 12 <sup>th</sup> November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Road of Life (continued) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Future plans</li> <li>- What will help me?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	8
8	Weds 19 <sup>th</sup> November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Pressure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- what is it?</li> <li>- How can we resist it?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	6
9	26 <sup>th</sup> November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Values</li> </ul>	6
10	3 <sup>rd</sup> December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritising our values in everyday situations</li> </ul>	8
11	17 <sup>th</sup> December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What we’ve learnt</li> <li>• Evaluation of the programme</li> </ul>	6

*Table 1. Content of Peer Supporters Meetings*



*Working on ‘Who am I?’ montages during the Workshop*





*Presenting our 'Who Am I?' montages*

*Trust Games*





*Presenting my 'Road of Life' – Past and Future*



*The Values we Chose*

## **7. Evaluation of the Programme – Achievements & Challenges**

### **7.1 Results of Evaluation with Participants**

At the final meeting, members of the group were asked to complete an anonymous evaluation form. For the evaluation form see Appendix 1. Summarised responses to the six questions asked are as follows, with quotes from the evaluation forms given in italics:

#### **1. What do you think a peer supporter is?**

*Find solutions for others but not to solve*

*A young person who is chosen by his own peers*

*A person who's respected and trusted*

*Helps others in times of trouble like fighting*

The group's responses to question 1 indicated that by the end of the programme, the majority of the group had a good understanding of the role of a peer supporter. Comparing the responses given in December, to those given at the start of the programme in October, we could see how the groups understanding of the concept of peer support had developed.

#### **2. The things I found helpful about this programme were:**

*How to be responsible and fairness*

*How to behave toward each other, values*

*I'm able to advise someone who is in problem and give them confidence to do something*

The group cited numerous things they had found useful, in addition to the quotes above they cited: to help other people; future plans; how to socialise with others; and good questions so that we can teach others.

#### **3. The things I found unhelpful about this programme were:**

Three items were cited as unhelpful, these were: self confidence, the road of life and respect. No more information about these items was given, making it difficult to understand exactly what was unhelpful. Four out of six participants responded that nothing was unhelpful in the programme.

#### **4. I would like this programme to continue YES / NO**

The entire group responded that they would like the programme to continue. Although it was made very clear to the group that this was a time limited programme, since the programme ended in December I have had numerous phone calls and requests from group members to continue the programme.

When asked why they would like the programme to continue, responses included:

#### **Because.....**

*It will help me [achieve] more of what I want to do and to be responsible*

*... I cannot just see and judge I will also take a step*

*I have learnt many things so I would like to learn more*

#### **5. If this programme continues I would like us to learn about:**

- *Child abuse*
- *Values*
- *Problem solving*
- *Sex and love*
- *Combating child trafficking*
- *how we can help these people*
- *vulnerable children in the world and how we can avoid in details*
- *HIV/AIDS (x2)*
- *Human rights*
- *fairness and justice*
- *How you can undo when our parents are fighting*
- *More*

#### **6. Other Comments**

Final comments from the young people were all very positive:

- *'Cause we are the future leaders. Let us bring development and peace to everyone especially children.*
- *I could like to thank the one who made up this programme because it really helped me. It has made me to think wisely and I hope and trust that even where I am they are able to see that there is a change.*
- *The programme should not only be done in centres but also demonstrate to other people so they see what is happening and what we are learning.*
- *Thank you for those who organised this programme, they did a good job because they kept us busy & we learnt a lot of things.*
- *I have made other friends*

- *Would prefer the programme to continue*
- *Thank you very much*

The responses from the group reflected their enthusiasm and interest during the sessions. They also show that the group were keen to be of help to their peers, they felt that the programme had also helped them personally, and that they had many ideas about topics that will enable them to be good peer supporters in the future.

## **7.2 Other Achievements of the Programme**

### **Assisting the Group Members**

Judging by the young people's response to the programme, and their enthusiasm and participation, the meetings were giving the young people tools they felt they could use in their day to day lives.

### **A Valuable Untapped Resource**

The young people involved in the programme, and doubtless many more within the network, were intelligent, knowledgeable, articulate, enthusiastic, and keen to make a difference in the lives of those around them. These young people are a hugely valuable, yet currently under utilised resource within the network.

### **Helping Others find their Own Solutions**

The young people left the group seemingly more aware of how they could help their friends through listening, encouraging them and helping them to find their own solutions to difficulties rather than by trying to advise them or problem solve for them.

### **Openness**

The group were keen to discuss real examples of difficulties they and their peers faced.

### **Good Participation**

All of the group members participated well in the meetings. Most were quite vocal about their views and ideas. Throughout the meetings the quieter group members opened up and spoke out more.

### **Good Behaviour**

Surprisingly few challenges were faced in terms of running the sessions with the young people. The group were extremely enthusiastic and cooperative during sessions. I do not recall a single instance of having to reprimand a group member for uncooperative or bad behaviour.

### **Group Involvement in the Process**

We took care to involve the group in decision making about the topics we covered during the programme. I believe that this added to their enthusiasm and commitment to the programme.

### **Promoting Children's Participation.**

The programme provided a positive model for the network on children's participation. Even the presence of the peer supporters group every week at the KidSAFE office was seen as constant reminder to the network of the importance and value of children's participation.

### **A Much Needed Social Space**

The young people also appreciated an opportunity to meet like minded others. Two of the group had been friends some years ago but had lost touch and were very pleased to have regained contact.

### **A Psychosocial Approach**

From my experience of running this peer supporters programme, I feel that taking a broader psychosocial approach, rather than a narrower counselling emphasis, was wholly appropriate. Counselling is a skill which requires intensive training, infrastructure and supervision, whilst a psychosocial support approach such as the one employed in this programme can be much more broadly applied and by a wider range of people. A psychosocial approach also more overtly encourages empowerment of its recipients.

## **7.3 Challenges faced by the programme**

### **Attendance**

We started the programme with 12 young people, but by sessions 6 -11 the attendance figures swung between 6 and 8 at each meeting. One of the reasons for this was when the participants were reliant on staff members from their centres to bring them to meetings, and the workers were unable to do this due to other commitments. School commitments including exams were another factor preventing the young people from attending some meetings.

### **Lateness**

Starting the meetings on time was often a challenge. This was sometimes due to transport issues, waiting for accompanying staff members, or coming out of school late.

### **Lack of Involvement of KidSAFE Members**

The loss of both of the KidSAFE counsellors who were due to be involved in the programme meant that the programme remained less connected to the network than we would have liked.

### **Lack of Understanding About the Programme by Centre Staff**

Lack of knowledge about the programme from centre staff at times seemed to lead to unrealistic expectations of peer supporters. For example, one group member reported that the centre staff had left them in charge of the centre whilst all of the staff went out. This issue could be rectified by better communication with centres if the programme were to continue.

### **Possible disappointment at the shortness of the programme**

Despite emphasising from the start that this programme was a pilot, and due to end in December, the young people were still hopeful that the programme could continue. Young people in centres are too often subjected to false promises from adults so the short nature of this programme might also have been perceived as yet another disappointment.

## **8. Next Steps – Recommendations**

This pilot was an excellent start, but what could be achieved in these few sessions was very limited. To create a group of peer supporters who could realistically support their peers the programme would need to be longer, with continuing follow up.

*A Peer Supporter presents her future plans*



### **❖ Phase Two of the Programme**

With assistance from the group, plan a 20 session phase two peer supporters programme to allow the peer supporters to develop their skills further and put them into practice.

### **❖ Peer Supporter Involvement in Planning the Programme**

In the next phase of the programme it will be important to involve the peer supporters in decision making about how the programme should develop. In addition, the programme should include the topics suggested by the peer supporters in their feedback, see Section 7.1, point 5.

To employ a truly participatory approach, two or three peer supporters could be 'employed' to develop the programme, with support and supervision from the psychologist or other appropriate professional.

### **❖ Recommendations for Content of Phase 2 of the Peer Supporters Programme**

There are many important topics which could be covered in phase 2. One way to approach this might be, as we did in phase one, to give the group an overview of our ideas about how to proceed and then to let them decide which skills or topics would be most helpful to them.

Possible areas to cover in phase 2:

### **1. The Group's Suggestions from the Phase 1 Evaluation**

See Section 7.1, number 5, for the groups' suggestions for future topics.

### **2. Knowing Where to Get Help**

A number of sessions training the peer supporters could focus on this. The peer supporters would need to know when they may need to pass a problem on to someone else, in addition to knowing useful agencies they can tell their friends about. Examples of these might include:

- Child Protection Unit
- Victim Support Unit
- Social Welfare Dept.
- HIV testing and treatment centres such as Kara Clinic, New Start Centre.
- Reproductive health centre - Marie Stopes International
- Child Sexual Abuse Clinic at UTH
- Kara Counselling
- Etc.

Visits to such centres would bring these agencies to life for the peer supporters and they would then know how to access them easily for their peers or themselves when the need arose.

### **3. Self Awareness and Self Development**

A portion of the second phase of the peer supporters' programme might be devoted to self awareness and self development of the group. Through learning about themselves and problem solving their own issues, the group will learn how to work more effectively with their peers. Conversely, if the peer supporters are lacking in self awareness and how to solve their own problems, they may not be so able to support their peers in an appropriate way.

### **4. Peer Listening**

Good listening skills are fundamental to any peer supporter.

### **5. Other possible approaches include:**

- A peer befriending or 'buddy' scheme
- Peer Advocacy
- A 'Children's Rights' approach

### **❖ Expand the number of Peer Supporters**

Allowing for some drop off in attendance the second phase of the peers supporters programme could include 16 young people, two from each of eight centres or organisations.

❖ **Involvement of two KidSAFE Counsellors as Facilitators**

To enhance connectedness to the KidSAFE network, two skilled counsellors from the network should join the facilitators team for the next phase of this programme.

❖ **A Peer Supporters Programme in the Copperbelt**

Now that the programme has had a positive response in Lusaka, it would be straightforward to replicate it in the Copperbelt. Two or three committed and suitable facilitators in the Copperbelt could be found and they could run the same programme there with a limited amount of support from the Lusaka group.

❖ **A Programme Timetable for Each Centre**

As there was often confusion about when the meetings were held, if each peer supporter and each child had a written schedule of peer supporters meetings and activities, hopefully such confusions could be avoided.

❖ **Continuing Support for the Peer Supporters**

The literature on peer support schemes emphasises the importance of continuing support and supervision for the peer supporters.

*... support and supervision to be the most vital components of the program, ones that could determine whether the program succeeds or fails.*

Latham 1997

❖ **A Relevant Title for the Role**

Enlist the group in creating a more accessible and youth friendly name for the programme.

❖ **Clarify and Publicise the Peer supporters Role**

Centre staff should be clear about what the role of the peer supporters is and what it isn't. Peer supporters should not be expected to take on the roles of staff members. Involve the group in publicising the role and skills of the peer supporters to other network members and partners including: other children; the outreach team; social welfare dept; counsellors; caregivers; parents; etc.

*The programme should not only be done in centres but also demonstrate to other people so they see what is happening and what we are learning.*

Peer Supporter

## 9. Conclusion

The positive feedback from the peer supporters, and the commitment and enthusiasm of the group, leads us to recommend the continuation of the programme into phase two.

Throughout the programme it became evident that a number of young people in the group were natural leaders with excellent peer support skills. These are an intelligent and articulate group of young people with a commitment to learning and helping their peers. The young people undoubtedly had the ability to learn new skills and to use these to the benefit of themselves, their peers and the network as a whole. In fact, not to develop this valuable resource would be a huge loss to the network.

Peer Support programmes have been shown to be hugely beneficial:

*Peer support encourages both those being helped and the helpers to develop personal and social skills, such as communication skills; improving self-esteem; learning to negotiate with one another and adults over areas of conflict; and learning to ask for help and support. It gives children and young people the opportunity to experience different roles and responsibilities, and to learn leadership skills and team working (Cowie and others 2002).*

*Evidence from practice and research shows that peer support creates a calm environment in which children can learn, play, develop and grow, and where bullying is significantly reduced (Naylor and Cowie 1999; Cowie and others 2002).*

Parsons and Blake, National Children's Bureau. 2004

As this programme continues, it is recommended that the emphasis on the involvement and participation of the young people in planning and developing every stage of the process continue. In this way, it will be assured that the programme is relevant to the group and to the prevailing issues within the network.

If there is continued support for this programme, we can look forward to peer supporters playing a key role in the KidSAFE network in the future, both as supporters of and advocates for their peers.

## References

Knowledge, use of and attitudes towards peer support. Cowie, H and others. *Journal of Adolescence*, 25, 5, 453—467. 2002

An Assessment of Psychosocial Care and Support to Children in the Africa KidSAFE Network. Sue Gibbons, *Africa KidSAFE*, September – November 2007

Effectiveness of Peer Counseling in Two Rural South African Schools. Rachel L. Konopka and Noelle M. Weber. *University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire*, 2007

Latham, A. (1997). Peer counseling: Proceed with caution. *Educational Leadership*, October 1997, p.77-78.

The effectiveness of peer support systems in challenging school bullying: the perspectives and experiences of teachers and pupils. Naylor, P and Cowie, H. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22, 3, 467—479. 1999

Peer Support: An Overview. Marion Parsons and Simon Blake, *National Children's Bureau, UK*. November 2004.



