

Combating Early Marriage and FGC

AP Peace Fellowship at the Kakenya Center for Excellence in Kenya

For six months, February through July, 2012, I will be working as a Peace Fellow for The Advocacy Project (AP), for one of their partner organizations, the Kakenya Center for Excellence (KCE). KCE is the first primary boarding school for girls in the rural village of Ensooaen, Kenya. Although outlawed in Kenya, the custom of early marriage and female genital cutting (FGC) are still common practices in this region. Often, matriarchal customs keep girls from pursuing an education beyond primary school and they are forced to abandon their educational dreams to raise a family.

Unlike other schools, the Kakenya Center for Excellence (KCE), was founded by a Kenyan woman from the region, who at a young age, was able to negotiate with her father that she would undergo the cutting on the condition that she did not have to marry young but could pursue her education. Thus, KCE has used their enrollment system as a mechanism to protect the girls from the traditional practice of FGC and early-marriage, by working with their relatives to agree not to subject their girls to this violent practice. In addition, the school is providing a safe space for girls to foster their individuality, dreams, and find their own voices.

My work will be supporting the general programs of the school and highlighting those voices by creating an outlet for diverse audiences through various social media tools, such as blogging, video, photography, Facebook and Twitter, to document my experience and profile the KCE community. As an experienced videographer and editor, one of my main tasks at the school will be to conduct a digital media workshop for the girls. I will achieve this by teaching the girls how to use the equipment so that they can interview themselves, and through this peer-to-peer dialogue, produce their otherwise untold humanitarian stories.

Lastly, one of the goals of my peace fellowship is to produce at least 10 short documentary films that will tell the story of the school and the girls whose lives have been impacted by the difference it has made in the region. A series of these videos will be focused on profiling the women artists who worked on a beaded advocacy quilt that The Advocacy Project and UNFPA will be displaying at the UN Head Quarters on International Women's Day in 2012. I hope that these videos will be used in the exhibit to help give exposure to the issues impacting these girls.