



Final Report – WISER International December 2019

Organization Name: WISER International

Project Title: Build the Sexual, Economic, and Interpersonal Agency of Girls in Rural Kenya

Grant Amount: \$49,402

Contact Person: Zack Fowler, Executive Director, zack.fowler@wisergirls.org

Address: Physical Address - 502 Sharon Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27517

Mailing Address - PO Box 3186, Durham, NC 27715

In 2018, WISER International was named the featured grantee for the month of November as a part of Dining for Women's support of our project to build multiple types of agency in hundreds of girls in Muhuru Bay, Kenya. Our overall goal? To create a set of experiences that cement girls as powerful, educated, healthy role models with all of the agency they need to drive change. This project has four major components and corresponding sets of outcomes.

Objective #1: Create a healthy and empowering environment for 60 first-year students at the fully residential WISER Girls Secondary School. Provide access to clean water, healthy meals, and essential medicines as we improve self-esteem, confidence, and academic results and eliminate early pregnancy and drop-out.

Objective #2: Support the growth of all 180+ girls at the WISER Girls Secondary School through academic resources, experiential learning, and leadership development. Provide textbooks, school supplies, and laboratory equipment; regional academic and athletic



competitions; hands-on Science and Engineering clubs; and training via the East African Girls Leadership Summit in Nairobi. Through these efforts, WISER will improve self-esteem and academic results among students while ranking among the best educational experiences for girls in western Kenya and enrolling more than 90% of our graduating class in tertiary education.

Objective #3: Support the future of 145 WISER alumni through mentoring and leadership opportunities. Provide agency-building opportunities during WISER's inaugural Alumni Mentorship Day and offer an extensive support network for WISER alumni.

Objective #4: Empower 650 girls in the community of Muhuru Bay through sexual and reproductive health education. Through WISER girl-led initiatives, build the sexual agency of young women through sessions in local schools and churches that increase knowledge of SRH wellness, build understanding of bodily autonomy, and provide girls with opportunities to lead sessions on issues that directly affect their personal health and well-being.

These objectives remained valuable and true throughout the course of the project. No objective changes were needed in this pursuit of increased sexual, economic, and interpersonal agency for girls in rural Kenya.

How many lives have been touched, both directly and indirectly, by the project?

We are happy to report that the number of beneficiaries continued to increase from our original projections to our interim report to, now, our final report. Originally, our proposal assumed program implementation in 2018, but WISER's growth over the past year has allowed us to expand our student population, our alumni base, and our reach into the community. There are now 210 students living and learning at the WISER Girls Secondary School, not 180, and after the success of our graduating class of 2018 and having just completed national exams for an additional class of 29 girls in 2019, our alumni base now includes more than 200 girls. These alumni are studying, working, and living all over the world – from Nairobi to Arusha to as far away as Scottsdale, Arizona. Additionally, while we projected that we would have 650 girls benefitting from WISER SRH outreach in 2018, we ended that year with 837 female youth participants in that component of the project. In 2019, this increased to 959 female youth participants and we expect yet another increase in 2020 as our student-led SRH becomes the largest source of sexual and reproductive health information in all of the 30,000-person community of Muhuru Bay.

It is entirely fair, we believe, to say that all 30,000+ people living in Muhuru Bay have had their lives touched by the direct and residual effects of this project. Because of these efforts, hundreds of girls have been given access to life-changing opportunities in education, health, and personal empowerment. Their families now have a young woman in their households who likely has the highest level of education and the strongest economic prospects of anyone in the family. Muhuru Bay's primary and secondary schools have benefitted from WISER's presence as a provider of critical SRH information in a region that has been plagued by HIV, a fish-for-sex

economy, and attrition due to early pregnancy. In addition, the number of lives touched by WISER's burgeoning alumni network, which was supported, in part, by this project, is incalculable. WISER alumni go on to lead in their universities (we celebrated alumni who were elected to be club leaders, university class presidents, and even medical lab managers in 2019 alone) and serve as shining examples of girls' empowerment and value. And in this vein, and in accordance with our logic model, it holds true that nearly all women (especially adolescent girls) in WISER's community benefit from the steady shift in the cultural value of girls generated from the success stories emerging from the efforts of this project.

What progress have you made toward achieving your objectives? Please address each stated objective. What are the measurements used to monitor success and how was this information measured? Be specific and include measurable results.

Objective #1: WISER has successfully welcomed 57 new students into our first-year class. While our original target was to welcome 60 girls, we reserved a number of admissions spots to be filled by partner organizations and, due to circumstances outside of WISER's control, a few partners were unable to fill the spots as planned. However, all 57 students to join WISER in 2019 were provided, as planned, with access to clean water, healthy meals, and essential medicines in the first six months of their schooling. We have also met our commitment for maintaining enrollment, as we have had no instances of drop-out in this class and no instances of early pregnancy. In fact, school-wide, WISER had a less than 2% pregnancy rate in 2019, compared to nearby schools which can reach as high as a 70% pregnancy rate within their school populations. All enrollment statistics are tracked using a bi-weekly monitoring form that is completed by the Deputy Principal in partnership with WISER's seven class teachers who manage individual cohort well-being. This form is submitted and reviewed by our Executive Director on a bi-weekly basis.

Objective #2: WISER has a current student population of nearly 210 students; an increase from our projected 180 provided in our original proposal. That entire student population, in accordance with this objective, has been provided with essential academic resources including textbooks, school supplies, and equipment for our on-campus science labs. The ultimate purpose of this objective is to provide academic resources and hands-on learning opportunities for young women and we have been in alignment with this purpose throughout the year. To date, students have participated in both athletic and academic competitions throughout the region. WISER girls had top-3 finishes in geography, history, and mathematics competitions in the first half of the year and four WISER teams reached the regional level of the Kenya Science & Engineering Fair. In the second half of the year, we sent three students and two faculty mentors to the East African Girls Leadership Summit (EAGLS) in Nairobi. During this summit, girls had the opportunity to learn arts-based approaches to community interventions, spoke out about community issues they've witnessed in Kenya's Lake Region, and visited the UN offices in Nairobi. Also in line with our desired outcomes, WISER graduated our sixth-ever class in the first half of 2019 and this class is on-track to send 93% of its students on to tertiary education in Kenya. Our seventh class completed their national exams in December and, while graduation will not take place



until early 2020, we estimate that a minimum of 90% of these most recent graduates will enroll in tertiary education as well. Provision of the essential resources and experiences involved in objective #2 are also tracked using the monitoring document explained in objective #1 with the added feature of pre-generated forms that are carried by teachers (club patrons) to local competitions and meetings to track and report results. Tertiary enrollment is measured both by cutoffs on national exam scores (projected eligibility to enroll using national standards released by the Kenyan Ministry of Education) and eventually confirmed enrollment tracked by mobile-based alumni surveys and by a record of requests for transcripts from WISER graduates.

Objective #3: In the second half of 2019, WISER held our Alumni Mentorship Day, which was attended by more than 90 alumni (over 50% of all girls that ever attended WISER at the time!) this August. Throughout the day, alumni were given the opportunity to network with one another, reconnect with their WISER mentors and teachers, and provide valuable advice to current WISER students who are working to follow in these alumni's shoes. As a special addition to this year's Alumni Day, approximately 30 alumni who are currently pursuing degrees in education or who are currently teaching in a Kenyan school were given the opportunity to get focused time with our teachers. These sessions provided guidance on everything from classroom presence to pedagogy. To reach all alumni, including those who could not attend the in-person event, we added skills-building programs in business, entrepreneurship, health, education, and STEM for 2019. These programs included mobile-access business skills training, which was made available at no cost to all WISER alumni through a partnership with Eneza Education in Nairobi, in-person advanced SRH training for alumni interested in continuing their community health efforts after graduating, and computer literacy training for recent alumni in WISER's on-campus computer lab to provide additional support between a WISER girl's last day of class at WISER and her first day at a university. Alumni participation in the opportunities provided in this project was tracked by our on-campus finance admin, using an alumni-specific monitoring form. It may be of interest to DFW members to know that we chose our finance admin as the main steward of this information not because of her financial management abilities, but because, over time, it became clear that she is one of the people that WISER alumni trust most on our campus. We believe this is due to a mix of technical proficiency (she is the staff member most comfortable with texting, WhatsApp, and social media) and proximity in age (she is also one of our youngest staff members). For each specific alumni program, a different set of indicators and monitoring mechanisms exists (e.g. Eneza offers a back-end dashboard that shows usage of the program and number of trainings completed via mobile platforms; the computer literacy training is evaluated using a survey prepared by the conducting organization, which then shares results with us).

Objective #4: We are glad to report that we have exceeded our objective of reaching 650 girls in the community of Muhuru Bay via SRH outreach. In 2019, we have worked with just under 1,000 adolescent girls (959) in local primary and secondary schools, churches, and community spaces. Sessions this year have covered critical topics including understanding the human body, developing general SRH wellness and hygiene, and STI prevention.



Between 2016 and 2019, WISER SRH has expanded more than 1,500% - and we expect numbers to be high yet again for 2020. Impact of the SRH program is measured by both attendance and changes in SRH-related knowledge and beliefs. We track participation through the assistance of our student leaders who run the SRH sessions themselves. Each student is given an intake form on each trip to lead a session and that form contains space for the number and gender of attendees, topics covered, the length of the session, and the location. These are collected on a weekly basis, compiled by our Deputy Principal, and included in the aforementioned monitoring report. To track the impact of the information provided, we use a pre-post survey created in tandem with students from Duke University that allows us to see changes in attitudes and knowledge such as, for example, a 75% increase in the number of students who believed that service providers should make contraceptives available (from 2017) or a 51% decrease in youth who believe women should not use contraceptives before first pregnancy (from 2018).

What challenges did you face in connection with this project? How did you address those challenges?

Our primary challenge executing this project related to the management of WISER's sexual and reproductive health outreach in the second half of 2019. In our original grant proposal, written in 2017, much of the coordination regarding this outreach and the subsequent monitoring and data-reporting was handled by our Deputy Principal acting as a monitoring officer. In 2018, we moved to address this by hiring a full-time Program Officer who would take over these responsibilities. However, in June 2019, that Program Officer departed the organization, leaving no main "point person" on our staff to lead the efforts. To ensure that no programs were affected and that our data remains reliable, we are shifting back to a structure similar to that reported in the 2017 grant. Our Deputy Principal was asked to manage school-based M&E (as we showed in our objectives section) and another long-time school administrator (our finance admin) picked up programmatic responsibilities, including M&E for community SRH and alumni. Moving forward, we're going to be addressing these challenges even more thoroughly by hiring an in-country director in Kenya in 2020. This person will have both implementing responsibilities, such as overseeing the execution of our SRH programs, and strategic influence, such as advising the board on ways forward with both content and target populations.

What were the most important lessons learned? What has changed within your organization as a result of this project? Describe any unexpected events and outcomes, including unexpected benefits.

We have always been proud of the ways in which we involve our students and alumni in not only the execution of our programs and projects, but in their design and future direction. That theme emerged so strongly while implementing this project and it is, without question, the driving lesson behind this experience with Dining For Women. One of the goals of this project, from the beginning, was to develop the agency of our alumni base and to lead toward a future in which we could formalize a mentorship network of alumni that worked not only for each other but for current students as well. We had begun planning the bare bones of this structure in early

2019 by planning with our board and staff and preparing to reach out to collect feedback from the alumni themselves. Imagine our surprise when, while perusing LinkedIn one day, our Executive Director found a WISER alumna who had listed herself as a “founder of the WISER Alumni Foundation!”

As it turned out, a group of WISER alumni had self-organized after seeing the need for an alumni association within WISER’s growing alumni base and had created a new organization on their own. The group not only had a name, it had a steering team of four alumni, it had formal members (30 and growing) and it had plans to donate textbooks and some small monetary donations during the Alumni Mentorship Day supported by Dining for Women! We were thrilled at the initiative shown by these young women and, in a way, it was the clearest example of WISER’s programs in action that we had ever seen. A group of girls who were the first in their family to finish secondary school had seen a need, collected the person power they needed from each other, and jumped on the solution while we were busy planning.

On one hand, this makes for a fun and endorsing anecdote about the effect WISER can have on young women. On the other hand, it’s a historical note that is likely going to change the way our organization works for quite some time. After the creation of the “WISER Alumni Foundation,” our board voted to create a permanent board seat in Kenya for the President of that alumni group, allowing us to bring an alumna’s voice more formally into strategic discussions going forward and for WISER to be more supportive in the future direction of that budding organization. Without projects like the Alumni Mentorship Day, which brought these driven young women back together, this unexpected and welcome change might never have happened.

Did this grant and relationship with DFW assist your organization in obtaining other funding, partnerships with other organizations, or public recognition in some capacity?

Thanks to our partnership with DFW, we have enjoyed building relationships with both the core DFW team in South Carolina and a number of chapters across the country. Specifically, we were honored to be invited as an in-person speaker for the DFW chapters in Sag Harbor, NY and in Paris Mountain, SC and enjoyed receiving the recognition of the value of our work that came with those invitations. While the relationships described have not led directly to additional funding, they were instrumental in a number of productive conversations with new thought partners and led to the development of friendly networks of supporters in new areas of the United States.

If the project is ongoing, provide plans and expected results including a projected timeline.

Nearly all components of this project are ongoing, because they are core to the work WISER does year-to-year. Therefore, a timeline would essentially be a repetition of what you see here, reflected in our objectives, stories, and outcomes. However, we are happy to say that we will be continuing our Alumni Mentorship Day and look forward to welcoming more than 100 young

women back to campus for our 3rd-ever event in August 2020. We also look forward to continued expansion of our girl-led SRH in the community and we are in the process of applying for grant funding from AmplifyChange to create a new SRH-based partnership with ZanaAfrica, which would involve implementing their randomized control trial-vetted SRH curriculum throughout Muhuru Bay (while still being led by the WISER girls themselves). In January 2020, we will welcome our fourth and final (for now) expansion class as our school population expands from 120 girls in 2016 to 240 girls each year beginning next month. That means more girls living and learning in an environment that is offering a multitude of agency-building opportunities each and every day.

Is your organization or project situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?

In 2019, WISER International's staff structure (in the US) changed from a co-director format featuring a Managing Director of Programs and a Managing Director of Operations to an executive director-based format. In this new structure, WISER's Managing Director of Programs was named Executive Director and WISER hired two new part-time staff and one new full-time staff member this year. With this change, the responsibilities in the grant that were conferred to the Managing Director of Programs now fall directly under the supervision of the Executive Director. This structure will evolve yet again in 2020 as WISER adds a full-time Operations Manager and full-time Development Manager in the US, both reporting to the Executive Director. In Kenya, our staff has grown from the reported 33 on-the-ground personnel to 37, though the manner in which the staff engage with the project remains as described. This staff will grow again, as previously mentioned, in 2020 as we add an in-country director who will be representing the Kenyan NGO, leading in-country programs and fundraising efforts, and serving as the eventual top staff person for WISER's work in the country.