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SUCCESS STORY

Abstinence and Be Faithful Programs Make Inroads with Youth

USAID is providing young people with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to make healthy choices



Mobilizing Youth For Life, Kenya
Rongai Youth Development Outreach

World Relief uses sports clubs like this one sponsored by Rongai Youth Development Outreach in Kenya to reach out-of-school youth with the empowering message of abstinence.

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THROUGH THE PRESIDENT’S EMERGENCY PLAN for AIDS Relief, USAID is supporting an innovative new activity to encourage youth in Kenya, Haiti, Mozambique, and Rwanda to avoid risky behaviors. This effort is part of a broader five-year program involving several organizations across the 15 focus countries that seeks to decrease HIV transmission among young people by reaching them with messages about abstinence and fidelity.

Mobilizing Youth For Life is a program being implemented by World Relief. One of its major goals is to challenge and equip more than 1.8 million youth ages 10–24 to choose abstinence before marriage and faithfulness in marriage as the best prevention for the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Another goal is to help 200,000 “influencers” of youth—parents, guardians, pastors, teachers, and youth leaders—to guide youth to make and sustain wise life choices about their sexual behavior. World Relief and local staff are already training peer educators to use open discussion of decision-making skills, sexuality, risk behaviors, and abstinence strategies, in hopes of changing such behavior.

Other goals include encouraging 60% of the unmarried youth under the age of 24 in peer education programs to commit to sexual abstinence for at least one year. At another level within the community, it is hoped that 50% of churches will integrate abstinence support programs and HIV/AIDS awareness into their ongoing youth programs. An estimated 1,750 youth clubs will be established to provide ongoing support for youth with activities like sports, development of life skills, and enriching social events.

To connect with their audience, some peer educators share their own stories. One newly married youth discussed how he had managed to wait until marriage for sex because of his personal commitment to abstinence and the strong influence of his parents’ beliefs. Another discussed his strategy for avoiding risky behaviors: “Every time I walk around and interact with the opposite sex, I assume that everyone other than me could be HIV-positive.” This assumption, he says, “...keeps me from having sex carelessly with anyone.”

Lucy Njoroge, Kenya Program Manager for World Relief, offered positive results of *Mobilizing Youth For Life*’s first few months of operation. “We...have given out 50 pledge forms to nine clubs. All have been signed and the clubs are asking for more. We are likely to have more than 50% of the members committing to abstinence.” In one club alone, she says, “Ten youth have gone for HIV counseling and testing out of the approximately 25 members, and seven have signed the abstinence pledge.”