

AfCiC News



"Working towards a world of equal and sustainable opportunities for every child"



Embracing the Digital Revolution

Who is AfCiC?

Action for Children in Conflict (AfCiC) is a registered non-governmental organization that has been working in Thika, Kenya, since 2004. We operate a range of programmes aimed at preventing, supporting and rehabilitating street and other acutely vulnerable children in the local area, and are focused on addressing the root causes of conflict that force children into exploitative and abusive situations including those entailing abuse, neglect, poverty and violence.

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In line with vision 2030 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Kenya has embraced the digital revolution and introduced computer lessons in all public schools. In the annual budget 2012-2013, the government set aside 52.3 billion Kenya shillings to make the provision of laptops for pupils a possibility. Teachers are being taken through information communication technology (ICT) training to equip them with the skills they need to be able to transfer skills on how to use the computers to children. However, this programme will target in-school children and sadly leaves out children who are in other institutions for example the rehabilitation center such as the one run by AfCiC.

Thus, AfCiC has introduced computer classes at the Interim Care (ICC). The ICT Hub was set up with the support of Angela De Stefano and a grant from Cycle Africa. The computer laboratory is well equipped and the children are being equipped with basic computer skills. Using the computers the children are now able to communicate with other children from other parts of the world and tell their story. They are also learning about the rest of the world through the

internet and research on different topics and subjects for their class work.

The children at the ICC will have an added advantage when they go back to school as they will have had an experience with lap tops and it is hoped that they will be able to assist other school going children in the computer classes . This will help to boost their self esteem as they will have a skill that they are good at and this will help reduce on their stigma. In the coming months, AfCiC will be creating another ICT Hub at the Working children Center in Majengo so as to be able to afford the same opportunity to working children and youth who do not have access to computers.

Digital Alphabet Challenge

The digital revelation has influenced the learning of the alphabet by children. Try to create a digital alphabet , we generated the following list:

A for Apple computer

- B for Bytes
- C for Computer
- D for DVD; Digital
- E for Email
- F for Facebook; Flash disk
- G for Google
- H for Homepage
- I for Internet; IPHONE; IPad; IMac; Ipad
- J for Java
- K for Keypad
- L for Laptop
- M for Monitor
- N for Nokia
- O for Orange
- P for Post
- Q for QWERTY Keyboard
- R for Recycle Bin
- S for Samsung; Skype
- T for Twitter
- U for USB
- V for Virus
- W for Windows; Wikipedia; Whatsapp
- X for Xmen
- Y for Yahoo; Youtube
- Z for Zuku



Joseph, one of the boys undergoing rehabilitation at the ICC during a computer class. Most of the boys can now use basic computer programmes. They have learnt how to type and save their work.

Children Voices- Nurturing Leaders



Faith Ann from Barracks primary school was a powerful debater and her efforts took her school to the semi-finals and the school went on to become the winners of the annual debate competitions taking the title from St Patricks that won last year.

Children have the right to participate. This right is recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Kenyan Constitution and the Children's Act.

It has increasingly become clear that children are aware of what their needs and wants are and in most cases if given the chance they will come up with the solutions to their problems.

Group discussions, research from books and the internet has worked to increase the knowledge of children in regards to their environment and the issues facing the country and how these issues affect them.

Giving children an opportunity to voice out their opinions is very important. It is no longer okay to invite children into gatherings only for them to entertain the guests in the gathering.

The government of Kenya is engaging children in governance through setting up the Children Assemblies and school councils.

Most child centered organizations are coming to the realization that they can not strategize on children without fully knowing what the children in question would like. It is only the children who are targeted who can be able to fully voice out what their needs are and with guidance from adults where necessary how they can solve issues affecting them.

AfCiC takes the voices of children very seriously and we have incorporated child participation in most of our programmes.

One of the ways that AfCiC has been able to achieve this is through the introduction of child advocacy clubs in schools. There are currently eight clubs being run in eight primary schools within Thika.

The clubs are meant to be a forum where children can come together and discuss different issues. The Advocacy clubs also double up as debate forums and reading clubs.

Debate forums are initiatives that empower children become engaged citizens through being able to advocate for their rights and freedoms and those of other children in the community. Children's participation is key and especially in matters affecting them since they form an integral part of our societies.

Through the advocacy clubs, young people meet and talk about issues and develop policies that would make their schools and communities bet-

ter or friendlier. In the clubs topics are introduced to the children and they participate in the learning of the topics in depth.

Recently some children from eight Schools in the municipality participated in a debate forum where the theme was "*the power in your hands.*" This theme was in line with the global hand washing day.

A majority of the children that AfCiC targets are from the slums. Hygiene and sanitation are a menace in the slums hence through the debate the children were able to give their views of how standards of sanitation and hygiene can be improved. Throughout the preparation period, the children formed their own children parliaments where they elected their presidents, speakers and members of the house. These parliaments came up with motions which they debated about and the best speakers were chosen to represent their schools in the finals.

The use of a children parliament is no doubt one of the best ways that children freely articulate issues that they face, participate in policy formation and influence change in policies put in place on issues affecting them. Children's parliament is also a way of making sure that young people have a say in shaping the future. They also help the young people have a voice to everything that matters to them.

Mary from Umoja defending the motion. Mary was identified by the judges as having real talent that requires to be nurtured and her confidence built up.



Vincent from St Patricks challenging one of the speakers during the heated debate.



CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ARE PART OF THE COMMUNITY



Children with special needs are a group that is often misunderstood. The community views them differently; some even considered a result of curses and witchcraft. Their parents too are discriminated against; people shun them and are often not invited to take part in community events such as weddings. In turn, the families of such children view them as the source of their discrimination in the community and hide them in their houses, where they cannot interact with other children and cannot even go to school.

Recently AFCiC in partnership with the Education office in Gatanga has been conducting a series of activities aimed at creating awareness on the plight of children with special needs. The activities are ongoing in three zones namely; Gatanga, Kariara and Gati- iguru where parents and gatekeepers have been targeted for the sensitizations.

The forums held have been targeting parents and caregivers of these children and the topics covered during these forums include; rights of children, how to handle different forms of disabilities among children and also assessment of children with special needs.

In the sessions parents are encouraged to share the challenges they face while handling their children. Some parents are reluctant at first but after probing they open up. This is a very informative session for them since they were able to offer solutions to each other's challenges and also for the facilitators, as it gives a glimpse of the struggles these parents go through.

The sessions form a basis for the forums as parents are taken through an in depth training on how to handle their children and how to cope with stigma associated with raising a child with disability.

From the interaction with the parents, it became apparent that parents have very little knowledge about the rights and

entitlements of their children some of which are guaranteed by the Government. Some of these parents are not even invited to school meetings. Majority of the parents do not know that there is a special curriculum for children with specific mental disabilities or that there is need to take your child for an assessment before you enroll them into a special school and unfortunately this information is not widely shared.

For children and families to be able to benefit from assistive devices and other monetary benefits from the government there is a requirement that the first get accessed and then get a registration number which is used as an identifying number when accessing this help.

The assistance provided by the government ranges from school fees support, family support, assistive devices and institutional support. Unfortunately most parents can not afford the fee charged as an assessment fee and this hinders the registration of children. Most of these parents do not have this information as well.

Some of the solutions discussed in the forums other than the registration of children was the formation of groups. The government of Kenya launched a fund that is meant to help Kenyans start up businesses called the UWEZO fund. One of the requirements for accessing this fund is the registration of groups. The groups have to be headed by either youth members or women. The loans given to the groups that qualify are interest free making it easier on the groups to repay them money borrowed. The groups are registered at the department of social services.

"My child is nine years old. She has special needs. She has a terrible temper and gets offended by almost

everything. When she was a small baby, she delayed in walking which usually annoyed her and it's like she blames her siblings for that because she could see them walk and play while she sat there helplessly. She also complains that they don't learn in school and she would want to be in the regular classes like her siblings although she can't read and write. What worries me so much is the temper because she becomes violent and harasses everyone in sight. Other children in the neighborhood tease her which makes it worse because she starts beating them. How can I handle this situation?"

The response to this question is behavior can be inherited or acquired from the environment. If the parents are hostile or treat the child differently, the child will be angry and will in most cases develop hatred towards society. The parent should try to show the child love and treat them equally if others are given presents she should also be given, if there are visitors at home, the child should be allowed to welcome them instead of hiding her. Through that the child will feel loved and appreciated and the tantrums will reduce.

From the forums it was apparent that parents are now facing a new fear while dealing with their children. More and more parents are reporting that their children are being defiled in their schools or as they walk home from school. The children are easy targets and are also being defiled by their relatives in the homestead, because they are not able to report.

This is a serious concern and the forums have now integrated training on what to do when a child is defiled and how to tell if your child is being sexually abused. A police training on this will also be conducted in the region in the coming months.



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AfCiC



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Photography: Images used are courtesy of , unless mentioned, our own staff photo library. The images depict children who, in the recent past, have been part of one of our programmes and do not necessarily depict children who are currently either living or working on the streets of Thika.

Hi Daina, What is your involvement with AfCiC?

I am the manager at the Interim Care Center. I oversee the activities at the Interim Care Center and also coordinate the child sponsorship program. My duties at the ICC are mainly to ensure that the rehabilitation program is being carried out as planned so as to ensure efficiency. I also see to it that the ICC staffs carry out their duties as specified in their job descriptions. Handling disciplinary cases amongst the staff and children is in my docket too as meeting up with parents and guardians of the children at the ICC. Networking with government agencies and other stake holders is a important role that I carry out.

In the sponsorship program I ensure that the beneficiaries are placed in appropriate schools and act as a link between AfCiC and the schools. I ensure that school cheques are written in good time so that beneficiaries resume school in good time as well as make sure that they receive enough toiletries and personal items for use during the school term.

Why and for how long have you been involved?

I have worked for AfCiC for the last eight years. Working for street children is no easy task but the fact that positive change is evident at the community level is so fulfilling. Children should not be



deprived of their basic rights and sent to the streets to earn a living. Children should be allowed to enjoy their childhood and so seeing this happen keeps me going and enjoying my work

How can we help change the situation faced by the street boys of Thika?

The situation with street children in Thika can be improved by involving all the stake holders in looking for realistic solutions to this situation that is threatening to get out of hand. Some of the possible measures could include but not limited to;

All children must go to school as the government has provided free primary education in all public schools. The law enforcement agencies should see to it that parents and guardians are held accountable when their children do not go to school and

instead go to the streets.

Child labour must be stopped. The community must not engage children in running errands for them in exchange for money. The streets become very accommodative when children know that they can make quick money by running errands and performing chores for traders and other citizens.

Parental responsibility must be emphasized. All parents and guardians should take up their roles and ensure that their children do not go to the streets to make a living. Children should just be exactly that and not bread winners.

Government and other stake holders should invest programs that ensure children spend their free time out of school engaging in suitable activities that enhance their development and growth.

We couldn't survive as a working charity if it weren't for the support and generosity of the partners who we work with. We thank you for all you do and want you to know your partnership with us is invaluable as we continue to work towards providing opportunities for street and other vulnerable children in the Thika district. Special thanks goes to;

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|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mt. Kenya University Social Sciences | Sue Harries | Charles Njoroge |
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