

The “Focus on Dreams Family Literacy Program” at Lubuto Library Partners

By Given Besa



Lubuto Library Partners (LLP's) in Lusaka are heavily-used for many programs that meet community needs. Some of our programs serve as a gateway for linking high-risk girls to information and services that are empowering them to develop life skills, prevent HIV, and stay in school. LLP libraries have close connections to out-of-school and otherwise extremely marginalized girls and young women.

Under a DREAMS Innovation Challenge grant, Family Literacy is one of the programs to be implemented in two Lubuto libraries in Lusaka. The Family Literacy program facilitates girls' return to school after pregnancy by developing their literacy skills in a supportive peer group while also teaching them how to foster early literacy in their young children. Family Literacy programs are well-documented in educational research as a means of improving the literacy skills of parents and children alike.

As Lubuto, our aim in the Family Literacy program was to reach young women between the ages of 15-24 living in Lusaka, Zambia. The program is conducted at two libraries- the Lubuto Mthunzi American Youth Library and the Lubuto Model Library- where the program is delivered six days a week in 3 month cycles.

The program allows young mothers to further their literacy skills in supportive small groups. The program targets young mothers who dropped out of school following the birth of a child, and delivers an adult literacy curriculum intended to support young women in their ability to return to school after a period of absence. Early childhood education programming for children aged birth through to six years is provided during the program period. Young mothers in the Family Literacy program have shown improved literacy skills and determination to re-enroll in secondary school, vocational training, or other educational programs.

Each Family Literacy cohort lasts for 3 months, followed by graduation. Certificates are given to the mothers upon successful completion. Young mothers who are interested in going back to school are given a chance to apply for a scholarship. So far we have 23 young mothers that have returned back to school under our DREAMS scholarship program. These young mothers have received full secondary school scholarships to support their education from the point of enrollment in the scholarship program through to their graduation from secondary school.

Since the program started in 2017 we have enrolled over 300 young mothers, of which more than 100 have graduated and received feminine hygiene products-- leading to reduced school absenteeism among those that have returned to school.

These mothers are also exposed to many life skills trainings such as the skills in entrepreneurship facilitated by organizations such as SHE ENTREPRENEUR. The staff held workshops with every cohort to empower the young mothers with skills on how to start a business and manage a business with little income and budgeting.

To ensure sustainability of Lubuto libraries we establish partnerships with other organizations/groups that are also working to help the children of Zambia. The Family Literacy program has held field trips to various organizations with young mothers. As part of MTN Zambia's Y'ello Care Campaign in partnership with Asikana Network, an organization for women by women, young mothers have participated in trainings where they were taught basic computer literacy skills in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). These trainings have been exciting for the young people we serve, and the skills acquired have been valuable to them.

Reading Horizons Software is another ICT program that the young mothers are using within the libraries to improve their English knowledge. Reading Horizon Software is a phonics program that helps with learning how to read in English. Firstly they are assessed on how much they know and then they begin the lessons. At the end of each lesson they are given a test to see if they have understood the topic. The student only graduates after they have successfully completed all the lessons. The progress of the participant is recorded by the Reading Horizons software through progress reports; this is what facilitator uses to determine those eligible for graduation. This program has enhanced their ICT skills even more as they are frequently using the computers and internet.

We also have many successful stories from this program. One of the young mothers from the second cohort of Family Literacy program had this story to share;

“My name is Agness Kabwe, am 19 years old living within Garden compound. I got pregnant when I was in Grade 9, it was the most hurt breaking news to my parents who also refused to speak to me for quite some time, especially my father. The time I was sitting for my grade 9 exam I was 7 months pregnant, this was not easy for me as my friends bullied me and talked about me behind my back, this affected my life especially school, I couldn't concentrate at school thus I failed that exam. I dropped out of school for over a year and just kept the baby home and assisted with home chores, my parents had no plans to take me back to school and somehow and I completely lost hope for school.”

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I heard about the Family Literacy Program last year right at my mum's house when two Lubuto outreach officers came to inform us about the program. I was in a company of friends one who were in a similar situation and I thought of joining immediately just to keep my mind refreshed with reading and writing but I didn't know that other opportunities waited for me. I thought coming to this program would help me somehow than staying home. When I began this program I met other fellow young mothers, it somehow comforted me, I even made friends. With these lessons my hope for going back to school just increased as we encouraged each other with friends and teachers at Lubuto.

Soon I also heard about scholarship being offered at Lubuto and I thought it was an opportunity for me to go back to school. I applied in November in the last year. Luckily I was picked! It was the happiest moment for me, my parents didn't believe I took myself back to school, my mother was very happy for me, she agreed to be remaining with the child when am away for school. The school where I was taken requested that I repeat grade 8, I did mind all I wanted was to be in school.

Have learnt so many things from my mistake, in that period when I got pregnant I lost friends and hope but with Family Literacy program have gained self-confidence and standing up for what I want. I also know the importance of reading and writing and most importantly why it's crucial for parents to get involved in their children's school work.

I plan to finish school and go to university to study banking and be a manager at some bank someday.

I would encourage all young mothers/ children to utilize libraries for I didn't know I would get such a rare opportunity to go back to school.

I would advise the young children not to make the mistake that I made but by abstaining and waiting for a right the right time. I also thank Lubuto for giving me this opportunity to build my future and career.”

We are excited the program in making a difference and changing people's lives.

My Motivation of being a LIAZ Member

By Given Besa

I joined LIAZ (Library Information Association of Zambia) for various reasons however the most important was for the fact that LIAZ was linked to international organization which support services of my profession being a Librarian.

Libraries require meaningful information that is of local and internal value therefore it is inevitable for a Librarian to have such connections in our library field.

And surely, I have enjoyed countless opportunities on local and international platforms since I joined LIAZ where I have created professional relationships with other institutions and other Librarian from different countries and organizations and I have learned a lot of beneficial information important to me and my institution.

Among the benefits I enjoyed was the fully sponsored trip to Europe in which LIAZ played a major role in supporting some of the requirements I needed during the application. This was in 2017, when I saw an article that was posted at LIAZ platform, which was advertising about Initiative for Young African Library Innovators (IYALI) to participate in the international workshops which was held in Lithuania, then attend the IFLA conference in Poland. Upon seeing an article I made an effort to apply generally and how excited I was that I was one of those picked to attend this workshop. The workshops were exciting as I met different librarians across the world especially during the IFLA conference.

Personally, LIAZ has enhanced my personal and professional development and keeps providing endless networking opportunities which I have tapped into. During the 2016 AGC in Ndola I was given an opportunity to give a presentation about my organization and the unique programs we are running at our library, this was good for me to get exposed and share what we do with others, I guess someone was able to learn from my presentation and went to implement some of the things and this was my expectation when joining.

I like to keep myself abreast with latest information so as to give up to date information to my clients, thus having up to date information is good for any information provider for people to make informed decisions. Such kind of information is mostly shared within the professional bodies meaning that being a member has given me an advantage to new trends and having firsthand information regarding my field.

Listing my association membership on my resume is just excellent to current or future employers and that was my interest too, as it shows that I am dedicated to staying connected in my profession.

I do however have other expectations from being a LIAZ member such as seeing LIAZ push for a Library bill to become law, with this enactment our professional can be revamped in many ways and our professional can be regulated. Another things I would like to see LIAZ is awarding the most hardworking librarian in the country just to appreciate them and motivate others to become more innovative and work hard.

Lastly I would like to express my deep gratitude towards the whole LIAZ team. I also render my gratitude to the former LIAZ President Mrs. Munsanje for the support, guidance and encouragement during IYALI application, and generally for spearheading LIAZ objectives. I would also like to thank my organization Lubuto Library Partners especially to our Director of Library Services- Elizabeth Giles for encouraging me to join this wonderful association and for believing in me and according me those opportunities to present at LIAZ conferences and workshops.

