

The activities created in the Grassroot Soccer program were designed to teach boys and girls in Zambia and South Africa between ages ten and eighteen skills to build resiliency and prevent infection of HIV.

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Grassroot Soccer resiliency pilot program: Building resiliency through sport-based education in Zambia and South Africa

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GRASSROOT SOCCER (GRS) is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that is using the power of soccer in the fight against AIDS by providing African youth with skills and support to remain HIV free. Founded by former professional soccer players, GRS trains African soccer stars, soccer coaches, and peer educators in the world's most HIV-affected countries to deliver prevention training to youth.

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Program purpose

In 2006 GRS designed a curriculum and sport-based teaching model to build resiliency, targeting boys and girls in Lusaka, Zambia, and Johannesburg, South Africa, where most children are reminded daily of the devastation caused by AIDS and where many face chronic and acute hardships. In these settings, an estimated 17 percent of the adult population in Zambia and 18.8 percent of the adult population in South Africa are infected with HIV,¹ and ministries of education in both countries have identified delivering effective HIV/AIDS education as a major challenge. Collaborating with curriculum specialists, evaluation specialists, and, perhaps most important, Zambian peer educators, GRS created interactive activities designed to resonate with youths' interests in sport while teaching boys and girls between ten and eighteen years of age skills to build resiliency and prevent infection of HIV. With the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development through CARE, GRS enhanced its existing activity-based curriculum by adding resiliency concepts, created the resiliency program logic model, conducted training-of-trainers courses, launched a six-week resiliency-focused HIV/AIDS education and life skills pilot program for the boys and girls in Zambia and South Africa, and conducted an evaluation study of the pilot program. Peter Banda, a twenty-year-old Zambian GRS peer educator, was trained in quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods and served as the Zambian research director.

Population served

In Zambia, the 520 youth participating in the resiliency pilot project were boys and girls in government and community schools, soccer teams, and peer education programs throughout Lusaka. In South Africa, the 150 youth participating in the resiliency pilot were boys and girls in public schools in Johannesburg. GRS made an effort to engage girls in the resiliency pilot program² because girls in South Africa and Zambia are more likely than boys to

contract HIV/AIDS³ and are less likely to participate in sports, which can serve as a support group setting and promote resiliency.

Youth voice innovation

Grassroot Soccer's innovative approach to tapping youth voice in resource-poor settings, drained of adult infrastructure, involves using sport as a tool for youth social development, part of a global movement called sport for development (SfD). Grassroot Soccer is one of the few organizations in southern Africa that dedicates itself to defining the core components of effective SfD, piloting innovative models that use sport to unify communities toward the common goals of health, education, and economic prosperity.

Youth voice was influential throughout the design, execution, and evaluation of the GRS resiliency pilot project. The activities were tested and developed with the participation of Zambian peer educators, and extensive qualitative data were collected from youth participants in order to directly capture the youth voice on which activities they felt were most effective. The data were also largely collected by Banda, a Zambian youth raised in similar conditions as the participants.

In order to execute the pilot program, GRS created the following working definition of resiliency, in the context of sport for development: "Seeing your strengths and building your skills so that you can *stay* strong and bounce back when things don't go your way." One Zambian peer educator at a training-of-trainers session described an example of resiliency: "A peer educator lost both parents to AIDS but came back to teach people about AIDS and to play football hard and study hard."

Grassroot Soccer believes that youth inherently possess the necessary skills for resiliency and that often they just need to recognize those skills and practice them. Acting on this premise, GRS used experienced trainers as key agents to promote and develop strengths in the youth through four primary methods in order to help these youth build an enhanced response to stressful situations. Grassroot Soccer staff worked collaboratively with a consultant

from Edgework Consulting, practitioners in the fields of facilitation, organizational development, and curriculum design, to develop the foundation and innovative approach of the program through a framework called the Four Ways to Stay Strong, developed from experience in SfD curriculum design, as well as a practical application of evidence and theory drawn from resiliency literature.

The Four Ways to Stay Strong are:

1. *Use your Strengths*: Trainers help to improve a student's self esteem and confidence through things like constructive praise, vocabulary development, and providing a positive outlook. Youth are encouraged to identify things they like to do, are good at, and learn fast and use these skills to stay healthy and strong.
2. *Plan your Next Move*: Trainers help young people to think about their future and realize that they can achieve success by making the right choices in life. Students learn skills that will help them to strategize and achieve goals that they set for themselves in the short and long term.
3. *Build your Support Team*: Trainers focus on the concept of teamwork and joining the GRS "team" to show youth the value of surrounding themselves within a positive community of peers and mentors. GRS helps youth to recognize who are positive teammates and where to find them in the community.
4. *Take Action in the Community*: GRS helps youth to get active in their community. These types of activities may include: peer education, playing sports, organizing events, and mobilizing their peers.

Additional key resiliency concepts devised by Grassroot Soccer are Coach's Voice and Praise Circle. Coach's Voice is designed to remind youth about the role that a good coach can have in one's life and to consider oneself as a coach with an insightful voice each time a decision is made (Figure 12.1). Coach's Voice stimulates a thoughtful decision-making process weighing the pros and cons for difficult choices and tapping into youth voice for meaningful consideration. Even when there is not a trustworthy adult present, one can ask a young boy or girl: "What does your coach's voice tell you in this situation?" GRS trainers help youth to practice and trust

Figure 12.1. Members of the Afrika Sports Soccer Team participating in a discussion about HIV/AIDS with their coach, Henry Kalolo, in Lusaka, Zambia



their own coach's voice, instilling a sense of pride, accomplishment, and empowerment in the youth they work with. Praise Circle is an activity that helps youth identify their strengths and practice using them. The daily ritual of praising your teammates, praising yourself, and being praised by your coach is an integral part of the GRS resiliency pilot program that builds young people's positive vocabulary and recognition of things they do well. Giving specific praise is important to GRS in order for youth to know how to replicate their behavior in the future. Giving specific praise is a facilitating skill that GRS teaches and encourages in its trainers to make their interactions with youth more meaningful.

One teacher in Zambia at a training-the-trainers session described the opportunity to help youth tap their own voice and build resiliency: "As teachers and coaches, we help them [youth]

break their shells to bring out their skills and visions so they can bounce back.”

A student expressed her confidence and voice as she addressed an invited crowd of teachers, parents, siblings, and friends at a GRS resiliency program graduation ceremony in Lusaka, Zambia: “In Grassroot Soccer, we’ve also learnt that anyone has a choice to make and that anyone has a strength to do something in every day of our lives.”

Professional development

An unintended consequence of this project was the professional development of the GRS peer educators who assisted with the monitoring and evaluation component. These three young men aged twenty to twenty-three were trained to collect baseline demographic data, deliver pre- and posttest surveys, conduct interviews with participating students, and enter data into data management tools for future analysis. Due to praise from the principal investigator who was managing the study about the thoroughness of their work, the peer educators began to identify and refer to themselves as “scientists.”

The following testimony from Peter S. Banda demonstrates the impact that acting as Zambian research director had on his own life and career goals:

Firstly I would say that it was an honor to have been given a big role in conducting a research about resiliency in a capital city of Zambia, since then I feel so responsible an expert in research because of the experience I got from the role I held for a short while, hence being a big achievement in my life time.

I still visualize myself moving around doing surveys in different schools also conducting interviews using a voice recorder with the selected audience of pupils. However, my most memorable experience was the data analysis and entry; this has really helped me to compare data before final results and also considering my current job where monitoring and evaluation is a priority it has played a role in a way that it’s simple for me to use some methods learnt in the resiliency pilot project. Hence, it being a sub-

component of a course I am hoping to study this will be to my advantage in this field in future hopefully soon.

Evaluation

An evaluation of the Grassroot Soccer Resiliency Pilot Program was conducted in November 2006. Its primary objective was to answer the following question: Can resiliency be taught to boys and girls between the ages of ten and eighteen years using a sport-based model in Southern Africa? Specific study objectives were to assess participants' perception and articulation of key resiliency-related concepts pre- and postintervention, determine trainer opinions about the GRS resiliency concepts and activities and gain ideas for program improvement, and determine the participating boys' and girls' experience in the program.

Study Design

In Zambia, the evaluation approach consisted of pre- and post-intervention surveys, interviews with a subsample of program participants, group discussions with trainers, and demographic assessments of each site. In South Africa, the evaluation consisted of assessment information gathered at five weekly group reflection and discussion sessions with trainers, trainer assessment, and a program and curriculum feedback from trainers.

Findings: Voices from the field

Feedback from participating boys and girls shows that the Grassroot Soccer resiliency pilot program succeeded in helping young boys and girls in Lusaka identify strengths in their lives and ways to improve their resiliency. In particular, it helped young girls to have and identify a trainer or coach as someone they could ask for help. GRS also helped boys in believing that they are able to make their own decisions, not always making a decision based on what feels good at the moment, and in seeking help from an adult family member when they have a problem. Both girls and boys learned from GRS how to make

a backup plan for when things do not go their way. The GRS program also succeeded in helping boys and girls to identify and articulate their strengths and goals for the future. After completing the program, both boys and girls increased in their ability to say what they are good at and what they hope to achieve in the near and distant future.

There is a clear indication that students plan to follow through with positive behaviors after the GRS resiliency pilot program. For example, teaching others about HIV/AIDS, making a list of consequences when making a decision, and using their own Coach's Voice to think through a decision were all expressed by the students as things they will continue to do. When asked, "What will you do when school is out this year?" an increased number of boys and girls said they would like to teach others in their community what they learned about HIV/AIDS and bouncing back from adversity from the GRS activities. Some students also indicated in their future goals that they would like to be a GRS trainer someday. These plans reflect positive behaviors that are intermediate to the ultimate programmatic impact of increasing resiliency and decreasing HIV infection among boys and girls in Zambia and South Africa.

The youth voice was also reflected in the graduation ceremony. Trainers and students organized their own graduation ceremonies, which were attended by parents, school administrators, members of the community, and GRS staff members. Graduates often demonstrated their favorite GRS activities (Figure 12.2) or performed plays or songs about what they learned in the program.

Trainers. Grassroot Soccer equipped trainers with concepts, tools, and teaching skills for building resiliency in various educational settings. In South Africa, trainers reported using Praise Circle in other educational settings to build esteem and improve relationships among their students.

Overall, trainers expressed a positive experience with delivering the GRS Resiliency Pilot program in primary schools in Johannesburg. All trainers ($n = 20$) agreed or strongly agreed that the GRS pilot program helped them develop their skills as a trainer and expressed a desire to participate in the program again the next year.

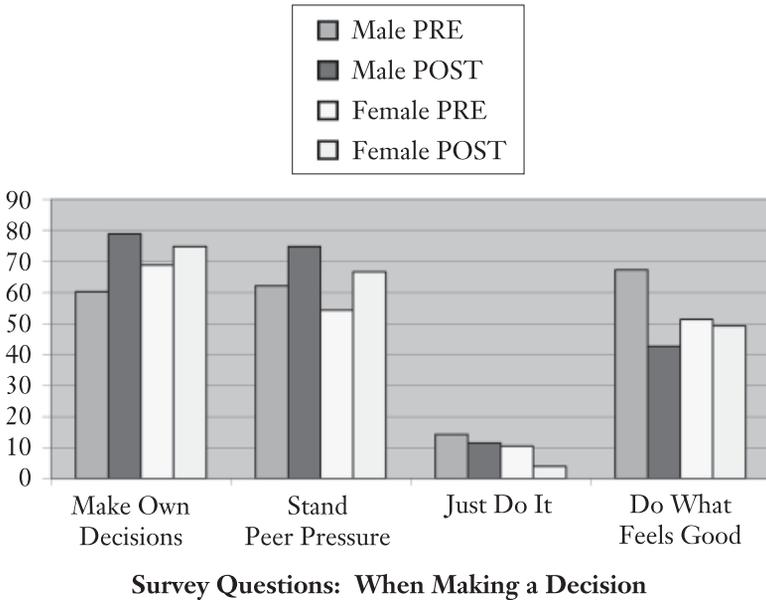
Figure 12.2. Song about HIV/AIDS and resiliency performed by graduating students and trainer, Ronica Ngoma, at the GRS resiliency pilot program graduation at the Edwin Mulongoti School in Lusaka, Zambia



Trainers listed their strengths as facilitators: good listener, enthusiastic, engaging, explains effectively, inclusivity, well organized, determination, problem solver, team player, and confidence.

Survey findings. Youth demonstrated an increase in agency and youth voice through responses to survey questions. Figure 12.3 illustrates the decision-making practices of boys and girls before and after the GRS resiliency pilot program. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “I believe I am able to make my own decision,” youth showed a significant change in response before and after participating in the GRS pilot program. An interesting difference between genders and a convergence in responses by gender after participating in the program was observed. In an assessment before the program, fewer boys than girls indicated

Figure 12.3. Decision-making practices by gender, before and after the GRS resiliency intervention



that they believe they can make their own decisions. Believing that they have agency and real choice to make their own decision is viewed as a positive attribute by the researchers in this context. Therefore, girls showed a unique strength and confidence in themselves as compared to their boy peers before participating in the GRS program. In the posttest, boys showed a statistically significant increase of 18.6 percent in their feeling that they could make their own decisions. This is a significant achievement and a direct benefit to boys, as it shows that participating in the GRS program helped them identify their own voice and have the confidence to express healthy decision making. After the program, the boys were able to catch up to their girl peers in feeling a sense of agency and strength in decision making.

Figure 12.4. Grassroot Soccer graduates in Lusaka, Zambia, demonstrate Pressure Limbo, an activity that generates discussion of the difference sources of pressure to have sex



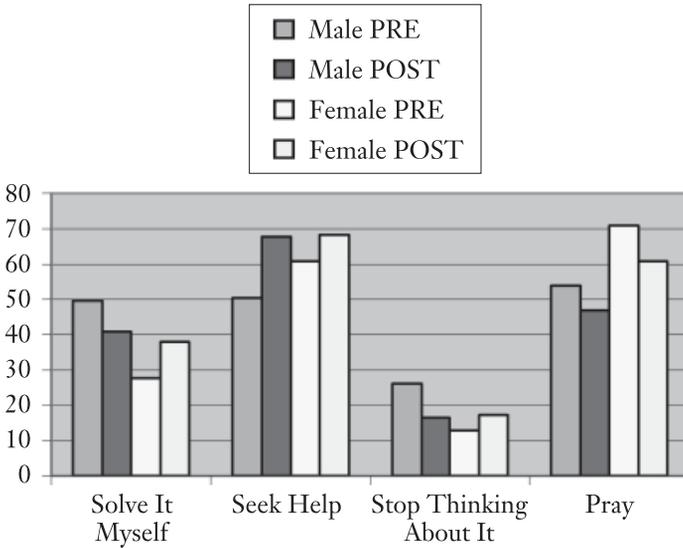
The GS curriculum generates a great deal of discussion among students and trainers about identifying and standing up to negative peer pressure and avoid making risky decisions. A game called Pressure Limbo (Figure 12.4) illustrates how the pressure to have sex becomes greater as the children get older. This game is designed to create discussion with students about what kinds of peer pressures they feel to have sex. More boys and girls reported that they knew how to stand up to peer pressure after completing the program than before starting with GRS. This indicates that before the program, peer pressure may not have been a concept that was easy to identify in real life, and during the GRS program, the participants were able to strategize and develop creative ways to stand up to negative peer pressure in their own communities

and lives. Activities offered during the GRS program benefited both boys and girls equally.

Boys and girls were better equipped to think through the consequences of making decisions and confident to make good decisions for themselves after participating in the program. The program curriculum dedicated significant attention to making a good decision and using your resources, such as a trustworthy friend, your Coach's Voice, or a list of pros and cons to help make a decision that is good for the present as well as the future. When asked to complete the sentence, "When making a decision, I . . .," fewer boys and girls responded, "I don't think about it, I just do it" after participating in the GRS program (see Figure 12.3). By responding "I don't think about it, I just do it," the boys and girls indicated that they frequently made decisions based on impulse without considering the positive and negative consequences of their actions. Boys dropped significantly, 24.6 percent, in their response, "I do what feels good," after completing the program. This is a great improvement since "doing what feels good" is usually tied to a lack of consideration for future consequences and focuses on immediate benefits. This is an especially important change to see in boys as they pass through adolescence into adulthood and sexual activity. Figure 12.5 illustrates the change in participating youth's attitude toward asking for help and dealing with a difficult situation.

Gender difference in the participants' responses is a notable finding. Before beginning the GRS program, more boys than girls said they could just solve a problem by themselves and girls were more open to seeking help from someone. After the program, however, boys were more willing to ask for help, and girls were more aware that there were problems they could solve by themselves. Neither one of these actions is considered good or bad, but the differences by gender indicate that boys and girls may have started out with different attitudes about asking for help and then opened to new ideas after participating in the GRS resiliency pilot program. The findings suggest that boys were initially more hes-

Figure 12.5. Problem solving by gender, before and after the GRS resiliency intervention



Survey Question: What Do You Do If You Have a Problem?

itant to trust someone and ask for help, but after the program, they were able to reach out and trust another person. For girls, the findings suggest that before the program, they may have felt more comfortable than boys trusting someone else and asking for help, but they may not have felt confident enough in themselves to face a challenge alone. The shift observed in girls toward declaring that they could solve problems themselves may be due to gaining a sense of agency and self-efficacy after participating in the program. Both boys and girls illustrated that they could find workable solutions with the resources around them, as demonstrated by the decrease in responses, “I stop thinking about it [my problem].” This shows a decrease in hopelessness among students when they are met with adversity.

Conclusion

The evaluation findings indicate that the Grassroot Soccer resiliency pilot program had a direct impact on both trainers and students in Lusaka, Zambia, and Johannesburg, South Africa. It affected decision making and strategies for building resiliency in the lives of boy and girl study participants. By using a sport-based model, this program provided boys and girls with a caring adult whom they could ask for help: their GRS trainer. Gender conversion observed on survey items before and after the intervention indicates that GRS succeeded in promoting gender equity. It also equipped trainers with new facilitation techniques that can build resiliency in boys and girls in educational interactions outside GRS. With the specific feedback obtained, Grassroot Soccer will continue to improve the resiliency curriculum to better serve boys and girls and adult trainers who face recurrent challenges and vulnerabilities in their lives.

Notes

1. UNAIDS. (2007). *AIDS epidemic update*. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf.
2. Fifty-eight percent of the participants in the Resiliency Pilot Program were girls.
3. UNAIDS. (2006). *Report on the global AIDS epidemic*. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV_data/2006GlobalReport/default.asp.

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