Introduction

On Monday, February 4, Ayako Kaino visited Ending Violence Against Children activities implemented by AVSI Foundation in Omugo Refugee Settlement.

The Humanitarian Relief Specialist for Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children was accompanied by Veronique Njo, UNICEF - Protection Officer for the West Nile Region and Gaele Chojnowicz, UNHCR - Child Protection Specialist in Kampala.

The team was received with enthusiasm by AVSI Country Representative John Makoha at the event held at AVSI Multifunctional Youth Center and attended by beneficiaries of the project.

The visit was an occasion to share experiences with project direct beneficiaries and to evaluate AVSI’s implementation of the project.

“With your support, we have built protagonists in this community.

John Makoha, Country Representative - AVSI Foundation

“I’m paying a learning visit to hear your voices.

Ayako Kaino, Humanitarian Relief Specialist - Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

About AVSI Foundation

AVSI, created in 1972, is a non-profit organization which carries out development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects throughout the world.

AVSI began operations in Northern Uganda in 1984, focusing on education, economic empowerment and livelihoods, health, disability, HIV and AIDS, nutrition, child protection, energy, sanitation and hygiene, emergencies.

AVSI remained a direct supporter of communities and partner organizations throughout the two-decade civil conflict in the northern regions of the country, demonstrating commitment and capacity to adapt to volatile circumstances.

About AVSI Foundation and UNICEF in Northern Uganda

AVSI Foundation has a long history of partnership with UNICEF in Acholi sub region, supporting the health sector to strengthen Maternal, New-Born, Child Health and Nutrition, and education.

About Ending Violence Against Children project

AVSI Foundation is implementing Ending Violence Against Children project (April, 2018 to March, 2019) in Kyangwali and Rhino (Omugo) Refugee Settlements located in Kikuube and Arua Districts respectively. EVAC envisions a world in which every child grows up free from violence. EVAC’s Mission is to make societies safer for children and end violence against children everywhere.

Project Goal:
To end violence against children in Rhino (Omugo) and Kyangwali Settlements.

The project objectives are:
1. To improve case management and access to protection and legal services through community level protection structures.
2. To provide a supportive family care environment.
3. To promote a safe environment in schools and in the communities.
Poem from Parenting Group:

Parents, parents, parents!
Mothers, mothers, mothers!
Fathers, fathers, fathers!
Stop being authoritarian!
Stop being permissive!
Stop being careless!

Authoritarian parenting
Makes children to grow with fear.
Permissive Parenting
Makes children to grow without respect.
Careless parenting
Makes children to grow like wild animals.

Parents, parents, parents!
Let’s be authoritative if we need:
Disciplined children,
Lovely children,
Cooperative children,
Happy families.
Parents, parents, parents!
Let’s be authoritative.

Translated from a local South Sudanese language.

An UZAZI parenting poem by LOKETA Group of 30 members (24 females, 6 males) in Omugo Refugee Settlement.

AVSI's Parenting Approach in Omugo

AVSI Foundation developed a parenting training program to target both young and older parents. In this project AVSI utilized its UZAZI parenting skills model which comprises of five modules built on the hypothesis that parenting skills training increases parenting knowledge among participants, translating into improved parenting behavior and ultimately resulting into improved well-being of children, including those living in extreme conditions of poverty, abuse and conflict.

The training equips parents with parenting skills to help them understand who they are, appreciate their children as they are, appreciate their parenting responsibility and adopt positive (authoritative) parenting behavior, values, skills and attitudes that enable them to accompany their children to maturity.
Testimonies:

Happy Musheka is 14 years old and originally from South Sudan. She lives in Omugo – Rhino Extension Refugee Settlement in Arua District. Musheka is excited to attend school in Kumoyo Primary School.

Having minimal parental care, Masheka joined a group of peers when she lost her parents in South Sudan in 2014 and soon misbehaviour cropped in and she was out of school, a story the teen narrates with sorrow.

“I was separated from my family when my uncle asked us to leave South Sudan for Uganda. We left home as a family but I arrived in Omugo with people I met on my journey”, narrates Masheka.

Three years later, while in Omugo, Masheka’s neighbour, Agnes Kaku took her in and gave her counsel and food to eat and Masheka became part of Agnes’ family, and related well with her four children; but Masheka wouldn’t listen to the counsels Agnes offered her, which strained their relationship.

In June 2018, Masheka enrolled into AVSI’s life skills trainings which excited her “when I heard girls around me share their stories, I knew I was in the right place”.

Masheka loved the moments she met her peers at the training area, she felt good about herself and wanted to have an education and a more focused future. A now confident Masheka who refers to life skills as her “game changer journey” is happy to share her story with young girls to encourage them that life skills can help shape their lives.

Masheka looks forward to reuniting with her family in Bidibidi Settlement in West Nile region of Uganda.

Stranded in the hands of separation, many child refugees spend frightful days facing new horrors with beatings and other forms of abuse right from home.

Betty decided to leave her father’s home in Kajo-Keji when she faced mistreatment from her step-mum. At first she envisioned the punishments as “normal” since her step-mum seemed to extend her love; but when the beatings escalated, Betty, 14, walked away from home in a search for her mother who lived in the city of Juba, 100km away. The child refugee describes being kicked, beaten and at times tied to a tree by her step-mum.

Superimposed upon her face was grief – she was sure her mother would not afford her stay in school, but she had to leave Kajo-Keji. Her concern was far from what would come ahead of her – war broke in South Sudan and Betty and her mother had to begin their unsafe crossing. They walked to Uganda’s Rhino Refugee Camp in Arua District where life would make another turn for the teen.

At 15, Betty became pregnant by a young man and gave birth to a healthy baby boy, but cultural concerns dropped in, Betty’s boyfriend and father to her child was a relative! She would have to look after her son without the help of her boyfriend; just as clan beliefs barred her from getting close to the father of her child again. This was tense for a child-mother hoping for a fresh start when she met her caring mother, and now in a safe country.

Feeling overwhelmed with loneliness and isolation and describing her daily life as shameful, “I feel humiliated anywhere, in the camp and outside” Betty needed assistance and a life skill was going to be an ideal saver of the teen’s self-confidence and her future. For six months she attended weekly trainings in hygiene, pregnancy prevention, health, household management and discipline at AVSI Foundation’s multifunctional youth center in Omugo Refugee Camp.

Betty is among scores of vulnerable child refugees in Omugo Refugee Settlement who find themselves in need of assistance, a figure widely understood to be about 100 pregnant teens by 2018.

“Marriage is not something any young person should rush into; I have taken a decision to delay sex.” Betty wants to become a nurse – hopefully for her country because she “wants to give health instead of making money”.

She would never have contemplated involving herself in a sexual relationship if she had learnt the truth about the topic “life skills has helped me become a “counselor” to my peers and I am enjoying sharing this knowledge.”

Betty wants to enrol for adult literacy educational program - she has set her goals and believes she will achieve them all.
“I used to beat my children - I was certain that the only way to teach them something was by using physical punishment but I was wrong.

Today my relationship with them has totally changed. My children don’t fear me and I enjoy spending time with them.

We tell stories about home (South Sudan) and about what we left there; I want them to be responsible because they are the future of our country.”

Ayako Kaino inaugurated the art mural at St. Mary’s Ocia Primary School.

The art mural shows what a good school means for learners and is a tool to remind teachers, learners and the community of Omugo about the importance of a safe and free-violence environment.

After the inauguration, Ayako shared moments with students to hear their stories.
Results in the year:

3,137 Children issued with Birth Registration Notifications.

26 Legal outreaches conducted.

4,092 people participated in legal outreaches.

712 home visits conducted.

514 people trained in child protection and legal services interventions.

1,488 parents trained in parenting skills.

265 foster parents identified.

522 girls trained in reproductive health and menstrual hygiene.

1,149 boys and men engaged in dialogues on awareness on GBV issues.

1,066 youths trained in life skills.

4,731 people provided with psychosocial activities.

519 boys and men trained and made aware of gender equality and positive norms of masculinity.

133 teachers trained on child friendly approaches.

7 schools supported, assessed and became child friendly.

3,926 pupils attended dialogue sessions on child protection.