

# GIRLS lead 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign

Fiji

SHARE

December 15, 2014

For the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign this year, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement's chose to focus on girls and young women. The team spoke to Pacific Women about how a group of 10-12 girls used theatre arts to highlight discrimination, gender equality and bullying with schools and communities in Fiji.

It has been as exciting two-years for the 39 girls part of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement's empowerment project – GIRLS.

Grow-Inspire-Relate-Lead-Succeed is a critical part of the FWRM's Young Women in Leadership Programme and is one of Fiji's, if not the region's, finest feminist-based gender equality projects for 10-12 year girls.

According to FWRM's Programme Director Tara Chetty, the movement chose to work with girls and young women because it recognizes their experiences of gender-based violence, and also their leadership in addressing these issues.

"We have been inspired by the young leaders in our GIRLS theatre project who have fearlessly told their stories through the powerful medium of live theatre."

The play, titled 'A series of unfortunate events: Fiji-style', was performed in two communities during the 16 Days, culminating in a performance at the Civic Centre on 10 December marking World Human Rights Day .

Working in partnership with the Informal Education Theatre Consultants (formerly Women's Action for Change), FWRM's major goals when designing this project was to create a space and curriculum that empowered girls by boosting their confidence and their ability to express themselves freely.

The creative arts seemed to be the ideal set-up for achieving these goals as it saw the girls role-playing, discussing, debating, sharing and bonding with each other – all while having a lot of fun! The school and public performances not only gave them the opportunity to interact with other students and communities but also have them the chance to tackle issues of sexism, inequality, gender stereotypes and girls abilities. Issues which they are familiar with only too well.

FWRM's GIRLS Officer Lillian Delana has been working closely with the girls for the past year and has seen some remarkable changes in their attitude and behaviour.

“When the girls came in last year, they were very shy and reserved. It took them a while to come out of their shells. But following recruitment, the girls took part in a three-day workshop, where they were divided into different groups to discuss some of the challenges girls their age face. Looking at those recorded sessions then and now, it's amazing to see how much they have changed. They went from being shy and reserved to being very confident and empowered. If they see anything happening around them, especially in school, that is unfair, they take a stand. They are also inspiring their own peers,” she said.

The project has gained a lot of popularity since it started, so much so that the girls did their first public performance this year in August to an audience of over 300! There were many fun moments, as the audience were taken through a rather humorous story of how two girls (and their friends) dealt with their little brother, a child overly doted upon by their parents and society, simply because he was a boy. There are many incidents of bullying, kidnapping and other hair-raising adventures in this Fiji-style series of unfortunate events tale. All in all, a fantastic way to highlight serious and real issues in a humorous way.

Pacific Women also got the wonderful opportunity to speak to some of the participants of the project themselves and their parents:

Participant: Ana, 13

“I enjoyed my two years in GIRLS very much. It made me really think about my rights and to use it when I have the need. It really built my confidence and self-esteem. We all really opened up. We used that confidence on the stage – otherwise I would always be behind the curtains! When the rest of the girls

shared their stories, it was very hard for me to listen because some of it was very sad. We have all become very good friends now.”

Participant: Akansha, 13

“I think this project is great! In the last two years, I have learnt that we all have equal rights. I also learnt about privilege and how that affects equality. My parents are very supportive, especially my Mum who accompanies me to sessions and performances even though she is working. Because of this project, my confidence has really increased, especially when I speak in front of the public. I want to be a radio announcer when I am older because I think these skills will help me do a good job there.”

Participant: Jamila, 11

“I have been part of GIRLS since this year and like it because I can speak when I want. Violence is not good for girls...for anyone. That’s what I learnt here. I used to be very shy before but I am better now.”

Parent: Ala (Parent of Raumue, 10)

“I saw this project as a character-building opportunity for my daughter. She is shy by nature but by mingling with the other girls, I see a big a big difference in her confidence level. She has made many new friends here. Being able to commit to all the sessions, especially the Saturday ones, was a good way for her to learn about time-management and sticking to commitments. As for me, I tried to be as supportive as possible – this included waking up early and juggling various events.”

Parent: Ajeshni (Parent of Akansha, 13)

“I learnt about this project through an advertisement and thought it would be great for my daughter Akansha because girls should do everything. I have seen a lot of positive changes in her. She is more self-disciplined, broad-minded and confident. When I was in school I used to take part in a lot of extracurricular activities and I want the same for my daughter. In fact I want her to have access to more than what I had access to at that time. Sometimes I feel like I am just as enthusiastic, if not more, than her about attending sessions and performances! It’s a great opportunity to meet new people. In fact, I took leave today so I didn’t miss her performance.”

The impact made by the project in such a short-span of time is visible, positive and ground-breaking. This is only too obvious when you see the girls performing fearlessly in front of crowds.

All the 39 girls will graduate from the project next year.

FWRM acknowledges the support of the International Women's Development Agency through the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women, in empowering the girls of Fiji.