

SNAPSHOT

Life-skills Training Boosts Confidence for Future Women Leaders: Volunteer Carmen Byce



Day one of training - nervous and hesitant girls. Photo by Biruk Tesfaye

The Melka Abune Aregawi Nunnery runs various community and welfare services including managing 40 acres of small scale agricultural production of citrus and vegetables with sales supporting school programming and housing and food for over 115 orphaned girls. The girls lost their families through HIV/AIDS, civil wars, displacement, famines, and other social problems, and are drawn from different regions of Ethiopia. The nunnery was recruited as a Farmer-to-Farmer host based on the role it plays in training youth on horticulture, bee-keeping and dairy production. The nunnery also manages a primary and secondary schools for the orphans, which also serves the local community, helping the social integration with the community. Although the nunnery is giving commendable services to meet the needs of the girls, socio-economic, emotional and psychological challenges remain. The nunnery is not well equipped to handle these additional challenges, and does not have the capacity to hire trained experts. It is for this reason they requested for a F2F volunteer to train on leadership, life-skills and basic entrepreneurial skills.

Carmen Byce, a Program Coordinator at Texas A&M Agri Life's Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture and a co-owner of a small farm in Franklin, US, travelled to Ethiopia in December 2015 and trained 45 persons (42 orphan girls and 3 nuns). The girls were mostly in grades 8-10, most of them teenagers. It was the first time that the orphan girls got such exposure to realize their own potential and build their skills outside of formal education. It took some time but they started interacting more freely, and even notable improvement was seen in their confidence during and after the training days.

The training provided opportunities for the girls to explore their natural responses to different environments and situations. Competitive team building exercises, short stories and play presentations as well as guidance on developing per-

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Last day of training - confident, lively and engaged. Photo Credit Carmen Byce

sonal goals and action planning prepared them to become confident, competitive and strong leaders. The positive response and results of the training were immediate, and have continued to have lasting impact for the orphans and nuns.

The trained girls are now mentors and trainer of the younger girls, they exhibit emotional maturity and have enhanced leadership and conflict resolution abilities. According the mother superior, these girls are role models within and outside the nunnery and will excel in their fields of choice.

The positive experience went both ways. Carmen had this to say; 'Volunteering with Farmer-to-Farmer is without exaggeration, a life changing experience. When I first learned of this opportunity to volunteer in Ethiopia, through my membership in American Agri-Women, I knew immediately I wanted to volunteer to support these efforts, and more specifically to support leadership development amount girls and young adults that have faced such struggles in their lives. Not to my surprise, I gained a wealth of knowledge.' and irreplaceable experiences from my kind hosts as well as the girls I worked with.'

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