Camp Shriver at Kenyatta University Nov. 30th-Dec. 11th 2009

Reaching out to the community through inclusive youth sports


By
Peter Bukhala – EKS Fellow 2009
Kenya

Be a fan of acceptance, dignity, and the human race.
What is Camp Shriver?

The Kenyatta University Special Olympics Club held its inaugural Camp Shriver for youths from around the University from 30th November to 11th December 2009. This was in honor of Mrs. Eunice Kennedy Shriver the founder of the Special Olympics Movement. In her view, Mrs. Shriver conceptualized Camp Shriver as a recreation program that would create opportunities to promote the social inclusion of children with disabilities and to allow children without disabilities the opportunity to interact with and achieve a greater understanding and appreciation of their peers with disabilities. Unlike the school setting, where the differences between children with and without disabilities are often accentuated, the Camp Shriver model stresses the importance of recognizing the similarities that exist among all children who participate.

The unique experience of Camp Shriver brought together children with and without disabilities who engaged in the same camp activities alongside one another. In doing so, the camp used sports as an avenue for improving not only campers’ sports skills, but also their self-esteem, social skills, and confidence in building friendships with peers.

The specific goals of the camp were:
• To provide sports, recreational, and enrichment activities for all campers.
• To improve campers’ sports skills as well as their social skills and self-esteem.
• To create an atmosphere of understanding and caring so that campers with and without disabilities can develop friendships.
The camp attracted 106 youths with and without intellectual disabilities from low-income, neighborhoods of Kenyatta University. The uniqueness of this camp from other recreational camps offered around the country was the opportunities that were provided to all campers to participate in a *totally inclusive at no costs* holiday camp and the fact that it offered children with and without disabilities to play and learn together. At Camp Shriver the emphasis was on sports, making friends, and most importantly having fun. The Camp provided the children an opportunity to learn new skills, build friendships, and experience personal growth in ways that only a recreational setting such as camp could provide.

For children with intellectual, developmental or learning disabilities it is not only the high cost, but also the lack of inclusive programs. In Kenya and indeed most countries in Africa no such opportunities exist. The 2009 Camp Shriver at Kenyatta University was the first such programme to be launched in the country.
Early stages

Late 2008 Special Olympics approached me to coordinate a special Olympics club at Kenyatta University. This was after a survey that showed there were many young people in the area who could not be served by the existing clubs as the parents could not afford to transport them every Saturday to the existing clubs in the city centre. The club begun with 20 enthusiastic young boys and 5 university student volunteers. The only activities played were soccer and basketball. When finally the club was launched in November, it was with pomp. Parents attended and were all ready to support the new programme. The boys had no playing kits and no shoes. They would report at 8 am till 11.00 am. The only snack they were provided with was a glass of milk and a few slices of bread.
First organized Basketball match

First donation of 10 soccer balls from SOK and another 15 soccer balls and 17 basketballs from SONJ made the whole difference. We were the richest SO club in Kenya. Then came 20 bibs which served as team uniform. Now we were able to play team sports in an organised manner. Today we are proud owners of adequate balls for the registered athletes. Thanks to the generous support from various sponsors who have continued to support our activities. They included Safaricom Foundation, SO New Jersey, SO Kenya, FKL, CECFA, Dr Bulinda, Lions club SOI, Mrs. Goodwin of the Department of PE Kenyatta University.
The idea of Camp Shriver was developed in USA during my EKS fellowship and concretized after visiting various summer camps. I liked the idea of Unified Sports camp as designed by the Camp Shriver at Umass - Boston. However the idea of training volunteer coaches was developed one rainy afternoon in a New Jersey restaurant with my mentor Marc Edinzon. We called it Event Management. As a result a 4 day workshop for 32 volunteer student coaches was designed to train them in various skills to manage youths sports programmes. Basketball and Soccer were the focal sports for the camp.
Training of volunteer coaches

Two University soccer and basketball coaches (Mr. Vince Ombiji and Gitau Waringo) provided the leadership in training the volunteer coaches. Different training methods were used to enhance learning. That is, class presentations, practical demonstrations and group discussions were used. In addition, The National Director of Special Olympics Kenya, Mr. Joe Mutua provided the needed information on training an athlete with Intellectual Disability (ID). Many of the student coaches had never interacted with athletes with ID before. In addition, the coaches were trained in various fitness assessment techniques.
The University gymnasium was the place for fitness training. All were tested and shown the correct methods of taking individual measurements and recording results. Dr Vincent Onywera an exercise physiologist in the Department of Exercise Science volunteered time to guide this exercise. By the end of the exercise, all coaches were confident and ready to evaluate the fitness and motor abilities of campers.
The closing day for the event management course was eventful. First the National director SOK couldn’t let the coaches go without doing the Divisioning exercise. Then came Joshua the ever green International Global Messenger as usual advocating for the athletes. He moved the coaches by saying “It is you the volunteers who make us what we are.” He urged the coaches to do their best and give the athletes a chance to learn skills. The speech by the chief guest Mr. Patrick Naggi who is the Football Kenya Limited director was again a motivation story. He promised to inform FIFA and organize a training for level 1 coaching certification for the new coaches.
First encounter with athletes after training

After the workshop the coaches were given an opportunity to work with small groups of athletes who attend the Saturday Special Olympics training programme. This was a reality check as many of the coaches indicated their fears at the beginning. They had fears that the athletes would not be able to learn or they would be hurt. But as they continued training, they relaxed and were seen enjoying each step.

When an athlete couldn’t get the skill right, they individualized the learning.

It was also interesting to see the change in tactic by those coaches who were volunteers before the training. They were more assertive, considerate to athletes and also created a variety of skills to enhance learning.
The inaugural Camp Shriver 2009 brought together an equal number of youth with and without intellectual disabilities (106) aged 8 to 18 years. The youths were recruited from schools around the University with permission from their parents. They were then matched with those without disabilities based on age, gender and location of residence. This was done to ensure the campers were matched according to the previously determined profiles. A total of 22 girls participated in the camp. Most of the campers were from families that could not afford to pay for their children to participate in a sports camp. All campers who lived more than 1 km away were transported to and from camp daily.
The camp begun on time and all campers were ready by 8 am to enjoy and have Fun. 106 campers with and without ID were registered. All had filled the required forms including consent forms by their parents. On arrival each was given a T-shirt and assigned to his or her group depending on the color of the T-shirt. The coaches were on hand to welcome the campers. Once the preliminary activities were through, the campers were assessed on their initial fitness and motor abilities.

Once these measures were recorded, campers were ready for the fun.
Day 2
This was the official opening day. All were set and colourful for the match past. They were led by the volunteer coaches around the field as they sung to popular tunes. The climax of the opening was the lighting of the cauldron. Joshua the Global Messenger guided the athletes through the ceremony which ended with athletes and coaches reciting their pledges.
Each day was divided in three Sessions. The early morning Session ran from 8 am to 10 am followed by a 30 minute snack time. The second session ran from 10.30 am to 12.30 am followed by a one hour lunch break. The third session was a 1 hour free play session then final assembly before departure. During the morning sessions, the groups were divided into two equal groups, so that when one group was doing basketball, the other was on the soccer field. After break time the groups swopped. For those campers with very limited skill abilities individualized programmes were designed and supervised activities offered on a one to one basis.
One of the goals of the camp was to enhance skill level among campers with disabilities. Whenever a skill appeared difficult to any camper, he or she was given individual attention by a coach or another camper. Some of the campers with very low concentration span or ability level worked with a coach all through. By the end of the camp, there was significant improvement in skill performance. One camper, Bony made the greatest improvement. Initially he was very dependent but by the second week he was able to walk around unaided.
Free Play

At this point the aim was to expand their sports skills and to encourage creativity and socialization. It was also an opportunity to observe the level of interaction between campers with and without disabilities. Initially most campers without disabilities would group together but with time and encouragement teams were mixed. Campers without disabilities started helping those with disabilities to participate in same teams and activities.

The free play time provided campers an opportunity to engage in any activity of their choice. A variety of equipment were availed for them to choose the activity and group to play with. Once the campers had chosen their preferred play activity the coaches supervised to ensure safety.
Parents were encouraged to visit the camp and share their experiences with others. At the beginning many of the parents who visited were concerned about the safety of their children. Some were concerned that their children would not cope or may cause trouble to their colleagues. However after a few days, the concerns changed and they started asking to be taught about management of their children. This need led to the parent training sessions in nutrition, health and general sharing of experiences among the parents. It was interesting to hear them talk openly about their experiences. In the end the camp became a combined camp for parents and athletes training. On the last day 80 parents of campers with and without ID attended the closing ceremony.
As a way of changing the learning environment, the campers were given a tour of the Nairobi National Park. This was courtesy of Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) who waived all entry charges for the 130 campers and their coaches. The KWS provided two buses at a subsidized rate. The campers were ready by 8 am and nothing could destruct them from going for the trip. The day was sunny and as soon as we entered the park we saw our first animals. Two giant giraffes just near the road grazing from the top of trees. Within a short distance a few zebras, rhinos, buffaloes, ostriches warthogs were in the vicinity. The tour which took six hours was so captivating that none of the campers with disabilities slept or felt bored. At lunch hour the stories were all about the animals. The KWS guides were so motivating as they provided a lot of information on all the animals identified. The campers were so thrilled as many had never seen such wild animals.
Many of the campers did not know each other before the camp. They were randomly placed in different teams depending on the colour of T-shirt given to them. At the beginning they were shy to share and talk to each other. However this did not take long before they were playing together and calling each other by their names.

By the second week, new and strong friendships begun to form between partners and athletes, between partners, coaches and campers and also between athletes. This friendship is still evident as could be seen in the Saturday programme this new year.
At the end of all the sessions and after all the campers have left, all the coaches would assemble in the tent for a debrief. They were encouraged to discuss the day’s activities and any new issues that were noticed. In many cases all the problems experienced were solved among the coaches themselves. They planned the next day’s activities during this session.

All the information gathered each day was recorded by two coaches who were assigned the duty throughout the period of camp. This information included, fitness records, daily briefs, attendance records and incidences.
The inaugural Camp Shriver 2009 received generous support from various organizations within and outside the country. Thanks to the entire Special Olympics Kenya management support. Millie Rono, the 2008 EKS Fellow was very handy in identifying sponsors, writing to them and even calling them personally to support the camp. This support enabled us to raise all the required funds for camp. The main sponsors were:

• **Special Olympics International** – US$3,000
• **Special Olympics New Jersey** – US$ 3000, 150 T-shirts, soccer, basketballs, Logo designs
• **Lions Club (SOI)** US$182

• **Safaricom Foundation** US$ 7000 (Kshs 500,000)
• **Population Services International** – 150 T-shirts
• **Alive and Kicking** – 15 soccer balls
• **Coca cola** – soft drinks
• **Alpine Coolers** – bottled water for all days of camp
• **TKM Maestro construction** – Kshs. 40,000 US$533
• **Echuka Dairies** – Yoghurt
• **Nairobi Airport Services** – cakes
• **Special Olympics Kenya** – corporate identity, technical support, balls
• **Kenya Wildlife service** – free entry into Nairobi National Park
• **Kenyatta University** – free training grounds, corporate identity.
• **Sports Station** – 40 Medals
The closing day was all colourful and fun. All participants received medals. The occasion was graced by University management, SOI, Dean AHS, SOK, sponsors and parents.

“When is the next camp”
- camper
The interest generated by Camp Shriver at Kenyatta University has started to show. The camp was covered on KTN - a National Television at prime time during the closing ceremony. This has exposed the program to many people who call to inquire about the activities and whether they can bring their children with ID to the camp. Journalists from Reuters also covered the programme for a documentary to be aired on a channel beamed across Africa. We are already planning for the next camp which we hope will be more successful.
A Parent’s Testimony

“My daughter has really improved. Those people who knew Jackie before will tell you she couldn’t walk for a long distance without seeking help. She is happy here and has created more friends. She no longer bothers to look for me once we arrive at the field. I am grateful to the Kenyatta University Club” Susan

“I came with my sister Martha to participate in the camp. I had thought I would be the one to show her everything but after registration we were assigned different teams. Soon my sister was busy and making her own friends. I was assigned another camper as partner. We had fun at the camp and each day we woke up early to reach the field on time. We really enjoyed the activities and we will come back during the next camp”. Margie
We are ready for the new year. The Saturday training programme started on January 16th for the Special Olympics Club. The number of participants has increased. All those who participated in Camp Shriver returned and for the last three weeks a total of 198 athletes and partners have been registered. The enthusiasm from Camp Shriver is evident.

Our new challenge is to begin a young athletes club to cater for increasing number of participants aged below 8 years. In addition, sustaining the motivation for both volunteer coaches and participants is crucial for club this year. We are appealing to our sponsors and new ones for support to make this year’s activities better and fun for the eager youths with and without disability.

Thank you all for making Camp Shriver at Kenyatta University a reality

Mr. Peter Bukhala EKS Fellow 2009
peterbukhala@yahoo.com, bukhala.peter@ku.ac.ke