



NEWS RELEASE

CorStone expands Youth First resilience training program to Kenya

Youth First helps keep young people in school while advancing academic performance, emotional and physical wellbeing and gender equality

KENYA – 01, July, 2017 – CorStone, an organization dedicated to helping youth around the world thrive in the face of significant challenges, today announced it has launched its **Youth First** program in Kenya. Youth First is a resilience and health training program that focuses on social and emotional development of marginalized young people – including boys and girls living in poverty-stricken rural areas and nomadic communities.

“Resilience skills and healthy behaviors can be taught, even in the most difficult circumstances,” said Steve Leventhal, Executive Director, CorStone. “And they are proven to help young people – particularly young girls – stay in school, transcend societal barriers, and not just survive but thrive in the face of adversity. We are delighted to expand the Youth First program for the first time from India to marginalized youth populations in Africa, where we believe we can have equal impact even in the most resource constrained communities where gender inequality remains a significant challenge.”

Youth First Kenya is based on a successful program conducted by CorStone in India since 2009 among more than 50,000 marginalized adolescents. The program has been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness via large-scale studies across a variety of environments adverse to youth wellbeing and advancement. Youth First was shown through randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to build assets, knowledge and skills to advance education and support wellbeing in multiple life domains including mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. In the studies, health knowledge about topics such as nutrition, reproductive health, malaria, hygiene, and early marriage increased by 99% (vs. 78% improvement for controls); attitudes about gender equality improved 18% (vs. 8% improvement for controls); and overall emotional resilience improved by 23% (vs. 8% improvement for controls).

In Kenya, nearly 25 percent of youth don’t enroll in high school programs despite improvements in access to and quality of Kenyan primary schools. Young women in rural poor and nomadic communities are even less likely to enroll in secondary school, and in some Kenyan counties, dropout rates reach 30% due to poverty, discriminatory prioritization of the education of boys and social pressure.

Youth First Kenya provides resilience training that builds social and emotional assets, such as coping skills, character strengths, and self-regard, along with adolescent health training. Students who are well equipped with internal resources coupled with stronger external

supports are shown to experience reduced rates of depression, have improved social skills, remain in school and be more engaged in school and perform better academically.

Youth First is the first teacher-facilitated school-based program in Kenya that draws from positive psychology and social-emotional learning in which potential risks or threats to wellbeing are addressed by boosting internal resilience assets and external supports. Under the three-year Youth First Kenya program, a joint partnership with CorStone, **BasicNeeds Kenya** and **SOWED Kenya**, 55 teachers will be trained and approximately 1,000 students will participate. Rigorous quantitative and qualitative assessments will be conducted to evaluate and document program outcomes. The program will also touch on issues of gender equality, gender relations and gender rights, and is specifically designed to ensure equal attention is paid to skills development in girls and boys.

A typical student participating in Youth First Kenya represents the first generation in his or her family to attend school, and is at-risk to be pulled out of school for child labor. Further, the girls are at high risk for child marriage and face strong gender preferences towards boys.

Leventhal said, “In India, so many girls in our programs have said to us ‘no one ever told us we had strengths.’ With Youth First Kenya we look forward to teaching the skills young Kenyans need to overcome circumstances that are hostile to their emotional and physical wellbeing. Youth First is about helping them to oppose gender-based violence and early marriage, advocate for their educational rights, complete schooling and choose positive health behaviors that impact them and their families.”

About CorStone

CorStone helps young women and men redefine their futures, even when they are faced with the most difficult circumstances and the most limited opportunities. CorStone resilience training teaches the skills that empower marginalized youth to thrive - not just to survive - despite significant adversity. Large, well-documented, studies show the powerful impact the organization's approaches are having in youth around the world. For more information please see www.corstone.org

[BasicNeedsBasicRights Kenya](#) has provided psychosocial services for 11+ years and worked in Tharaka Nithi for 9 years, where they have strong county government and community relationships. BasicNeeds houses expertise in psychosocial needs of Kenya’s youth and youth engagement, as well as strong monitoring and evaluation and facilitator training experience. BasicNeeds will serve as the in-country lead trainer, manage the monitoring, evaluation and learning components, and lead implementation efforts in Tharaka Nithi County.

[SOWED Kenya](#) has delivered education programs, built State Department of Education (SDoE) relationships, and trained teachers to conduct programs among students for 17+ years. SOWED holds legal and operational mandate to engage with government schools granted by SDoE. SOWED’s staff includes education and health experts. SOWED will serve as the lead on

communications and advocacy with target schools and the Ministries of Education, and also lead implementation in Kajiado County.

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