

SUMMIT DAILY

For the Good Period works to create change in Kenya

Local | March 7, 2017 Caitlin Causey | Post Independent Correspondent



For the Good Period founder Kayce Anderson played Hokey Pokey with Kenyan school girls before a large sanitary napkin distribution and reproductive health education session at the village of Magutuni in 2015. Singing, dancing and games are often used to break the ice prior to the reproductive health lessons and pad distributions with school girls in Kenya. Photo: Kate Lapidis

Today is International Women's Day, an annual celebration of the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also serves as a call to action for accelerating gender equality, when hundreds of lectures, workshops, rallies, festivals and other events take place in major cities around the globe. Here in the Roaring Fork Valley, the leader of local nonprofit For the Good Period is busy making preparations for a trip to Kenya to continue the group's work with impoverished adolescent girls and their communities.

"I leave in April, and will be gone for about four weeks," said executive director and Glenwood Springs resident Kayce Anderson. "I'm also hoping to make another trip this year in the fall."

Anderson will travel to rural Tharaka-Nithi county, an agricultural area where For the Good Period has focused its efforts since the organization formed in 2015. Anderson and her team initially began working in the region to help young women stay in school by distributing reusable sanitary pad kits.

"Girls in this area often missed school or dropped out early because they didn't have access to basic feminine care items," Anderson said. "In this patriarchal society, there was also a great amount of stigma surrounding the natural process of menstruation, and a lack of knowledge among women and girls regarding their own sexual and reproductive health. So our work delivering the sanitary pads and helping women talk about health concerns was really the focus in the beginning."

Quickly, Anderson noted, the group learned that the issues facing the girls of Tharaka-Nithi county were far more complex than the simple lack of access to hygiene products. Over the course of the past year, her team has worked to refine their model to include not only the pad kits for individual girls but deeper, more comprehensive education initiatives for the greater communities in which they live.

"We recognize that the pads are an entry point into the bigger conversation, but they're only one part of the issue," she said. "Our goals have evolved to encompass what it will take to broaden opportunities for girls — including developing a community's capacity to make the work sustainable."

For the Good Period has seen it's not quick or easy to ensure young women are valued by their families and neighbors enough to be kept in school. But Anderson's team has developed a broad three-step process to help define how they plan to execute their mission within a given community.

"First, we start by discussing their vision for their education system, because a big part of creating change is about just being able to think about it first," Anderson said. "Second, we will identify gaps in the system: who's attending school and for how long, what the expectations for students, parents and teachers are. And last, we will work with them to really get to where they want to be. This involves a heavy focus on education as a basic human right, the notion that education is not a privilege but a right. With this approach we want to engage the entire community: girls, boys, mothers, fathers, women and men."

To ensure that the process of change is truly community-led, Anderson believes that these steps could take years to complete. She has enlisted a Kenyan board and a full-time Kenyan program director to help lead the organization's efforts and continue its work during the stretches of time when Anderson and her team cannot be physically present. She is also in the process of hiring a part-time Kenyan assistant, a young nurse who will act as a role model-educator for the girls.

"Basically we want to make sure that the work, at its heart, is Kenyan first and foremost," she said. "Although the idea of change is new, we believe strongly that it should be brought about in a culturally sensitive way. Our team in Kenya is instrumental in helping ensure the change is not only appropriate for each community, but lasting as well."

Anderson has also formed a board of directors here at home, and continues to work with founding partners Sharon Secor, Molly Secor-Turner and Kate Lapidés. She noted that For the Good Period's success rides entirely on having strong support, both in Kenya and in the U.S.

"Founding a nonprofit has been a huge learning experience for me," Anderson said. "It is equally challenging and rewarding. I also feel that it has helped me become more deeply engaged in the local Roaring Fork community, and I have been so inspired by the support and open-mindedness we've received from people here."

As For the Good Period continues to refine and evaluate its process, Anderson hopes to reach many more communities in the coming years.

News and information about For the Good Period can be found on social media and at forthegoodperiod.org.