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November 20th, 2024

To the International ACAC Team

Report on the Counsellor Gathering July 25th - 26th, 6 2024 Yaoundé - Cameroon

Program: The seminar with Counselors, teachers, and Students during the “Open Dreams at 10 (#OD@10) celebrations, for the International ACAC Opportunity Grant.

The Open Dreams’ 10th anniversary, which ran from July 25th – 27th, 2024 in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon, was a whirlwind of activity, filled with concurrent sessions that brought together educators, counselors, students, community leaders, and stakeholders, each eager to contribute to the ongoing mission of empowering young minds in Cameroon.

July 26th, 2024 was the day dedicated to educators (teachers, counselors). One of the key highlights of the day was a panel discussion for the over 40 educationists, and counselors who were present at the event. I, Emmanuel Ngolefac, had the privilege to participate in the panel discussion alongside Guilian Asongtia who coordinates Open Dreams in the city of Douala and Bate Elvis who coordinates Open Dreams in the city of Buea. All of us are STEM teachers and counselors and members of the International ACAC creating an impact across Cameroon through the power of volunteerism. Our session was focused on exploring ways educators and counselors can play a pivotal role in nurturing student potential. The discussion was skillfully moderated by the Open Dreams Regional Program Coordinator for the North West, Blessing Lum (MasterCard Foundation Scholar, ALU-Mauritius), who posed thought-provoking questions that sparked deep reflection and conversations among the panelists and the audience. The session was particularly engaging, with teachers, counselors, and students alike on the sidelines, sharing their experiences and posing insightful questions.



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It became clear that in a context like Cameroon, where many public schools lack adequate counseling resources, teachers are often required to fill this critical gap. While it is essential for the government to address these shortcomings, the reality is that teachers must take proactive steps to guide and support their students in the absence of formal counselors. Teachers were encouraged to join networks that foster growth like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and organizations like the International ACAC, Open Dreams amongst others to continue developing essential skills needed to guide, counsel, coach, and mentor students seamlessly.

The discussion left many educators inspired and motivated to equip themselves with the necessary skills to serve as both teachers and counselors, ensuring that no student is left without guidance and thus permitting students to make informed decisions about their future careers.

The day was long, engaging, and rewarding as Araba Botchway (Executive Director of Admissions & Financial Aid, Ashesi University), Abraham Darriel (Associate Director of Student Recruitment, Carnegie Mellon University Africa), Dolly K, Mwiti (Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at USIU-Africa. Career Services) and other international visitors gave a presentation titled, ***“What are admission officers looking for and how can counselors prepare students to meet those expectations?”***. This session was aimed at guiding educators on how to adequately prepare their students for international education and global citizenship, orientate their learners in choosing a course, university, and country, while being open to other cultures and a diverse world, and being ready to spend about four years of their lives after high school in a setting so different from home. The session also emphasized community engagement, clarity of vision, leadership, academic achievement, digital skills, public speaking skills for college interviews, and other factors related to the global competition for limited opportunities in education.

Immediately after their presentation, we had an inspiring session with Dr. Gwanyama Noella, who spoke passionately about the power of volunteering. She shared her journey through her passion-driven community engagement initiatives and emphasized the importance of taking action to lead change in our communities. Her



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key message was clear: "***Begin action.***" It is through action that we create change, refine our ideas, and ultimately emerge as leaders within our communities. This was to encourage teachers to go the extra mile in empowering their students.

The next in line was Fulbright Scholar and Chevening Scholar, Nanje Patrick, who is one of the leading mentors and highly accomplished international education experts at Open Dreams. For about an hour, he drilled teachers on 21st-century skills for impactful education. This session focused mainly on the use of technology to strive towards meeting the holistic needs of every student to help them thrive beyond high school. With his inspirational and energetic style, Patrick shared his personal experiences and proven strategies teachers can adopt to help young students in their journey toward attaining their full.

Many breakout rooms were created for counselors and teachers, graduates and undergraduates respectively to further explain the international education landscape and the opportunities there within. Dr. Miki Gilbert (Commonwealth Scholar, University of Reading, UK), Forghab Prince (Oxford Africa MasterCard Foundation Scholar, UK), Phillip Nteta (Fulbright Scholar, Arizona State University, USA), James Akaba (the Country Director, Open Dreams, former International ACAC Scholar) and a host of others led insightful, informative and inspiring sessions on international education, Gen-Zs, community engagement, College Essays, Student support, and Personal Statements, skill required for international education etc which left many of the educators informed and empowered to guide their students holistically to explore opportunities in international education.

The day was crowned by Hans Kullberg, Open Dreams co-founder, who flew in from California - USA. His message was "Open Dreams started with one phone call, one conversation, unlocking human potential through Education", and we are happy to see how far this dream has taken us. He underscored the role played by teachers breaking away from traditional systems and embracing an open world of opportunities by working closely with organizations like Open Dreams, the HALI Access Network, the International ACAC, the MasterCard Foundation, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, and a lot more. He was full of gratitude for the excellent work done by teachers and the hard work put in by students, which has seen many of them heading



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to some of the best universities in the world in their numbers. He pledged more commitment to supporting grassroots initiatives that focus on teacher empowerment, so every student can have a fair shot, as talent is universal, but opportunity is not.

I left the day feeling both energized and committed to continuing the work of empowering my students and helping them find their voice.

Links to some blog posts accompanied by pictures:

- 1) <https://www.open-dreams.org/post/opendreams-10-breakout-room-insights-and-inspiration-atagio-bruel>
- 2) <https://www.open-dreams.org/post/b373f33d>

We are so grateful and indebted to the International ACAC for sponsoring this event and for making it such a great success. Your transformative involvement in Cameroon is beyond measure and results are very visible. Thank you for making the magic possible.

Submitted by Ngolefac Emmanuel, 2022 International ACAC Scholar, Open Dreams Regional Program Coordinator (Bafoussam - West Region), UREGA Outreach Manager.

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