

ALBINO AWARENESS DAY GREAT SUCCES

The very first Albino Awareness Day has been conducted. Ninety-four albino's and their supervisors came together on march 15th 2009 at the Kwale Girls school in Kwale District. The goal of the day, besides registering the albino's in the region, was advising them about the dangers of the sun and the best possible way to protect themselves against it's harmful effects. Also this day was a perfect opportunity to let the albino's know they are as valuable as anyone else despite their weaker eyesight and skin discoloration.

The day had finally arrived after weeks of preparation by Ans Verkaart, Manon van Oldenbarneveld and Trudie van Aken (VDT in Holland) and Beasy Mbogo (VDT in Kenia), Alex Munyere (chairman of the Albinism Society Kenya) and Mohammed Almasi (Kwale District Eye Centre). Ads where posted over the entire region by Beasy and Mohammed inviting albino's to attend an event which was specially organised for them. Miss Bahati, director of the Kwale Girls School, had been so kind to open her school so that the Albino Awareness Day could take place.

Registration numbers where higher than expected

The first people arrived around nine 'o clock and shortly after they where joined by busloads full of albino children together with parents and/or caretakers. They came from orphanages and schools across the region. Upon arrival all the visitors where handed a hat, bottles of lemonade and water. The turnout surpassed all expectations. Around fifty were expected, but the VDT can proudly announce that ninety-four albino's have been registered. Among them was a cute young albino girl who was only two weeks old. Also joining in where journalists from the national newspaper, radio and television. Manon and Alex gave an interview which appeared two days later, along with a picture, in the 'Daily Nation'.

Inspiring examples

The day started with a song and dance performance by the students of the Kwale Girls School. Followed by several different speeches from guests. Alex from the Albinism Society Kenya, an albino himself, started off his speech. He told us about the problems he faced during his youth. He made it very clear that being albino is not something to be ashamed of and that albino's all throughout Kenia deserve the same opportunities as anyone else. Additional inspiring examples included a girl and boy from Nairobi, who he introduced to the group. She is attending college and he has a good job at a national bank.

The Albino Evolution Culture Group, a band that includes ten albino's, came all the way from Tanzania for this special event. They gave away a wonderful performance and made an emotional speech about the cruel destiny of many albino's in Tanzania. It was made clear that albino's are in fact killed to process their bones into powders which are believed to contain magical powers.

The play was quite emotional and it was striking to see how the albino's held each other's hands looking for support. During our stay, we received the news that the Tanzanian government had officially announced that from now on albino's will be better protected.

We were extremely excited about the visit of the District Commissioner of Kwale, who in his speech, promised to work together with Alex from ASK to establish a fund for the wellbeing of albino's in Kwale.

Catherine from Kwale Eye Centre gave a speech about the importance of wearing sunglasses and handed out pairs to all albino's. The eyes of albino's are quit sensitive. You have to understand that the iris contains little to no pigment and because of that the sun's rays are more harmful. Wearing good sunglasses are therefore very important.

The dentists of Verkaart Dutch Dental Care, who where visiting the Kwale school during the event, demonstrated how to brush teeth proper. They also handed out toothbrushes and toothpaste.

After a delicious meal, this successful day ended with a demonstration by Alex and Trudie showing the correct way to use sunscreen and the importance of wearing covering clothing. Eight hundred bottles of sunscreen and lip balm where handed out, which were given to us by Nienke Sonnefeld from the African Albino Foundation. The use of sunscreen is very important for albinos, since their skin is extremely sensitive to prolonged exposure of the sun, which can lead to sunburn, blisters and in the worst cases skin cancer. The importance of using sunscreen with a high protection factor and wearing protective clothing, such as hats and long sleeved shirts, was made very clear.

Help us

We would like to thank all the sponsors who have helped make this day as successful as it was. A safe and quiet existence for albinos in Kenia is still not guaranteed, and a lot still needs to be done. Therefore it is of great importance to organise another Albino Awareness Day in the near future. By offering the right education and prevention awareness, our goal is to give as many albino's as possible basic tools and more self esteem to improve their daily life.

Does this sound like something you would like to participate in? Please don't hesitate to contact Ans Verkaart 0174 244361 or Trudie van Aken 06 21544029 albinoproject@verkaartdevelopmentteam.nl