

ADVOCACYNET 370
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COVID Anguish Turns to Vaccine Advocacy in Nairobi Settlement

Community campaign produces 311 vaccinations in two weeks



Abigail Kwamboka helped to design the tee-shirt for the Kangemi campaign. She is the latest group member to be vaccinated.

Caren Mbyaki (photo below) remembers the moment of pure panic in August when she learned that her sister was infected with the coronavirus, putting their families at serious risk.

Three months later, Caren has channeled her anguish into one of the most inspiring community campaigns currently supported by The Advocacy Project (AP). It is run from Kangemi, one of the largest informal settlements in Nairobi, where Caren lives.

Sporting exuberant tee-shirts that show a syringe in hot pursuit of the virus, Caren and ten friends from Kangemi have persuaded 311 Kenyans to sign up for vaccinations in less than two weeks. The group has attracted media attention and is well on the way to meeting its target of 2,000 vaccinations by the end of the year.

“It’s been fun” said Caren in a recent Zoom call from Nairobi. “We really want to see people flooding these places for the vaccine.”



With a population of 55.3 million, Kenya has been on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19 in Africa.

By August, when Caren’s sister tested positive, only 1.7 million vaccines had been distributed. The rate has improved and to date Kenya has administered just over 4.1 million vaccines. New infections have fallen to 168 a day. Still, the crisis is far from over. Less than 2% of all Kenyans have been fully vaccinated and vaccine skepticism is widespread. Several

members of Caren’s own association, the Kangemi Self-Help Advocacy Group, are still hesitating.

Caren formed the Group in June last year to help women in Kangemi participate in [a new Sister Artists quilt competition](#). Their embroidered blocks have been turned into exquisite art quilts by American quilters and will be auctioned by AP later this year.



Group members found stitching to be deeply therapeutic and signed up for another AP quilting project earlier this year to describe the pandemic. Funded by Humanity United, the project has produced 180 embroidered COVID stories from the US, Zimbabwe, Nepal and Kenya. These have been [assembled into quilts by quilters in the US](#).

AP has sent a quilt to Nairobi, and it now accompanies the Kangemi team to outreach meetings. One block, by Abigael

Kwamboka, carries the image of a syringe that features on tee-shirts. Group members also use a WhatsApp list to share information about vaccines. Each new vaccination among the group is greeted with a digital whoop.

The campaign itself is a hard slog. Kangemi’s two health centers do not have the freezers needed to store vaccines, so the association invited a mobile team in for the weekend and persuaded 207 residents to sign up. Their knowledge of the Kangemi community proved to be a bonus: many residents work at night and chose to get vaccinated in the late afternoon.



Last week the campaigners were invited to the Westlands medical center where they were bombarded by requests for tee-shirts and received expert advice about how to counter vaccine hesitancy (photo).

The team also persuaded six walk-in patients to get vaccinated. Later in the week, they returned to the clinic and helped another 88 patients to register online for a vaccination. In the process they have met MPs and community leaders, including Esther Pasaris, the Nairobi County women's representative. The quilt was profiled recently by the [Business Daily](#).

AP is covering the cost of team travel and campaign material. In addition, Delaney Rogers, a recent graduate from the University of California who manages AP projects, meets with Caren every week to offer encouragement and advice. AP is also posting photos of team members as they get vaccinated.

The latest to get the jab is Abigael, who designed the iconic image of the syringe and is heavily pregnant. A recent WhatsApp exhortation from Caren urges other group members to follow Abigael's example: "When are you taking the big step? Charity begins at home!"



Want a Kangemi tee-shirt? [Contact us](#) or donate \$40 on our home page and specify Kangemi campaign. All profits go to the campaign.



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