



1 August 2016

TO: United Nations Global Compact  
FROM: Sherry Sacino, CEO  
RE: Communication on Engagement (COE)

To: United Nations Global Compact Membership and Colleagues

The Youth Empowerment Alliance, Inc., its board, staff and volunteers are 100% committed to the values, principals and objectives of the Global Compact and have made those principals a part of our own operations as a NGO working with the United Nations and in full support of the SDGs and conforming to the aspirations established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since our inception in 1999, our efforts have focused on empowering youth to have a voice in their world. We initially operated Youth OUTLOUD! a global new service proving content from youth to major media. As technology has proliferated, our work now focuses on giving children a more local voice - through community storytelling. Our primary focus is to empower Nation States to provide a multiple of literary benefits to their youth population - specifically the indigenous people who can now have textbooks and educational materials produced in their own language for a low cost. By educating ALL children, we empower everyone.

Since our inception, we have worked with youth and their adult supervisors to share in every country in the world to share their voices about issues for which they are concerned. We have shared these concerns with businesses, public officials, the media, and appropriate NGOs - many of which are members of the Global Compact. We will continue this high-level of activity as it is key to our mission. Specifically, our activities include (though our program, Rescue Writing):

### **Enhancing the value of literacy education**

Sharing stories in the classroom and at home is the most important way to support literacy, according to Gordon Wells, who conducted a 10-year study of oral language development in the home and at school at the University of California at Santa Cruz. "Constructing stories in the mind — or storytelling, as it has been called — is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning. Whether at home or at work, in the playground or in the club, it is very largely through such impromptu exchanges of stories that each of us is inducted into our culture and comes to take on its beliefs and values as our own."

Lucy Calkins agrees in her book *Raising Lifelong Learners* saying, "Invitations to tell stories matter... Children need to be inducted into the tradition of reliving and rethinking moments of their lives. This isn't a minor detail in a child's education; it's essential."

Storytelling is critical at a young age; it shapes the foundation for what they will find to be meaningful. For this reason it is important to always encourage our children and students to share their stories. Developing their minds and helping them learn their values will set them on the pathway to success.

### **Workforce Development**

As in basic education, the ability to communicate effectively is vital in employment opportunities. All job skills will benefit from learning the storytelling process as it is the same as any process – it has a beginning, middle and end, along with a desired outcome. The skilled ability to organize thoughts and ideas is a core asset for all people. Additionally, through storytelling, a child or young adult will learn to assess their own life for those attributes that make them unique and allow them to share them with others.

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### **Relevancy Leads to Permanent Connection; the value of Indigenous Storytelling**

Everyone, at an early age, seeks connection to one another. Storytelling about family and community folklore instills a connection to that which is immediately around us. This connection leads to roots and sense of belonging.

Having worked in dozens of developing countries – the dearth of local, printed stories is everywhere. In the case of Haiti, many books are from France or the USA - sharing tales of foreign origin; and while wonderful stories, they lack relevance for the local Haitian child. The stories of the slave uprising and sharing of medicinal remedies from local plants were told orally – around the dinner table and family gatherings.

Then, the earthquake came.

More than 250,000 people lost their lives and families were displaced. The stories yet untold will remain silent and this rich legacy was lost forever. It would have made a difference in Haiti if children recorded the words and faces of their family members into books, and had hard copies made for local schools and libraries.

### **Ability to Leverage Funds and Collaborate**

My experience in operating a global youth news service is there are hundreds of organizations supporting education, storytelling, media development, etc. Rescue Writing is an opportunity to collaborate with existing NGOs, all of which have local infrastructure supporting education and/or media. Often, these outcomes are temporary – a radio broadcast or class project – but can easily be made permanent by creating a series of storybooks around any topic. Rescue Writing will give permanence to these existing literacy/media programs.

### **Combatting Extreme Violence**

Rescue Writing could play a critical role in combating extreme violence recruitment by providing storytelling on the ground in existing education and child-serving organizations. By gathering these relevant and personal stories, and distributing them via social media sites to youth prior to the recruitment process, their search for inclusion can be swayed to a more positive outcome. Jigsaw (formerly Google Think Tank), and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue have conducted research into the lone terrorist, and technology components that contribute to the recruiting process. Jigsaw is currently mining YouTube videos in cyberspace as a means to combat terrorist recruitment, and needs a more grassroots strategy. Rescue Writing's on-the-ground work with USAID and other NGOs would multiply these efforts.

### **Working with local partners**

The Rescue Writing resources are currently accessible via the [rescuewriting.org](http://rescuewriting.org) website and can be used by anyone for FREE. To create a printed book, there is a cost of printing. The proprietary software has licensed printers all over the world, and published products can be printed locally or regionally. Using LOCAL printers in developing countries is a plus for many NGOs.

## **United Nations – Convention on the Rights of the Child Compliance**

Every five years, every country in the world provides a report to the UN Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. While the USA is not a signatory to this UN treaty all other countries in the world are – and compliance to the CRC standards is important in their record of progress. Rescue Writing specifically addresses Article 17 of the CRC, which calls for the Right to Access Information and be educated in host country's indigenous language.

Our future plans include establishing a strategic funding source that provides an opportunity for children throughout the world to have access to local, relevant educational materials written in their local language, especially for indigenous children. These tools can further be used for older children to teach young children in a non-formal educational setting, those bringing learning into daily home life.

As a small NGO, working with mostly volunteers, we do not have specific documentation that measure our efforts, but this will change as systematic funding becomes available. There are hundreds of studies that validate literacy as a core component of education and strengthening a community, and continued calls for more relevant and localized learning tools. Common sense dictates that learning in a native language increased literacy and community (as well as personal) development - this is why Rescue Writing was created in the first place - in direct response to Article 17 of the CRC.

The Youth Empowerment Alliance, Inc. is very proud of its work and will continue to support the unified efforts of the United Nations Global Impact directly and in partnership with its esteemed membership.

Sincerely,



Sherry Sacino  
Founder and CEO