Radio script for drug and substance abuse (Level 3)

Title of programme: Drug and substance abuse among youth in Kenya

Host: DJ Angel
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Good morning. This is 89.1 FM Slum radio. We are the voice of the Youth, home of urban music and I am DJ Angel. When 16-year-old, Florence died last week from a deadly mixture of drugs and alcohol, she was one of the many young people we lose to this silent killer that robs our families, our communities, our nation and the community of nations of the world. Our thoughts go out to Florence's family and we offer our deepest sympathy to them. But Florence's death has not been in vain. Here with us in the studio are four of Florence's friends. They are here to talk about their experiences with drugs and alcohol. They want to speak out so other young people won't die. But before I ask these courageous young people to introduce themselves, let me introduce Dr Mathai. She is a drug and substance abuse expert. She is here to help us understand the effects of abusing alcohol and drugs and what these substances do to our minds and body.

Welcome Dr Mathai and welcome Martha, David, Mark and Lisa. Thank you for offering to share your experiences with us. I'll let you introduce yourselves.
Hi I am Martha. Florence was my friend and I want to make sure that other young people don’t die like she did. I want to talk about what drugs did to my life, to let other young people understand and know.

Hello I am David and Florence was my friend too. I also took drugs, alcohol and it almost killed me. When Florence died, Martha and Lisa, Mark and I decided that we needed to do something to stop this thief stealing young lives.

Hello my name is Lisa. I want young people to know that it is never too late to turn away from drugs. I used drugs, but I managed to stop and if I can help young people to seek help to stop, then our friend Florence will not have died in vain.

Hi I am Mark. Like my friends I am here to honour Florence’s memory and to speak out against this silent killer. If my story helps someone else to stop abusing drugs, then it's worth speaking out.

Thank you everyone. So just to put the problem in context, drug and substance abuse is one of the top problems confronting our nation today, especially among the youth. Incidences of drug and alcohol abuse-related anti-social behaviour have been increasing rapidly in recent years. A few years ago the most commonly abused drugs among students were tobacco, bhang and ‘miraa,’ and alcohol or jolly juice as some in the street refer to alcohol. But today, opium, cocaine and heroin have been added to the list. The use of sleeping pills, tranquillisers, cough mixture, inhalants such as glue and petrol is now rampant, especially among the street youth. In Nairobi alone, it is reported that a large number of students, including those in class seven, eight and form one, have taken drugs at one time or another. So what makes them do it? What is the attraction? Martha, you first. What made you take drugs?

Yes, I started at a time when I felt my life was full of problems. I was struggling with school and other problems at home. I had broken up with my boyfriend. I wanted to forget my problems and the pain. When I looked around me, everyone was struggling. I saw no hope for the future of even finishing school, going to university or even finding a job. I wanted to escape the problems and the pain so I began taking the drugs. Every time I
smoked bhang, I became calm and relaxed. The problems did not matter: the sadness went. It was great. At first.

**DJ Angel**

So the drugs made it easier to forget. You said ‘at first’. Looking back, did they help you to find a solution to the pain and the hopelessness?

**Martha**

For a while they did. Then they became the problem. I needed them more and more. I could not think clearly. I started skipping school. I needed to earn money to get the drugs. It got so bad, I would do anything, go with anyone to get the money for the drugs. Afterwards I always felt guilty, bad and hopeless about where my life was going. I took the drugs again to help me forget. I got addicted. I could no longer go through a day without them.

**DJ Angel**

Yes, that seems like a very bad time in your life. We do need to talk about the addictive nature of drugs with Dr Mathai here, but first can I ask you David? What happened with you?

**David**

I started around the age of 13. I felt I was not good enough. I thought my body looked terrible, I was short and skinny and weak. I had no friends let alone a girlfriend. I felt lonely. Everyone around me seemed to be having a better life. Sometimes I was angry at everybody, including my parents. I mean, we never had enough money. One day someone at school came to me and said, ‘you know, I can help you out. I have something to bring to you up. Something to make it easier for you to talk to girls’. I didn’t pay attention that day, but he came back again and again. He walked with me to school, he talked to girls we met on the way. ‘Trust me’, he used to say, ‘you will be the guy. People will want to be around you. Try it for yourself, it’s free and if it does not make you feel better, then just don’t take it. Of course if you would rather just be a boring person then…’. So I tried them and they did feel good. Soon he started to make me pay for the stuff and very quickly I was buying lots from him and stealing from wherever I could to pay for it. Like Martha, I was addicted before I knew it.

**DJ Angel**

Dr Mathai, can we have your thoughts on these experiences that Martha and David are describing?
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<tr>
<th>Dr Mathai</th>
<th>Sure. First of all, thank you for having me on your show. I want to say I really admire these young people here today who are willing to talk about their experiences. I hope they will inspire other young people to come forward and talk about these issues and seek help. What Martha and David are describing is how young people feel as they are going through adolescence, especially when they live in difficult circumstances, whether it is poverty, absence of parents or stable families, or other pressures. They feel they are unable to cope with the everyday challenges and changes happening to them and around them. They don’t see any hope of getting out of their situation for a better life. They are concerned about their body image, learning about the opposite sex, about being out there and fitting in, doing exciting things that their friends are doing. It is a time of confusion on the one hand, and the need to feel adult on the other hand. Yes, I remember that time myself. It was a difficult time when I was in my teenage years. I was confused and full of self-doubt. My parents didn’t have much money and we lived in the slums. Some of my friends were always out drinking and having fun. I don’t know where they are now. Luckily for me, I also had some good friends and teachers. They helped me to stick to my studies. And here I am… Dr Mathai, perhaps you can explain to our listeners: what is drug addiction?</th>
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<td>This is an important question. Drug addiction happens quietly but quickly. For example, someone can smoke bhang a few times but that is the first stage of abusing drugs. Then they start taking it regularly, and soon they develop a chemical dependency which means they have to have the drugs no matter what. Yes, I remember that time myself. It was a difficult time when I was in my teenage years. I was confused and full of self-doubt. My parents didn’t have much money and we lived in the slums. Some of my friends were always out drinking and having fun. I don’t know where they are now. Luckily for me, I also had some good friends and teachers. They helped me to stick to my studies. And here I am… Dr Mathai, perhaps you can explain to our listeners: what is drug addiction? You are all nodding. So what Dr Mathai is saying is something you all recognize. Mark, tell us about your experience. What made you try drugs? You must have seen all the posters saying: ‘Say NO to drugs!’ Why do you think the posters and the lessons at school have little effect on what teenagers do?</td>
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Well exactly! Everyone was saying that, but no one was explaining why. Or how the drugs work on you. It was just supposed to be bad. I was curious. I just wanted the experience to see what it felt like. A lot of my friends were doing it and they seemed okay. And they told me how great it felt. I thought ‘why not’? I want to feel great too. I wanted to impress my friends. At first it was awesome! In no time I was the cool one and we were having joints every day – sometimes if we had extra money, we would combine it with alcohol at the bar. Very soon, that was all I was doing.

Lisa what about you?

I was bored. I went to school, I came home, I helped my mother with washing, cleaning and cooking. I did my homework, I went to bed and it was the same again the next day. It was boring. I needed some fun, to have a good time, be independent. The dealer said, ‘So beautiful why such a boring life. This will put some excitement into your life: you will have fun, take a few risks, live a little. It will be sweet! You are only young once…’ They are very clever, these dealers. They know how to get you. They watch you and you don’t even know that they are doing that.

Did you have fun? Did you feel all grown up and independent?
Lisa: Oh yes, at first I felt on top of the world. I was happy and I was high all the time. I felt independent and thought I could do anything! For a while, life was not boring. But soon it became a habit, a very expensive habit. Life was not boring but it was now dangerous. And my body did not feel good either. My skin lost its healthy colour, and I started gaining weight. I looked and felt awful. I now needed the drugs to make me forget myself. I started going to places where I could earn some money by doing some risky things.

DJ Angel: Thank you Lisa. You bring us to an important part of this discussion. Dr Mathai, tell us, what do drugs and alcohol do to your body and to your mind?

Dr Mathai: There are many negative effects of drugs, alcohol or glue which show up very quickly, but by then the person is already at the point where they do not have the control to stop. As Lisa says, the skin becomes dull and loses its healthy look, the breath smells, there is weight gain, depression – which makes drugs and alcohol or glue even more attractive in order to forget the worries. There is confusion, memory loss and loss of focus, so school and grades get affected. Often the vision is blurred through the effect on the eyes. Eventually there are more serious effects that can lead to suffering and even death, just like for Florence.

DJ Angel: And these are effects that happen pretty soon after you have developed the habit? [The four young friends are murmuring in the background, ‘yes’ ‘hmmm’ ‘exactly.’] So you all are agreeing here. Can I ask you Dr Mathai, what about the effect of drugs and alcohol on your behaviour?

Dr Mathai: As far as behaviour [Dr Mathai pauses] well as Martha said, they affect the way you think, judge and make choices. People under the influence of drugs and alcohol or those who sniff glue can have problems with their emotional and mental health. They tend to engage in risky sexual behaviour, leading to sexually transmitted infections including HIV. Some of our young girls end up with unintended pregnancies. If you are a drug abuser, it’s harder to resist pressure because of the habit, because you don’t think clearly. Your judgement is clouded and so you are not able to control the situation you are in, whether it is having unprotected sex or sex with strangers or getting other young people to take...
drugs. As these young people here know, you will do anything to get the drugs. So you will steal, or get others into the habit because the seller wants more clients. You might share needles, which by the way is another risk for HIV and infected sores. One risk leads to another. Through their behaviours, young people put themselves at risk of injuries or violence, and because their behaviour does not make sense, society looks at them differently.

DJ Angel

Yes. Instead of being cool they are now seen as misfits or 'bad' young people, and there is little sympathy for them because of the behaviour.

Lisa, Mark, I see you want to come in at this point? First Lisa, and then Mark.

Lisa

Yes, as young people we feel that we are struggling to understand **who we are**. We know we have our traditions but we also want to feel modern. We have a different identity at school where our teachers are telling us to behave in a certain way. At home, young people struggle with different problems. Money problems or domestic violence or pressure from parents to behave in a certain traditional way. Then we are also out on the streets where we see so many bad things happening, such as drugs, sexual violence, other crimes. Then the media gives us other messages: dress cool, have fun, enjoy youth, get expensive things, risk a little. People want to be seen as **cool** like we see in the movies and videos and magazines – it is cool to wear certain clothes and be seen in the nice places and doing exciting things.
I agree. All these things make us want to find something of our own, something special for us. We try and find a way to express ourselves like with our own slang language on the street. That makes us feel special. We belong to a special, exciting group with a secret language. We are not kids anymore, but we are not adults either. Where do we fit in? And when someone offers us something, we don’t know who to listen to. Our friends tell us one thing; teachers tell us another. We can’t talk to our parents because they are sometimes too busy working. They don’t know what is going on.

Some of our friends have learned habits from seeing their own parents drink and smoke. Some young people don’t even have parents. We are supposed to be grown up as teenagers, and we want to make our own choices, be independent, but we sometimes find ourselves dealing with things we are not ready for and we don’t want to admit it. We don’t always know whom to go to for help in making sense of it without them judging us. We lose hope in our future.
These are compelling stories. Strong and young voices. You have challenging life situations, especially in Kibera where you all come from. We, the community, need to understand all the pressures you have to deal with on an everyday basis. We will talk about who you can go to in a while and also about how you all stopped the habit. But first, I am curious, Dr Mathai, how can a person recognise the signs of drug or alcohol abuse?

Well these young people here have given us a good idea of what the warning signs are. It’s when you are relying on drugs or alcohol to have fun, forget problems or just to relax and feel confident. Maybe you are frequently passing out or using drugs or drinking when you are alone. When you lose interest in activities that used to be important to you. You know it’s got you when you will do anything to get your hands on the stuff – like lying, stealing or selling drugs, getting other kids to take the stuff, hurting the people you love by your behaviour. It takes hold of your life – it becomes your new best friend! You don’t care about anyone or anything else. But it’s a false best friend.

Yes, that’s true. My grades suffered as I started staying away from school, and my memory was not as good as it used to be. But the drugs were helping me to feel less stressed so then they became a good way to escape and have fun with my friends.

I found I could not make simple decisions or solve simple problems, as things got more mixed up in my head and I was confused about how to do normal stuff. I used to be really good at painting and art. I realised I could not think creatively, and my drawings became boring and less meaningful. I didn’t care that I was letting my family down.

These must have been difficult times for you all and we’ll come back to how you dealt with it all. I want to go back to what Dr Mathai said before, and Lisa touched on as well, and that is the role of the different media in creating the ‘pull’ to drugs and alcohol. We understand the ‘push’ now from our conversation about what the realities are that our youth grapple with every day. What is the media’s role?
Dr Mathai

Well, the media is a very important piece of the puzzle. They use several tactics to ‘pull’ you in as it were. They target the youth in this case in four different ways. One is by making you feel unlovable so the message is, ‘you won’t be liked if you don’t try this product’. Secondly, by making you feel left out, ‘everyone is buying the product, so don’t be left out. It’s the ‘cool’ thing to do’. I mean you only have to look at the cigarette and alcohol adverts on billboards or in magazines, movies, television, video games, newspapers, matatus, etc. Thirdly, by making you feel inadequate, so they try to tell you that ‘if you don’t buy this product, you won’t be able to do things as well as everyone else’. Lastly, but very importantly in the case of our youth, by making you feel less masculine or less feminine: ‘if you don’t use this product you won’t be attractive’. Imagine being bombarded with these messages everywhere you go through different channels.
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<tr>
<th><strong>DJ Angel</strong></th>
<th>So they are not just selling a product? The advertisers are also selling an image, lifestyle and status. If their messages are effective, people will purchase and use their product, despite negative consequences?</th>
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<td><strong>Chorus of voices</strong></td>
<td>Yes! Most definitely!</td>
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<td><strong>Dr Mathai</strong></td>
<td>And young people between the age of 4 and 12 are especially vulnerable because they have not learned the skills to think critically and make decisions. But the companies selling the products are smart, they use different tactics to pull in the old youth too. They might use images differently, and make the messages more hidden in the things they show around cool people, like fast cars driven by girls or boys who are smoking or just coming out of a bar, etc., looking successful, confident, having fun, leading an exciting life by using the advertised products.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>David</strong></td>
<td>Advertisers try to make you believe that using their brand will make you relaxed, popular, cool, physically attractive; in short that you will be a better person.</td>
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<td><strong>Mark</strong></td>
<td>In answer to the ‘Say NO to Drugs’ campaigns, they are suggesting, ‘Just say yes’ to smoking, drinking and other drugs.</td>
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<td><strong>DJ Angel</strong></td>
<td>Hmmm. That certainly makes us more aware of what we need to do to ask people in the media who can help. I want to hear more from the four of you about how you stopped, despite all these pressure on you, including the media pressure.</td>
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<td><strong>Martha</strong></td>
<td>In my case, it was the school that referred me to the rehabilitation clinic because of my behaviour in school. I was lucky that one of my teachers cared enough to do that even though I was a real troublemaker in her class.</td>
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<td><strong>Mark</strong></td>
<td>I was expelled from school and found myself on the street looking for drugs every day. I bought whatever I could find; I begged, borrowed, stole and then found myself sleeping on the street every day so I could go looking more and more, go earlier and earlier in the day. One day, the priest from the church saw me on the street and persuaded me to go to the referral clinic at the hospital. It was long, hard but the priest helped me through this time and I am back at school now.</td>
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David

Losing my leg in an accident brought me to my senses very quickly. My friend and I were riding a motorbike after drinking too much, and we were on the wrong side of the road and we did not even know it! I realised this time I had lost my leg and soon it would be my life. I was lucky, my friend lost his life in the accident and now Florence has lost hers.

Lisa

I lost my mother to cancer and I did not even have a chance to say goodbye to her. The last time I saw her, she was angry with me because I had stolen the rent money to buy drugs. That is what made me feel that I was not cool. I was not there for her, now at least I could be there for my father and my brothers and sisters.

DJ Angel

[DJ’s voice shows empathy and is gentler] I hear you and I know that you have all lost something important to you in your journey. I think you are all young people we can be proud of, to have the courage to turn around your lives, and especially to come here to help other young people think more carefully about being ‘pulled’ in. Thank you, and I know we reached a few young people and I hope it was worth it. After the show, we would like to talk about what can be done to help young people to help themselves as a group in memory of Florence, but for the moment, a last word, Dr Mathai?

Dr Mathai

Yes! I want us to go away with four key messages:

1. **Understanding:** That there are internal as well as external pressures that our youth face when they are going through adolescence, and especially life in areas like Kibera.

2. **Positive environments:** We as a society have the responsibility to provide positive and strong communities. It is everyone’s problem. We should not stigmatise substance abuse, but rather provide support and hope for the future to young people.

3. **Information:** We should provide more information on the negative effects of drug and substance abuse, so that we have a well-informed youth that can think for themselves and not follow whatever the media or other people feed them.

4. **Responsibility:** Young people are also responsible so I say to them: think before you act. Turn peer pressure into peer support. Get the facts, not the drugs.
What we would like to add to these messages from the four of us is that if you are in trouble, remember you can get out of it. It may not feel like it at the time but there is hope and there is help. We all took drugs; we all are here because we managed to kick the habit. We all lost something along the way, but if young people are smart they can stay away from it altogether or get out before it makes them lose what is precious to them. We learnt that the hard way, but it does not have to be hard for everyone. That is why we are here today. If we can help in any way, we will.

Yes, what has really impressed me today is the story of hope. These young people have a message of hope to all the young people out there. You can dream and you can make it! Let us, as united people, make that happen. On that note, that’s it for today! It has certainly been a pleasure to have you all on this show. To all the listeners, remember to tune in next week! For more information on drug and substance abuse, please go to……….. And before we leave you, let’s have a minute’s silence in memory of Florence.

[Fades into some solemn music to end the programme]
Radio Script

The radio script is a departure from the usual kind of radio lessons in the life-skills programme. Here in a panel discussion, a team of people, including four young people and a medical expert, are brought together to discuss the various issues that form the themes of this material. The script can be used at all three levels, although you will want to emphasise different aspects of it at each level. It focuses on drug abuse, alcohol abuse and the effects of peer pressure. Its main message is also that young people can take charge of their own lives, make sound decisions (even if they are painful ones) and bring meaning into their lives.

The script allows insights into the realities that young people face every day as they go through adolescence and as they are shaping their identities. Engaging in critical thinking, and learning to think for themselves, is the final step in good self-esteem and in entering the adult world. If used in the community, the script ends with a call for action on the part of everyone, with its take-away messages.