



Makindu Children's Centre

A project of the Makindu Children's Program –

A not-for-profit NGO operating in Makindu, Kenya

Headquartered in Brownsville, Oregon – Established 1998.

January 1999 Newsletter

The Shamba

Monday, Dec. 28: Our *shamba* now has an irrigation pump and delivery system installed and running. Instead of hiring all manual laborers from town, the older kids and their guardians all wanted to do it themselves, which we agreed to providing the work was done well. It was back-breaking work on an unforgivingly hot sunny day. They completed most of all 218 metres of a 3 foot deep trench in one day and did a wonderful job!

They got an unexpected Christmas bonus from the work and it was so lovely to see the pride they took in 'their' shamba' and their accomplishments. It is heartwarming for me to see how invested their entire 'family' is becoming in our community project. We got a great deal on the irrigation pump it was sold to us just a little over cost and the pipes and fittings were all discounted 25% off; and the installation and training involved were ALL donated free. The maize is growing nicely and we've got our first order for veggies from a local restaurant, who'd like to buy from us exclusively.

Kids, Kids, Kids

We are finally just about to complete our modified rural appraisal of the local area orphans those in a 15 mile radius or so close enough to access the center on a regular basis. The number of kids is startling and these are just the ones we have been able to confirm via modified PRA (public rural appraisal.) This includes compiling info from village elders, pastors, school headmasters, asst. chiefs; then verifying the data and finally completing a visit at each guardian's home for each child and family, detailing their situation. Complicating this has been the discovery that one of the assistant chiefs was actually bribing families and offering to place them on our 'confirmed orphans' list for a fee ... sad, but reality in this land of poverty and struggles amongst everyone.

Anyway, it has been an exhausting process, but wonderful as well to see all the kids as they live in their day to day existence and to share a bit more of their lives. We will sit outside a grouping of mud-thatched huts and a guardian (typically an elderly grandmother) will share her family's story with us quite an honor to have them trust us and share their personal tragedies. I've often had chickens placed upon my lap as an offering of thanks, but I've had to decline. I'm not sure

the Sikhs at the temple where I stay would be too thrilled about these guys roosting in my room! We've also completed full family histories and physical screening exams on all of these kids as well. Thus far we are serving approximately 100 kids and these are the ones within walking distance.

Christmas

I've put together a bit of a Christmas package for each of the families (don't worry, it's mine, not MCC funds). It's not much, but a token of appreciation for the devotion to the children and all of their volunteer efforts. It consists of some rice, flour, cooking oil, soap, tea, and treats for about \$4.50 a family and should last them about a week. Theirs (the guardians) is a 'gift of the heart' and nothing is more valuable.

We also had a Christmas party for the kids. We had fun baking a cake for about 90 or so in the outdoor oven. There were lots of giggles and Dianah was striped with flour by the end. Betty also spent the morning supervising Dianah's kids in extracting two baby chicks out of the latrine they had fallen into. They made a pretty ingenious 'retrieval kit', lowered it down and out they came. Believe it or not alive, albeit filthy. Unpredictable and hysterical all in all a pretty typical day in Kenya, I'd say.

Thought of all you guys fondly over the holidays and actually got downright nostalgic. I do miss and love you all. I'm leaving for Makindu in the morning and then will return to Nairobi in about two weeks. Love, Pooh.

An Office

We have received preliminary approval of a 3 - 5 acre plot of land a perfect location for the center eventually. It's even better than the previous offer by the school and is from the District Developmental Committee of Kenya. This is the sanctioning committee for all non-profit groups in Kenya and least subject to confiscation and legal problems down the line. . . We shall see. There are no Beobob trees on this land, but other than that, it's pretty nice!

We have also established an office space in Makindu, at last, to lease. I'm going to need it so that I can hide away and start writing proposals and applying for all the in-country grants and try and find a way to sustain this program after our 3 year commitment is over. The

permanent secretary of health himself is leasing us the space at a nominal fee only. It is considered to be his contribution to our project. It has a phone (that even sometimes works!), electricity (sort of, kind of), and is secure. I'm excited about moving all my papers out of the Sikh temple and into a file cabinet!

Makindu Medicine

Wednesday, Jan 13: I went out with one of the local docs to the interior way out in the country, because we're having a horrible outbreak of bacillary dysentery just now. Little ones, the elderly, and the weak are dying by the hundreds. It was pretty wild started about 100 IV's in a day. They were hanging from tree branches and whatever I could find. Even hooked one up to a sleepy, lazy, cow's horn. Tied her to a stump and hoped that she wouldn't wake up and try to move before the IV was through!

Scholarships

Winnie has identified a group of older children that she feels need special attention. They are the most needy, but have great potential. Many have either completed public primary school or dropped out. Boarding school is their only option, but totally beyond their reach. Winnie's plan is to start an academic scholarship fund for these children. Several families have also been identified with special needs. Their situations are extremely desperate and the children are challenged daily with just simply surviving. We hope to establish survival scholarships to assist these families with this daily struggle. Winnie and Betty have written several bios of these children and families, some of which follow. They are also sending us their photos. If you would like to help by sending one of these children to school for a year, or by assuring that their family has at least a daily sustenance, please let us know. Although it will not be feasible for us to guarantee that your donation is used specifically for a particular child or family, we can assure you that it will be accounted for separately and used for these special purposes if you so indicate. We will be happy to send you a copy of one of the photos of child or family from Makindu in return. We hope to also give you regular updates on their progress.

Kimeu (Kimayo) Makau is 17 years old and is entering Form I, Matiliku secondary school. He is the oldest of 6 children and lives with an aunt and uncle in a crowded mud thatched hut, where they sleep 4 to one bed. The family depends upon him to work, to bring home money for food, and it is not usual for this tall teen to willingly forfeit a meal for a younger family member. He is a bright and energetic young man, very polite and always eager to help, with sympathetic eyes, keenly observant of the world around him. He has a quiet, but very infectious giggle, and clearly enjoys people and make friends easily. Kimeus' school scores are consistently quite high, despite minimal resources at

home and little chance to study. He is currently very interested in pursuing a public service occupation such as social work. Any discussion of school gets him instantly engaged and very excited. As he says, he is Ready to learn. Friends are important to him and treasured as one of his favorite past times, as well as soccer and rock music (and girls!, he adds). A typical teen in many ways, Kimeu is also unique in his and compassion to youngsters. He is a deserving and promising young man. One year school fees, including tuition, room and board, uniform, books, etc. is about 14,000 Kenyan shillings (about \$250).

Madonna Fatuma is 12 years old and I consider him to be the big brother of our program. It was Madonna who first introduced me to the orphans of Makindu when I was here last year. He would bring them to see me at the hospital, one by one, and ask me in his broken English to Please help. He is a hard kiddo to deny with his warm and laughing eyes, broad grin, big heart, and an absolutely indomitable spirit. His mother died of AIDS when he was 2 years old, and his father before that. He has grown up between his grandmother's hut and the streets of Makindu. He wants desperately to go to school, but sees that his daily life on the streets hold more immediate promise for food. He often does odd jobs for people and collects the shillings he earns. At the end of the day he takes his extra shillings and buys food for those orphans in his village that haven't eaten that day. Madonna's school attendance has dropped over the past year. He never has the fees for books or pencils and his school headmaster treats him and the other orphans quite badly. His eyes light up at the mention of boarding school elsewhere. He knows that without school, his dream of becoming a pilot is impossible. Currently, he is a child at great risk as his home situation is neither safe nor supportive and his village is one deeply embroiled in poverty, crime, and substance abuse. If Madonna is unable to attend a boarding school this year, I'm afraid that he will have fallen too far behind and he will remain on the streets, his dreams abandoned. Boarding school fees for one year, including all accessory fees of travel, books, supplies, etc. is about \$165.

The Mbindyo Family consists of 5 children, ages 1 through 14 who live with an elderly and loving grandmother. The children's mother died giving birth to the twins, Mutua and Ngwenze, one year ago. Their father has abandoned them completely. Life for all children of Makindu is difficult at best, but this family's situation is most desperate. The twins are anemic and severely malnourished and happy spirit. She graciously offers me the one stool she has to sit upon in the small compound amongst the grouping of the mud-thatched huts, and shares her story. She always has a look of peace, courageous acceptance, and a loving smile. The older children can no longer attend school as they must work to bring home food. Our immediate concern is financial assistance for daily sustenance. Estimated

basic food costs for the entire family is about \$70 a month.

Kajoni, Mwanzia, & Wanza Ndangili ages six, four and two, comprise the family Ndangili, and their life is one of severe hardship and poverty. Both parents have died and the children now stay with their aunt, who is unmarried and unemployed. She must leave the three children alone daily to go out and search for casual labor. Six year old Kajoni (Ka-joan-ie) then becomes the father and cares for his younger siblings, foraging for food while carrying young Wanza and comforting her when she cries. All three children are malnourished and we often find Wanza eating dirt to fill her belly. It is a celebration of the spirit to witness the transformation upon Kajoni's face from one of solemn responsibility to one of pure glee when he is at the center. He can play and sing, and get cuddled, and be a young child once again. Our hope is to supply financial support to provide this family with basic nutritional needs until the guardian Teresia can be given some vocational training and the opportunity to become self-sufficient.

The Kioko Family now consists of just Mwilkali Kioko, age eight, and her sister, Nyamai, age six. They were just recently orphaned and are still adapting to living with their aunt. Tragedy is no stranger to this guardian aunt, who has lost 5 family members (her husband, infant child, two sisters, and mother) all this past year. Although she has known of our program, she just recently found the courage to ask for support and, as she says, Dare to believe in hope. She has quit her job to stay home with the orphans and her own two young children (ages 18 months and 3 years) and survives on whatever sustenance she can provide by begging or borrowing day to day. As I enter her tiny dirt compound, she will quietly take me by the hand and lead me among the recent graves scattered between their two small huts. \$60 will provide them with food for a month and some hope.

Mutisya Mwololo age 14, lives with his grandmother and other relatives in a dusty compound of thatched mud huts. They grow some produce, but have no source of income. The grandmother was forced to send Mutisya's brother, age 11, to live with another relative because she could not support them both. Mutisya, who is first in his class, scored very well on his final primary school exams. He emphatically states that he likes mathematics best at school and adds that math is also his favorite recreational activity. He dreams of going to a university to become an engineer. He also likes science, agriculture, geography, and civics. Although he is quiet mannered, he enjoys any kind of athletics especially soccer.

Makau Malatya is 16 years old and in standard 6, primary school. He is indeed a unique young man. Although his situation is not unusual for an orphan in

Africa, his attitude towards his struggles is quite extraordinary and inspiring. He is the youngest child (his elder siblings have all left home), who stays with his elderly and frail grandmother. As a strong adolescent, he is in the position to earn money for food for himself and his grandmother as her health is failing and they have no other means of support. Makau's predicament is that although he is a scholar and absolutely adores learning, he must miss school at least once or twice weekly to work so that they can eat. He is torn between his love and devotion for his grandmother and his commitment to learning. Last year he had to miss an entire month straight to work. He clearly states that he does not wish to miss school, but simply Gets confused about what I should do. He and his grandmother live in a tiny one room mud thatched hut with one bed. A small corner of the hut is reserved for cooking upon a dirt floor. There are no food stores and he must forage for food daily. His high school scores are usually the highest in his class despite his absences. His aspiration to be a doctor (he's intrigued with pediatrics), is impossible in his current situation. However, when allowed to give his dream some promise, he smiles broadly and states, My mind would be clear if only I did not have to worry about food. Our hope is to provide food, as well as school, so that his dream may become a reality. His high marks, commitment, and enthusiasm make him an excellent boarding school candidate.

Kanini Muema is a 16 year old orphan who lives in a one room rented hut in Ngukuni Village, Makindu. She shares this space with her aunt, her 15 year brother and her 11 year old sister. The family sells produce at a roadside stall as their only source of income. Kanini scored an exceptionally high 498 out of 600 on her eighth grade exams and has completed her first year of high school. She especially likes to study mathematics, chemistry, biology and business education, and she wants to become an accountant. She shyly reveals that when she gets some rare free time, she likes to read novels, be with her friends, listen to music, play soccer, and watch videos (when she gets invited for such an unusual and special treat.)

Mueni Kilonzo, who is 14, just scored a very respectable 411 out of 600 on her primary school exams. Her favorite subjects are home science, Kiswahili language, and social studies. She shyly admits that she is undecided about a future vocation, but her favorite things do tell a lot about her. She says she likes to Help my guardians get water, visit friends, help people who are in need, and play soccer. She lives with her grandparents and two younger sisters, ages 13 and 10, they live on a small remote farm in thatched mud huts in the dry and dusty region of Makindu. They survive on the produce they grow and casual labor jobs, but have no money for school fees.

Beatrice Musembi is a 16 year old orphan who has completed two years of high school. She had to drop out last year for six months because she lacked the school fees. A community fund raiser allowed her to go back for two months, but was not enough for her to continue. She very much wants to board at her school because the walk home is almost two hours in the dark and when she gets home, she cannot study because they have no oil for their lantern .She also has so many chores to do that studying is out of the question. At school, Beatrice likes biology, chemistry, and math, and her dream is to become a nurse. She has very little free time but she enjoys reading, being with her friends, playing soccer, and listening to music. After hearing that she may be helped to return to school, she was overheard remarking to her friends, Someday we are

going to be a great people.

How you can Help

You may donate either a lump sum or a monthly pledge to be applied to the academic or survival scholarship fund. We will then allocate each of the funds so that they are as effective as possible in accomplishing their respective goals. Unfortunately we are not in a position at this time to assure that your donation will be applied to a specific child or family. However, we will do our best to answer your inquiries about the children and the families and to provide you with updates as requested. Please indicate on your check how you want your donation applied and whether it is a lump sum or continuing pledge.