



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.

April 2000 Newsletter

JOSH REPORTS:

Editors Note: The following is a compilation of information from a phone call and subsequent February and March reports to Sharing Hands by MCC Director Josh Englehardt.

The MCC building in Makindu is almost done and is on target in terms of budget expectations. Floors are in (the last part of a Kenyan style structure), painting and finish work are underway. All is being done on budget, but at a higher quality and with a few more extras than were originally planned due to the careful oversight of Josh and Dianah. The MCC building includes two offices, a huge dining area and kitchen, large indoor storage area, vocational training room and community resource center, as well as outdoor latrine, rain water catchment system and outdoor cold storage. Josh says it looks great, and the community now really realizes that we're here to stay. This first building phase will be done within the month. Plans for additional buildings won't proceed until later. They are working on getting the water hookup. They have the District Officer and the Sub-District Chief helping them, and are applying directly to the district water engineer. They are hopeful that it will be forthcoming soon. When finished, a Grand Opening@ will be held for the community. It will be presided over by the District Officer, and will include speeches by the DO, Chief, Assistant Chief, other public officials, Josh, Dianah and concerned citizens, as well as singing, dancing and other activities. We will be reporting on it all, and hope to include photographs on our web page soon.

The Shamba is producing extremely well. The first beans harvested are worth some 10,000 shillings and will equal about 7 months worth of beans for the center's lunches! When these are all picked, we will plant more. The maize is also terrific. They had to hire laborers to help pick it so that it would be done in time to plant again! The gravitational flow plan will work for less than 1/3 of the shamba (5 acres) because of the slope of the land. In that Awell watered@ area they will grow *secuma* (kale), beans, pigeon peas, while the maize and other less water-needy crops will be planted elsewhere. They are going to utilize alternative irrigation techniques, such as drip irrigation, that demand no technology, cost little and are easily done with local materials. Thus far, they've relied upon the

sporadic rains, but occasionally have to rent a spendy pump to supplement them.

A second demonstration garden at the new center in Makindu has been planted with salad veggies and watered using drip-bucket irrigation. Josh thinks it will be easier to manage, give the boys at the farm less work, and be more centrally located to demonstrate drip-bucket technology.

Eight of our 25 African "Killer" Bee hives have been colonized. The superboxes, queen excluders, beekeeper suits and other gear have been ordered, and MCC has signed a contract with a honey exporter. Those experts will get this project really moving. Honey production has great potential to generate income and is a wonderful skill for the kids to learn.

The health of the kids is generally getting better, but it is a bad time for malaria. Last month 26 of the kids needed treatment for malaria, as did Dianah, all of her own children and Josh. None had complications, and are doing well. However, Josh has had a relapse. He reports that the system for treatment and payment set up at the hospital is working well without major snags.

(Editor=s Note: Nothing in Africa is easy. The Yin and the Yang are always very close. As reported in the last newsletter, the rains brought the ability to grow food, AND washed away many houses. This will lower malnutrition, but they also increased mosquitoes and MALARIA.)

At school, all of our standard 8 students passed their entrance tests and wanted to give secondary (high) school a try. They have all gone to four different boarding schools, except for **Wendi Musembi**. She was on the matatu, half way there, when she panicked a bit. It is a very isolated location, farther away from home than she had ever been on her own, and just too scary. She broke down in tears and Dianah Nzomo's sister Emily brought her back. MCC is looking for a closer alternative. **Musingila** did great on his std 8 exams, but sadly just missed the cutoff for Starehe School, the very prestigious boys academy in Nairobi. Like all of our kids he has had to struggle to get an education, being out of school for several years because of the cost. He's very bright and motivated and will do well anywhere. Despite missing 3 months of last year's schooling so he could work to feed himself and his grand-mother, 14 year old **Makau Mulatya**, scored the highest of ANY

child in his grade level, in the entire District. This means he scored NUMBER ONE of more than 20,000 students!! The boarding school is so thrilled with his motivation and aptitude that they have recommended to the government that he be given a free scholarship into the country's leading secondary school after he graduates eighth grade this year. Makau plans on becoming a pediatrician, and wants to return to Makindu someday, to help care for all of the area children. It was Makau that convinced us that we needed to help children with high school tuition.

Beatrice Musembi and Mutisya both did pretty miserably in secondary school last year, so this year they have chosen to try vocational school instead... Beatrice in computer studies, and Mutisya in engineering skills training. There's more, but the basic theme is all of the kids are doing pretty well, given hard life as per normal, in Africa. But of course nothing is perfect, one of our boys, **Musango Mwangangi**, hasn't been coming to the center lately. His guardian says he has refused to attend school and is running with the street kids. The guardian told Josh "Well, he wouldn't go to school, so I beat him thoroughly. He still wouldn't go, so I took him to the Headmaster, who beat him thoroughly. But he still wouldn't go, so I took him to the Assistant Chief, who also beat him thoroughly. Yet still he does not listen." Josh says he's still staying and eating at his guardian's house, but it has been difficult to get him to come to the center. Life is always hard in Africa. Josh and Dianah are working on it.

(Editor's note: One of the hard things to remember is that OUR kids are not really OUR kids. We have to work within the family structure and local culture to help them. But it is times like these...!!)

KID NEWS:

Muasya our five year old with advanced AIDS and active tuberculosis isn't doing well, as is expected in the course of this disease. Still, it is difficult for everyone as he is a favorite. He rarely comes to the center anymore as it is too far for him to walk and he's too big for Grandma to carry. The hospital has run out of options for him. He likes to be held, and when he comes he's gets that from a volunteer or Mother Dianah or another guardian, and if he feels well enough, he gets some laughs with the kids. He is very bright, the top of his kindergarten class, and is very excited to be starting 1st grade this year. Muasya has an older sister, **Victoria**, who does a lot of the day-to-day caring for him, and takes food home from the center for him and his Grandma guardian. (See the web site for his picture.)

The Mwololos are doing better. These five boys live on their own. The youngest two, Muia and Mutungi were not gaining weight as reliably as the others and we were concerned about the possibility of HIV. We treated them all for worms, and all the boys, especially the youngest two, have gained at least 1.5 kilos (~3 lbs) in the past month. Their oldest brother, Musyoka, 16, has

returned to Makindu to work casual labor there, and has been a huge help with the younger boys and also at the center. **Teresia**, who is Kajoni, Mwanzia, and Nzilani's guardian, has had a baby boy. No father is present. She now rarely comes to the center, and therefore, neither do two year old Nzilani and five year old Mwanzia. "Papa" Kajoni now in 1st grade can't bring them, and developmentally delayed Mwanzia is unable as well. Josh and Dianah are hoping to work on alternate plans to get them access to the center's food and activities.

Two of our guardians are failing with AIDS. Josh and Dianah are trying to gently navigate the families into thinking about the future care of the kids. This is difficult as people tend to wait to see what fate has in store, and do not like to intervene in that process. After all, no one wants to encumber themselves with that responsibility if some other means may present itself.

A word from Winnie:

(Editor's note: As reported in the last Newsletter, Winnie Baron returned from Makindu in December. She then wrote an extensive "A State of the Program" letter to the Committee. The following are a few excerpts from that letter.)

"These children of MCC... our children... have forever reserved a spot of passion in my heart that won't be diminished with time. For that, I am grateful; that is how affairs of the heart should be. I have often wondered if all of my friends, and all of the supporters of MCC, recognize how much they mean to me, and how much you have all meant to the children of Makindu; the distance is far, and communications difficult, infrequent, and erratic, and emotions so hard to translate. The gains we have made with MCC, however, are more tangible, and the effect upon the lives of the children undeniable.

I could start--- and appropriately stop--- with Ngwenze, as she summarizes it all. This beautiful young girl is alive and literally thriving, beaming and giggling, and happily exploring life, because of all of you. Her heart condition has resolved, with no medicine beyond food and love, and she continues to overcome her other physical disabilities. The guardians of Makindu call her "flower of the dust", god's creation that refused to die. Ngwenze is a testimony to love, and a gift to us all. I will never forget saying goodbye to this one, and will always cherish that memory.

But there are more stories: 98% of eligible kids are now enrolled in school, and the other 2% have started vocational training school. This, for a population of kids that many teachers felt had no chance to succeed, and were not worthy of the effort.

Where over 87% of our children were malnourished or anemic to some degree upon entry into the program, now only seven children have mild symptoms, and

those are improving. They have the energy to walk to the center, to challenge themselves at school, and to play and interact with life. The community is now rallying behind the children. The orphans are regaining their larger family within the village. They are no longer invisible children. We now have a giant map of the Makindu district at the center, on which each child has put their name, joyous in that connection and recognition of themselves.

Life continues to be hard for the children, as life in Africa is, but there is now hope. Dianah spoke to me about her greatest wish for the children. She knows that we can never change the harsh reality of their external lives -- disease and poverty will continue to plague them -- but they CAN develop a strength "within their own hearts" that will prevail. That, too, is a mighty gift.

And Kabibi Salim has found her voice... she always speaks in a whisper, and in a manner that suggests that she feels her thoughts are not worthy. Of all the children I heard speak about their feelings about school and their thoughts of the future, Kabibi's talk was the most eloquent and passionate. This child, who knows she is dying, spoke so compellingly about the concept of the future, and her excitement and motivation to learn more and more, to become a teacher to others, if she can. She also was finally able to share her feelings about the family she has lost, about her mother at her death, and her love for her younger siblings; these are things she was not allowed to speak of before, as she was told to "forget her life before@. So now, this child has reclaimed her past, and has found a way to believe in the future.

There are SO many more stories. Please know however, that I think we have created something to be proud of. Each and every story matters. We have helped these children to recapture their identity and to hold onto their hopes and dreams. They now know that the world and its possibilities are vast, and that friends are within their reach. ...many treasures and gifts, and it has been pure joy to share this with all of you.

MCC Cookbook now available

Here's a way you can help the kids get some- thing to eat AND do the same for yourself! Now, come on, how can you turn that down? Through the efforts of yet another tireless volunteer, Ronda Dietrick, (who will be going to Makindu for several months this summer) we are now offering for sale *a really neat cookbook*. **Sharing Our Best** is a collection of favorite recipes from Friends of the Makindu Children's Center. It contains over 250 taste-tempting recipes including a section of African favorites, some contributed by the people of Makindu! After production costs, all proceeds will go directly to HELP the kids. This will make an ideal gift or keepsake, and is sure to give you ideas when you want something new and interesting for

dinner.

The books are on sale in Eugene, Oregon for \$10.00 from:

**Greater Goods,
515 High Street
(across from the 5th Street Market)**

or by mail order for \$12.50 from:

**Sharing Hands, Inc.
PO Box 335, Brownsville,
Oregon 97327**

...Or call: **(541)466-3110**

...Or email: **sharinghands@dnc.net**

**AND AGAIN WE SAY-- THANKS FOR YOUR
SUPPORT!**

MCC has accomplished a great deal for these kids, and by extension, for the community of Makindu. All the kids are now in school, all are eating regularly, all are in better shape than they were, and all have a vision of a future that they want to achieve. In short, all are better off now than they were when we started. But none of that would have happened without your physical and monetary support. What MCC is doing is life saving and life changing. The kids and people of Makindu are extremely grateful. You should be proud of what you have done.....We sure are.

A SPECIAL REQUEST FOR THE FRIENDS OF MCC

We are looking for a lap-top computer for Josh in Makindu. He has no computer except that which he can rent at cyber cafes in Nairobi. Regular mail takes 2 to 6 weeks. Josh emails very long reports to Sharing Hands to keep the MCC committee informed so that we can decide what new directions to move in, how best to accomplish already set missions, and so on. At the moment Josh must type these many pages into the computer at the cyber cafe where he gains access to the Internet. If Josh had a lap-top he could create the emails in Makindu, allowing for much more detail and cut down his Internet access costs at the cyber cafe. Further, a spreadsheet program could allow him to be more efficient in keeping the books, as well as sending us instant copies of that data as well. If you have a lap-top - at least a 486 - to donate to MCC for this purpose, we and Josh would be very grateful. Of course it would be a charitable gift and would accrue all appropriate benefits. Please contact us as soon as possible so that a volunteer can take it to him!