



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.

May 2001 Newsletter

ANNOUNCING! A BENEFIT CONCERT

An Evening of Music, Poetry and Dance will be presented by the Friends of Makindu Children's Center on June 12, 2001 at 7:30 p.m. in the Majestic Theatre, Corvallis.

Featured performers will include: Diane Baxter, piano - Tom Bergeron, saxophone -- Valerie Bergman, dance -- Carolyn Buck, piano -- Jamie Cherry, piano -- Keller Coker, trombone -- Kevin Helppie, baritone -- Donna Henderson, poet -- Darryl Thomas, dance

AND: A handmade quilt with panels handdrawn by our Makindu kids will be raffled as well.

Tickets will be \$10, all general admission, available at Grass Roots, Corvallis -- Syd's Jewelers, Albany Saddle Butte, Brownsville -- Corner Cafe, Brownsville and Greater Goods, Eugene

Hey, this is going to be a really great time, and the Makindu Children's Center Committee is inviting you to attend. The evening will be filled with music, poetry and dance **PLUS the presence of Dianah Nzomo.** Please come and meet Mother Dianah, the woman who started it all. This is Winnie's co-conspirator and confidant and one of the most amazing people you will ever have the chance to meet.

This is one of those times when you can do good AND do well! And for only ten bucks...Please don't miss it.

Mr. Central Linn Pagent a HUGE Success

On May 10th the first Mr. Central Linn pageant was held at Central Linn High School as a benefit for Makindu Children's Center. It raised almost \$700!!, and everyone had a lot of fun doing it. It was run as a beauty contest for 9 young men who shared their talents in various events. The program featured line dancing, video interviews and back stage "peeks" at the nervous contestants, all to produce a wonderful time for everyone.

Sarah conceived, coordinated, and directed this event which is already scheduled for next year. MCC wants to thank all the guys who participated, the audience, the people who helped, and most especially Sarah, who has volunteered for MCC for the past three years. She is the kind of person that makes MCC such a special project.

Dianah Nzomo comes to Oregon

MCC is bringing Diana Nzomo, our Program Manager, to Oregon to meet the committee and as many volunteers and donors as possible. There will be many opportunities to meet Dianah over the month that she will be in Brownsville. You may well see her on the street. She'll be the one with the kind word and the beautiful smile, surrounded by some pretty excited Americans! Her itinerary to date is as follows:

June 6 - Arrival in Brownsville

June 10 - Brownsville Potluck Reception

June 12 - Benefit Concert Majestic Theater, Corvallis

June 16 - Brownsville Pioneer Picnic Parade

June 21 - Sharing Hands Board Meeting

June 24 - Reception at United Methodist Church of Sweet Home

June 30 - Eugene Potluck Reception

July 1 - Reception at St. Mary's Church, Albany

July 6 - Leaves for Nairobi

(Winnie emailed this description of Dianah as she prepares for her trip.) She (Dianah) is so excited, incredulous, actually, that she truly is coming to the U.S., and will at last get to meet so many of you that she knows already in her heart. She mentions her visit daily, and continues to ask questions about what she will see, eat, do, think. She is understandably anxious about the unknown, but seems more excited than worried. Jerry (a volunteer) and I have done our best to prepare her, assure her, and answer as much as we can. She is feeling much more relaxed now that she knows she is traveling with Jerry (who is returning to Chicago at the same time Dianah is traveling), and knows that he will be there to help her work her way through any confusion or problems until she is in your company in Oregon. She's planning ahead: has bought a pair of new shoes, is planning what she'll bring and wear, and even has a "countdown calendar" on her wall! Despite her excitement, she continues to work so hard each day, and is helping me to prepare for her absence getting me up to speed on all of her projects, and the territory that she usually covers without me. I'm already anticipating the party we will have for her upon her return. It will be so great to hear all of her stories, and share her experiences and excitement..

News from Africa The Kids:

The following is a report from Winnie on various aspects of our efforts in Makindu. In general, the kids are doing well, and are enjoying their holiday (the month of April all schools are out); most are still harvesting for part of the day at their homes. They come to MCC daily to eat, play, and visit with one another. The older ones all huddle together, telling stories, and laughing and laughing some more. MCC is a family and they are happy to be together again. The younger children hang on the stories and tales. With the miracle of rain, the red dust, drought stricken Makindu is green and lush, with fields of maize and produce all about. This is the first decent harvest this area has had in years. But of course, with the rains the incidence of malaria is way up, and we've had two children with severe pneumonia. In fact, Matave is very sick, but I have her on two injections a day and she is improving. In the States she would be in the ICU on a respirator, but here, we do what we can, with a lot of hand-wringing and praying. I didn't put her in the hospital, as she gets better, and certainly more, TLC at home. I see her twice daily, and am amazed to see her smiling again and playful. But she isn't out of the woods yet.

Kibibi is battling another lung infection that simply won't clear with anything we try. She still smiles, with some coaxing, but is becoming quieter. She knows she is dying (she has AIDS), and has talked with Dianah about it. She says she is not afraid. We pick her up on the bicycle most days, and let her just hang out at the center. We may again take her to Nairobi, even though it is exhausting for her, because it feeds her spirit, a most powerful medication. It has been difficult for her to see her younger cousin Khadija return from secondary school, bubbling with stories. And of course it is hard for Khadija to watch Kibibi fading away.

Teenagers - what'cha gonna do?

The following is a somewhat extended description of the realities of "rearing" orphan teenagers. I have removed the boy's name, but otherwise have left Winnie's comments intact. This particular boy is a terrific kid. He is very handsome, and as bright as any kid you will ever meet. His school work has been absolutely top notch. He and his brother were orphaned and taken in by his grandmother, who has since died as well. The Center is really the only home he has. Realize as you read this that these are not our kids, we can only guide and hope, and the fear of failure and rejection that every teenage kid knows is accompanied by the fear of the unknown which success represents. I asked this boy what he wanted to be when he grew up, and he said "an Engineer". But when I asked him what he would have in his house, he didn't know what a flush toilet was. MCC is trying to give them some context for success, but coming of age as an orphan in an environment that can trap and kill you is the future ahead of all these kids. It is very hard to keep your eyes on an uncertain prize,

when the joys of the present are all around you. This is one day in the life ...

[The boy] has just finished his one month "vacation" of sorts from the center. We put him on probation, and did not allow him to share or participate in any of the Center's activities for the month he was home from secondary school. He lived by himself in Sophia's old home, and sometimes at his older sister's home, and had to fend for himself for food, soap, paraffin for the lantern, etc. We encouraged him to work to support himself, as he had been doing this already, but was spending the money on alcohol, cigarettes, and video shows. We had tried about everything else, and thought it would be good for him to taste what life pushing a handcart forever in MKU might offer him. He could truly feel what he has been risking with his recent poor choices and behavior. He's actually an incredibly lovable young man, bright, talented, handsome, with a ready smile and great sense of humor, but has been both tormented by the challenges of his life, and enticed by a crowd of young men and women who have given up on their own futures. We really worried about him, and emotionally struggled with our next move. We assured him that we cared, were concerned, and would honor his right to make his own choices...good or bad. We really won't know for some time, but it does appear to have had an impact upon him; he talked with Dianah's kids about his mistakes, regrets, and his fears for the future, and was very teary and emotional, something we had not seen previously. We found him studying at night, his grades have been terrible, and he is a top student, and remarkably gifted, and he has made no repeated errors of which we are aware.

The interesting thing was to witness the degree of interest, concern, and discussion this generated with all of our other teens, who openly talked about trying to avoid temptations, and how best to avert difficulties and work with the many challenges they face daily. They had some very enlivened and active discussions about sex, AIDS, drugs and alcohol, responsible behavior, and consequences. They even talked about sexual abuse and some pretty sensitive and delicate issues. We welcomed him back at the end of the month, and have sent him back to Makindu Secondary boarding school. It is here in town so we can monitor him and continue to guide him as best we can. He missed loads of fun over the holiday, of which he was keenly aware. We had two separate all night slumber (slumberless) feasts, with singing, story telling, games, dancing, and loads of food. And he missed out on the comradeship and spirit of being with the others daily at the Center. We missed him, but hope his time was better spent away from us this month, more focused, perhaps, upon his inner world and the realities of life on his own.

Continuing our help:

Ngwenze and Mutua, our little twins, and their three siblings have been completely abandoned by their father. He left them with their aging grandmother who

has absolutely no money or support. She is elderly and frail, and unable to work. Recently, overwhelmed by the responsibility and meager resources she has to care for five young children, she succumbed to a hopeless spirit. The kids were coming to the center daily, but were incredibly dirty, hungry, exhausted, bedraggled, and emotionally needy and teary. We got Mama Ngwenze (the grandmom) medical care, put them back on our supplemental family food system, and talked with her about what else we could do to support her in her efforts to care for these kids. Simple things really, but it eased her emotional load immensely. The kids have stabilized and are back to tormenting us at the center with their antics and giggles, and Mama Ngwenze is happier, and hopeful. It is still a difficult and tenuous situation for them, but they are coping much better, and will somehow manage to prevail, I think, as most do here, with very little to go on beyond hope and love.

Other News:

The guardians have monthly meetings at the center, where they share concerns, ideas, woes, and joys. Reliably, one or two will rally and occasionally berate the others for not contributing or helping enough. They often gather the children together, and speak to them as a family, urging them to work or study hard, and so on. The last session was particularly fun, as we were harvesting maize full-bore at the time, and literally 1/2 the dining hall floor was covered in maize. Dianah, Jerry, Catherine, about 12 guardians, 25 kids and I, perched on piles of maize, shucking and bagging, singing and laughing. Little Nzilani fell asleep atop the very highest pile. The work continued for about 2 weeks with the children, even the little ones, harvesting, planting, and watering. The guardians bring firewood, or help with the shamba, or cooking. It isn't a daily occurrence, but is heartening to see their participation and spirit.

This is really fun news: Dianah pointed out to me that our guardians have formed a sort of guardian women co-op. They have been meeting every Wednesday down in the marketplace, and come together to motivate, share, and help work together in a kind of cooperative work/team strategy for shared income. They work on collecting and selling charcoal, making and selling bricks, etc., pooling their resources, knowledge, and sharing the income. I was so thrilled to hear this, especially as they have done this ON THEIR OWN, without our help or support. These women are pretty remarkable, and I have a great deal of respect for them. They are a never-ending source of motivation for me; imagine if they manage to instill even a fraction of this spirit in the children they are raising!

Donations: We've been doing really well, both with cash donations and donations of materials or service. We are averaging 100,000 Ksh (\$1300) each month.

This is pretty impressive for an impoverished community. (*And a pretty big vote of confidence for MCC by Kenyans who put their money where their hearts are!* Editor) Graduation Party: Mwendi Kavevi is our very first graduate! Mwende successfully completed a two-year vocational training course, and passed her certification exams as a seamstress and tailor. She works for herself and is building up her clientele. Of course she gets all the MCC orders for school uniforms and mending. She is very talented and skilled, and has gained so much confidence in herself it is a joy to see. MCC has leased Mwende one of our donated foot-powered sewing machines to use for the next year. It encourages her and allows her to build up her business until she can afford to purchase her own. We had a big party for her, with lots of food, and fun. Everyone enjoyed it, and it provoked discussion among the older children as they anticipate their own achievements.

SHAMBA: WOW should about summarize things. We have harvested almost 4,482 kg (9800 lbs) of maize! Plus, beans, and salad items, and are selling some of our pigeon peas again. By Dianah's estimate we have maize for about the next 9-12 months. The *shamba* has actually made \$150 in profit, and this month we estimate a \$500 profit! We have planted millet and sorghum only this season out at the main *shamba*, and at the center have more pigeon peas, cow peas and nursery items growing. The short rains are here, although not yet plentiful; we are hoping to have another successful harvest. The great thing about rain is that all our families are not struggling so hard for food and there is employment available. At the moment, there is much less desperation here.

In addition, KARI (*an agricultural aid organization*) has again donated seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and labor to plant about 2 acres at the center as part of their community-wide seminars for the local farmers. They will be discussing the "Neem" tree (*Azadirachta indica*) to the botanists, a traditional natural fence. It's seeds can be crushed for pesticide. Traditionally, it is also commonly used in some herbal medicinal remedies. They will be handing out free seedlings to everyone attending, and are donating about 40 to the Center. Their program manager has visited us several times, is very excited about our work, and wants to help promote both our causes.

Bee Keeping: We finally have our first harvest! The hives are still not working precisely as they are supposed to, in order for us to get the purest honey, and not all of our hives are active, but we're currently harvesting it the local, traditional way so as not to lose the entire harvest again at least until we can work out the problems with the "super boxes". We plan on filtering it ourselves, bottling it, and selling it locally. We've harvested about 25 kg, and have that much to go.

We hope to sell at 300 Ksh per kg. We harvest is at night, when it is cooler and the bees more friendly.

AIDS EDUCATION: We have answered an extensive file of HIV/AIDS questions from school kids and community members and are distributing them to the schools, and making them available to the public. The schools we visited have asked us to return for longer sessions and to bring videos. Our 8 videos are a hit with everyone. Paula and I had a very good talk with about 20 nurses from the Makindu Hospital. The task of changing the Nurses behavior is a formidable one, as many of the nurses are still unwilling to even touch an AIDS patient, and are incredibly depressed and discouraged by the problems faced in this arena.

The Last Words: I don't have too much room to chat this time. Please come to the Benefit Concert on June 12, and please try to find time to meet Dianah. She will bring this project to life in you, just as she did in Winnie. Remember, you are the reason that MCC can do the things we do. Thank you, from all of us.

**"Be the change you want to see in the world" –
Gandhi**