

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2011 Vol. 12, No. 1

JAMBO



A Message from the President

Foundation
President
Sherri Mills

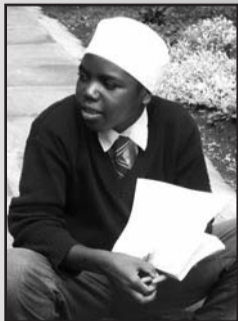
Recently, Anne Batzer (newsletter co-editor) and I returned from a fun, rewarding trip to see the Makena students, parents, guardians and school officials in Kenya. We visited six of the seven schools in which we have students enrolled, took part in a Parents/Guardians meeting and attended Prize Giving Day at Nyhururua Elite Schools where most of our students are enrolled.

Alice Njoki, who is sponsored by Anne and John Batzer at Naivasha Girls' School, was beside herself over Anne's visit. But, I must say, she was no more excited than Anne who could not sleep the night before visiting Alice. Watching the two of them together was such a gift to our Kenya representatives, Charles and Francis Karanja, and me. Anne and Alice talked non-stop while touring the campus, walking about and stopping for numerous hugs.



Anne and Alice have a wonderful relationship marked by long, newsy letters. Anne has been able to continue writing through the awkward months of getting to know Alice. Now, on both sides, the letters are filled with news, moral philosophies and more. You will hear more about their relationship in a future newsletter.

We all visited John Njoroge at his new school, a national school called Nairobi High School. Although he has been there only since February, he was eager to show us around the beautiful campus built early in the previous century by the British. Upon independence, the school became a Kenyan national school. John could also name members of the Kenyan Parliament and well-recognized professionals and businessmen who are alumnae of the school.



(Continued on back)

"Multi-Tasker" Helps Keep the Makena Dream Alive

By Anne Batzer

Charles Karanja is the familiar face of the Makena Children's Foundation (MCF) in Kenya. With our students now attending seven schools, Charles is often hailing a matatu (public van) and traveling east Africa's rocky roads to deepen relationships with the children and their teachers.

Nevertheless, Charles is a lifelong learner. He has taken courses in professional driver training, computer skills and management. He has particularly enjoyed participating in a leadership forum.

One of his first brilliant, creative additions to the way MCF is organized was to appoint six



Charles and his wife, Gladys, receive a gift from grateful Makena parents and guardians as their sons, 3-year-old Collins and 5-year-old Brian look on.

He does everything from arranging transportation for our students, to organizing three important parents/guardians meetings a year, to bringing parents to meetings with school officials if a student misbehaves.

But multi-tasking is not new to Charles. Along with his MCF duties, he is an entrepreneur with his own greenhouse where he grows tomatoes and sells them in the nearby town of Naivasha. His business plan includes increasing the number of his employees and his crops to include both onions and spinach.

Charles lives in Nyondie, the village where he was born, with his wife Gladys, who works as a hairdresser in a salon, and his two engaging sons, Brian and Collins. Nyondie borders Maraigushu where the Makena students live, so Charles' gentle presence is never far from our families. With characteristic humility and quiet dignity he says, "I want to be someone who can be a good example for all the Makena kids."

Like so many others in Kenya, Charles' life took a drastic turn after his father's untimely death. A top student, Charles scored a stunning 421 on the KCPE, Kenya's national exam taken by all eighth graders. 400 is considered a top score, and Charles should have been enrolled in an excellent high school. But his father's passing meant he needed to sacrifice his educational future and stay home to help support his mother and seven siblings. (Charles' older brother, Francis, who completed his University studies, partners with him in doing the work of the Foundation in Kenya.)

of our parents and guardians to committee chair positions, giving these subsistence farmers an experience as stakeholders and leaders in a group process.

Currently, the mothers of Evans Mungai, Alice Njoki, Peris Njeri and Christopher Kidali, as well as Hannah Wangui's father and Simon Mwangi's uncle, handle committee assignments that range from keeping data on the students, to arranging the logistics and food for the parents/guardians meetings, to making sure students' uniforms are in good shape and their toiletries in hand.

"It's important for the parents and guardians to make a contribution to the Makena Foundation and take responsibility for these necessary tasks," Charles says. "In many ways, my work with the Foundation is a continuation of what I learned in the leadership forum and management classes about how to organize groups, chair meetings and be comfortable talking with elders."

The Makena Children's Foundation is fortunate to have Charles Karanja as our familiar face, but it's probably more accurate to say he is our accessible heart.

"The Makena families have become my extended family," Charles says. "I feel like a parent to all the kids. I can already feel the Foundation's impact on the village. I want the Makena Foundation to be there forever. That's my dream."

Mills is Giraffe Award Recipient

By Mary Jo Baich

Giraffe are fascinating and beautiful animals. Easily recognizable because of their long, strong necks, their large, observant eyes and their graceful gait, they live in areas of Africa where trees are part of the landscape. These trees, mostly acacia, provide the food that only they can reach. Though giraffe do make some sounds, they mostly go about their work rather quietly.

So, it is the giraffe that is the symbol of folks who are willing to reach out and help others. The Giraffe Award (www.giraffe.org) is given by an international nonprofit organization that honors the risk-takers amongst us: Folks who are largely unknown, but who have the courage to stick their necks out for the common good.

We are so proud that our own Sherri Mills has received The Giraffe Award. She certainly embodies the qualities of this beautiful and endearing animal – the one exception being the height factor. Sherri’s reach is extremely long and her heart much enlarged in consideration of the needs of Africa and her children. Sherri has not only stuck out her neck, against great odds, to bring the gift of education to the young of Kenya, but – mimicking the strong mothering skills of the giraffe – she has brought others into the herd to lend a hand.

Nominated by Teri E Belf, one of our Makena sponsors, Sherri’s work began in the forested farm area of the Abedare Mountains and she has changed the lives of many families living in the village of Maraigushu.

Though in retirement, Sherri happily spends these years caring for others. It is nearly a full-time job to keep up with the children, their grades, their illnesses, family setbacks or educational stalls. Sherri is there for them in their difficulties, as well as to write encouragements or congratulations when the children have their successes. They call her “Makena” (this word in Kikuyu means “joyful one”) for she brings hope to them and their families.

Each year Sherri takes an exhausting journey to Kenya in spite of her health issues. Long air travel, traversing Kenya’s poor roads to see the children who now attend seven different schools, dealing with the country’s political uncertainty and meeting with parents or guardians are all part of what it takes to accomplish this work in Kenya. Visiting with a principal this March and discussing the personality and the educational needs of one of the Makena kids who attends his school, the principal said to Sherri, “Gosh, you really do know each of these children.”

Sherri never lectures, but always communicates that we have as much to learn from the Kenyans as they have to learn from us. She recognizes that honest and open relationships with the children, their parent/guardians, teachers and the Kenyan volunteers for the Makena Foundation are key to the Foundation’s success. Best of all, Sherri showers those she meets along the way with humor, compassion and lots of hugs. Sherri’s willingness to openly discuss racism with Kenyans and share perspectives on how to overcome it throughout the world has won her great respect.

Sherri is a grand ambassador for the US to Kenya, forming true partnerships to bring education to the children. She has long stuck her neck out to see the goal of educating children in Kenya come to fruition – no wonder the Giraffe Heroes Organization overwhelmingly voted Sherri a certified giraffe!



Charles Karanja’s sons, Brian and Collins, play outside during a Parents/Guardians meeting.



Will you be our partner?

As the Makena Foundation's work matures and grows it mirrors the complexity of the wildlife that is Kenya's national treasure. The web of life on the savannas is interdependent and abundant because the mesh of plants and animals work in harmony. As you read this issue of our newsletter, you see this webbing replicated in the coming together of our children, their parents/guardians, their teachers and their sponsors.



Together with the caring leadership of Kenyan brothers, Charles and Francis Karanja, our parents and guardians have taken on new leadership roles, sharing responsibility for the work of the Foundation and becoming full partners in the work of bringing education to their children.

This interconnected web of folks has strength and flexibility bringing together diverse talents and cultures to achieve a common goal. You can complete this circle of life! Please become an active partner with our parents and guardians by giving generously.

We give thanks in advance for your financial support.

~ Mary Jo Baich ~

Yes, I want to be a partner in helping a deserving child achieve the dream of a life-changing education.

Please accept my tax-deductible gift, payable to Makena Children's Foundation, Inc., 4138 Crossings Lane, Birmingham, AL 35242.

- I wish to sponsor the child indicated above with a gift of \$2,000 annually.
- I wish to lend a hand to the smooth operation of the Makena Children's Foundation with a gift of:
- \$50 \$100 \$200 \$400 \$600 \$1,000
- You have permission to mention my support in your publication(s).
- I prefer to make my gift anonymously.
- I am unable to contribute now, but please keep me informed about the work of Makena Children's Foundation.
- I would like to share my story relating to Africa or my sponsored child.
Please contact me by phone or by e-mail .

Name _____

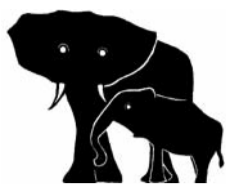
Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.
4138 Crossings Lane
Birmingham, AL 35242

If you'd like to help bring the priceless gift of education to deserving children, please complete the form inside and send your donation TODAY to the Foundation at the address above! Your gift will be greatly appreciated!



Washing Dishes after Sharing a Meal Together

Parents/Guardians graciously take on clean-up duty after a dinner meeting to discuss their child's progress.

President's Message (Continued from front)

On April 1, we saw John receive the "Best Overall" trophy at Elite Schools. He made the highest score (429 out of 500) of all students at Elite on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exam. John, who ranked number four of all students in his district and number 14 of all 700,000 plus students in Kenya who took the exam, also received subject awards in Science and Kiswahili.

Other Makena children receiving awards at the Elite Schools Prize Giving Day were Rose Waithira who was position one of all students in grade 11, Virginia Wangui who was position three in grade three and David Maina who was position five in grade four. John Muiruri, Peris Njeri, Hannah Njeri and Simon Mwangi performed in the marching band that enhanced the day's activities. John Gatonye was the leader of a rousing native dance that included a large group of boys. *(See photo at right.)* Other of our students took part in poems, skits and songs presented by the students.



The Parents/Guardians meeting held in Maraigushu was wonderful. We enjoyed a great time of give-and-take with the parents and guardians as we discussed what was working and not working in the project. Their greatest concern is for the children who will not make high enough scores on the Kenyan Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exam, to be eligible for government assistance for further education. We share their concern and are working to find solutions to this problem.

I was particularly gratified to see how this group has become a "family," helping each other in so many ways, and accepting responsibilities to help the Foundation. One man stood up in the meeting to say what the Foundation meant to him. He mentioned, among other things, that there had been a wedding in his family the preceding weekend, and that they had invited Makena Family members to the wedding. He remarked, "Before I was part of the Makena Foundation, I didn't even know many of these people. Now they are family friends." It's that ripple effect that we often talk about. When a group starts out to accomplish a goal (educate children), we never know all the resulting "ripples" that will occur.

These wonderful parents and guardians are now invested in the project and many are eager to do anything large or small to make their own contribution to the Foundation. Although Charles Karanja – who coordinates the work of the Foundation with those in the village – is a young man, I can see that the group respects and trusts him. They know how genuinely he cares for their children.

There is never enough space to tell you all the things I want to share from my trip to see the students. I am so inspired by these people – how hard working they are, how hopeful they are, how hospitable and generous they are. They have blessed my family's life immeasurably. It is my hope that through your involvement you, too, have felt blessed.

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