

Changing  
the world  
one  
child  
at a time

# MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Fall 2019 Vol. 20, No. 2

## JAMBO



A Message  
from the  
President

Anne Batzer

I often say the Makena Children's Foundation is a tiny light in the vast darkness of need. But you know what? Together we are making a difference! Because of your support, our young ones are thriving and they are full of joy. And our alumni are moving into important jobs that make a difference in their lives and in the lives of other Kenyans. I can't wait for you to read the stories in this newsletter.

We accomplished everything on our "most-ambitious ever" schedule for October's working trip to Kenya. We hit the ground running early each morning and never wrapped up meetings before 10:00 pm. Just to name a few of our activities: we met with teachers and school administrators, spent individual time with each of our students, visited prospective new secondary schools and universities, charted progress on our strategic plan, negotiated a small discount at our elementary school and coached our alumni on writing effective CVs. Checking off the "to do" list of items that enhance the daily management of the Makena Children's Foundation feels good. But what feels even better are the heart-opening experiences that filled every moment of our time.

Kenya is making economic gains but still 36% of the population lives on less than two dollars a day. This pervasive poverty is the constant companion of every traveler. It's heartbreaking to witness the daily struggle for survival that is the task of so many Kenyans, but the steady progress of our brilliant alumni reinforces our belief that education is the most sustainable path out of this persistent need.

We visited seven of our alumni at their workplaces. We'll share their inspiring stories in this and future newsletters. We also had time to really get to know our young ones. Their amazing resilience in spite of the experiences life has already held for them fills us with awe.

The dream of the Makena Children's Foundation to "offer love, encouragement and academic opportunity to children in the hope that their lives will, in turn, further enrich the people of their communities" is happening. You'll discover some of the reasons why in this newsletter. Enjoy!

## Magic Light ... and Laughter

By Kathy Helmer\*

Having accompanied Anne Batzer on her yearly visit to Kenya, my mind is full of singularly beautiful people met and moments lived. A particularly memorable moment happened in Maraigushu at the day-long meeting with the children's parents and guardians.

We sat with about 35 adults in a living room at the home of Peter and Helen. It was lined with small firm couches and chock-filled with chairs. The walls of the living room were covered with a variety of lacy cloths, a picture of Jesus and a poster with the slogan "Success depends on hard work."

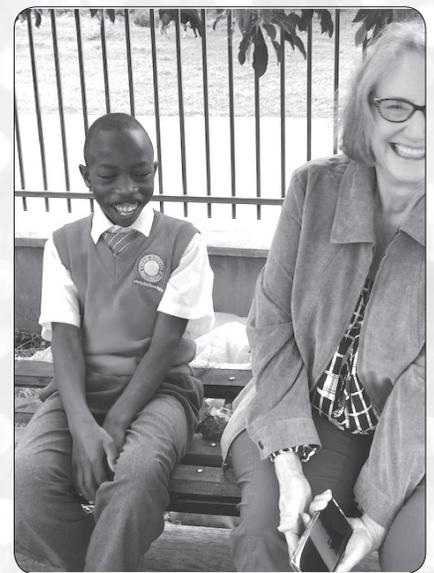
To everyone's surprise and applause, Anne started her talk with Kikuyu greetings and phrases. Then, parents rose, one by one, and thanked the Foundation for supporting their children's education. They spoke of the many times that Makena managers Charles Karanja and Francis Nijraini had personally looked after their children in times of illness or need.

One mother shared that they had been in a dark place before the Foundation came. Her eyes teared up. Makena, she said, had brought new light and hope into their lives. Still standing, she sang several verses of the song that begins:

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains  
You raise me up to walk on stormy seas  
I am strong when I am on your shoulders  
You raise me up to more than I can be....

I was then asked to say something to the group, but I was so touched by what she had shared that I barely managed to speak.

I returned from that two-week visit convinced that the Makena Foundation is having a transformative effect on the families of Maraigushu. It results from the children's hard work and success at school, the families' support of their children's work and each other, Anne's remarkably active love and concern for each child, and the ongoing competent and loving oversight offered by brothers Charles and Francis. All of this comes together as magic light in Maraigushu.



\* Note from Makena President Anne Batzer  
Sponsor Kathy Helmer accompanied me on my October working trip to Kenya. Kathy brought her background in Anthropology, her experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco, her facility with several foreign languages and her unbounded curiosity to the experience. Before departing, she read at least a dozen books on Kenyan history and culture. She enhanced every experience with her questions and insights. Kathy also contributed that great unifier: her sense of humor. Laughter — the perfect cross-cultural bridge — spilled out of every conversation she and Kenyans enjoyed together. Thank you Kathy, for sharing your thoughts.

# Keepers of the Light

By Mary Jo Baich

The light and energy that keeps the Makena Children's Foundation (MCF) on track each day in Kenya, is provided by Manager Charles Karanja and our newest volunteer, his wife Carol. As Charles says, "My job is to avail myself." And avail himself he does with a flurry of activities that fill each day. Charles visits each student every term at school. He checks on their educational progress and emotional needs as well as the condition of their uniforms, shoes and personal effects.

Charles meets with the MCF parents/guardians each month, keeping them united as a team and advising their Makena Kahuruko Self Help Group. He meets with the MCF alumni each term encouraging them in their search for jobs and recommending ideas that will keep them afloat until that job materializes.

Charles says recruiting a new child can be "heartbreaking" because there is always more than one deserving child. But when the MCF finds a willing sponsor, Charles works closely with the public schools to find a student who will succeed in the new, competitive school. Then, village elders advise Charles and help him with the difficult task of narrowing the field to the most deserving child.

His favorite part of the job is seeing the end result: despite the early trauma of losing one or both parents and living in poverty, most of our children advance through their education and succeed in fascinating careers.

MFC parents and guardians are quick to give thanks for Charles' dedication. One said: "When my daughter needed surgery, Charles was there every step of the way." Another said: "Charles has helped our family when we needed help the most. He's the wise older brother my children need."



But of course, sometimes a woman's touch is needed and this Carol willingly jumps in to provide. Carol counsels girls on hygiene and she purchases items especially needed by our girls and young women. She accompanies Charles when he visits the kids at their schools. In their homes Carol provides a Mom's insight and perspective. Carol provides another loving adult our children trust. She greatly enjoys that the kids really open up to her.

Charles and Carol are accomplishing their heart's desire, raising not only their 3 sons, Brian, Collins and Eric, but making a difference in the lives of the children of the Makena Children's Foundation. We give thanks for their perseverance and dedication!



## Fun Time on Fun Day

Our elementary students got a break from their schedule at Lizar boarding school when we took them all day Saturday to a fabulous playground in Naivasha.

They loved the bounce house, trampoline, riding toys and huge soccer field. We got to know them better. For example, we learned that Mary Wanjiku is proud she succeeds at a "high performance school." Mary Nyokabi loves science. Andrey Mungai is crazy about math. Sylvia Wambui enjoys farming, especially growing cabbages. Teresita Kabura is at her happiest when dancing on a stage. Caroline Wanjiru is tiny in stature, but hugely articulate. Harun Maina was recently elected class prefect. Collins Kamau loves "learning about God" in his Christian class. Brian Karanja's favorite book is *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

And Sharon Nyambura didn't want to talk about herself, but took the opportunity to repeatedly say, "Thank you for bringing me to a great school!"



## In Praise of Our Founder and President Emeritus, Sherri Mills

By Anne Batzer

"How is Makena?" "Give her our love!" These phrases were constants during our October working trip to Kenya. Every student and family member wanted news of our Founder, Sherri Mills. The group has always dubbed her, "Makena" — which means "Happy One" in the Kikuyu language — because of the joy she brings to this work and her quirky sense of humor. My bag coming home from Kenya was full of cards lovingly crafted and gifts thoughtfully chosen to send to her. I have always said I could never fill her shoes, but I'm grateful for the path she so magnificently cleared. Because she continues on our Board of Directors, she always makes my job easier. The scope of Sherri's legacy is emerging in the wide-ranging successes of our alumni.



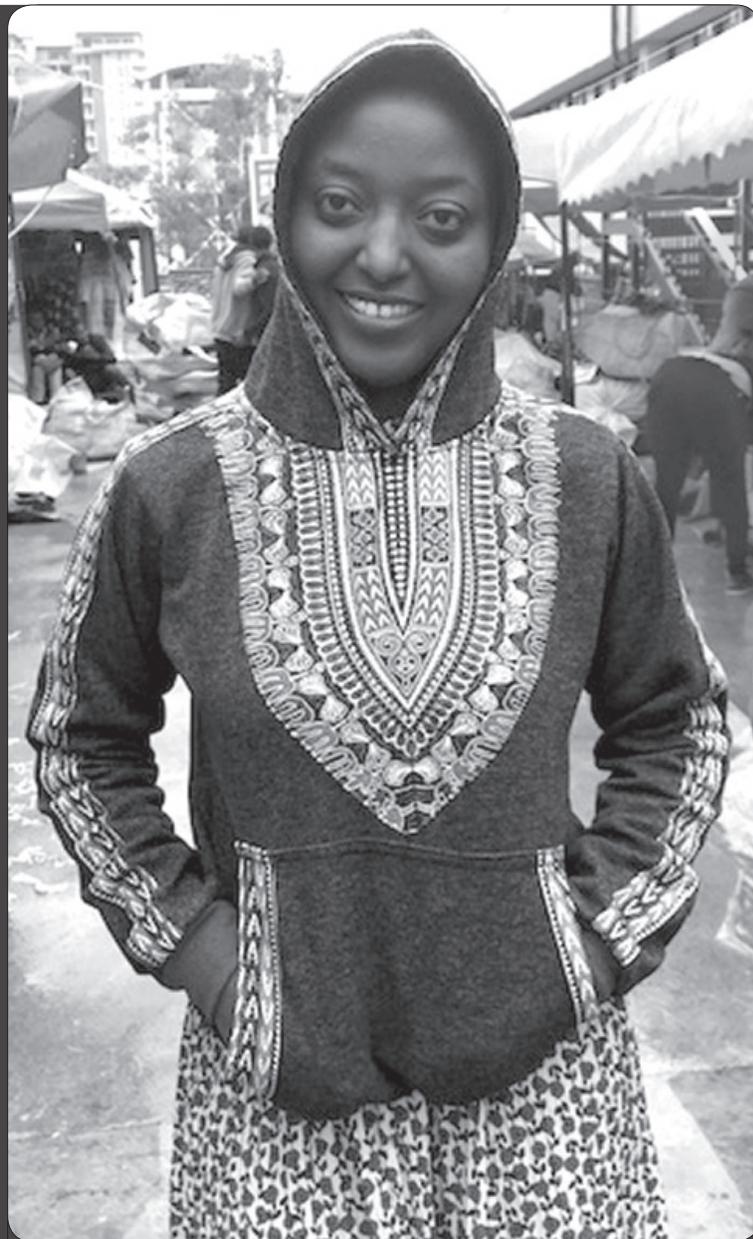
# Education = Hope

"What if you had not had an education through the Makena Children's Foundation?" That is the question Makena President Anne Batzer asked of recent university graduate, Alice Njoki. Here is her reply:

"I can't stop thinking about this question. Because of my education, my perspective about life has changed. I have met so many interesting people and been exposed to a whole different world. If the Makena Children's Foundation had not funded my education, I would have completed school in the village through class 8.

"Thinking of the lives of village girls a little older than me, including my elder sister, I would have found employment as househelp and probably been mistreated. I would have met some guy who would show me 'love' and I would fall for him. The guy gets me pregnant and, because there is no hope for a better future, he gets abusive — but I would stick with him the rest of my life. So, having an education made all the difference. Having an education has given me HOPE!"

Currently, Alice Njoki has a job in Nakuru that has allowed her to live independently. She says she loves living alone because, "I have time to reflect on my life."



**We need your financial donations to continue this life-changing work. Please send us a tax-deductible donation today.**

Make your tax-deductible donation TODAY, payable to Makena Children's Foundation, Inc.,  
711 Medford Center, #117, Medford, OR 97504.

- I wish to sponsor a Makena student 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 .

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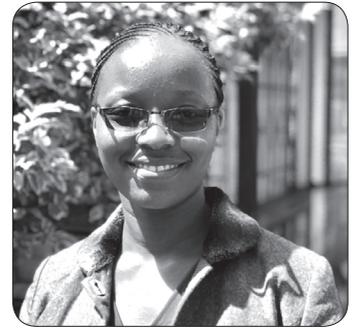
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

# Making a Difference: Our Nurses

Two Makena graduates who dreamed of being nurses are fulfilling their promise by working in fascinating, important jobs.

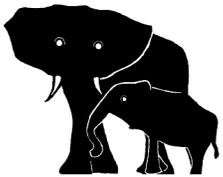
Mary Gatuku is a nurse with a faith-based organization supported by America's Center for Disease Control, the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program. She works with HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis patients. With the HIV program, she encourages testing and follows through with administering meds, sometimes on a daily basis, to those who need them. Her work involves working closely with pregnant HIV-infected women to insure that their babies are born without the virus. She also does home visits to HIV-positive patients. Mary says staff keeps testing results strictly confidential. Patiently convincing those who test positive to be honest with their partners and bring them in for testing is an important part of her job.

Njeri Nganga is the Nursing Officer for the Kenya Nut Company (KNC). This company produces macadamia nuts and beef. They are also the first Kenyan company to produce wine from their own vineyards. KNC has progressive Human Resources policies against hiring minors, against sexual harassment and is proud of the fact that their 280 employees come from many different tribes. Njeri is the nurse for them and their families. She starts her day seeing patients and then offers health trainings to employees and their families on a wide-range of topics including work safety, family planning, Cancer and stress management. Of course, she also provides first aid and treatment for any work accidents. Vineyard manager Norman Ndegwa (pictured at right with Njeri) says he is impressed with her commitment to observing all aspects of the agricultural work so she can effectively teach how to prevent work accidents and be ready to treat them when they occur.



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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.



## Congratulations, Samson!

Makena alumnus Samson Machohi (left, seen here with Makena President Anne Batzer and Manager Charles Karanja) has been awarded a Kenyan government scholarship to pursue a Master's Degree in IT. Mornings he will continue his job at the Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO). Samson is working on a World Bank funded project on the effects of climate change on Kenya's food production. Afternoons he will take his graduate classes at the University of Nairobi. We are so proud of you!



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