

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2026 Vol. 26, No. 2

JAMBO



A Message
from the
President

Anne Batzer

Our annual working trip to Kenya is always a whirlwind of emotions: *love* because of being back with treasured colleagues, our precious children, our accomplished alumni and our wise parents and guardians; *glee* because of our many successes; *determination* because of our challenges, and *sadness* because of Kenya's pervasive poverty.

These feelings often happen simultaneously, but this trip there was something more.

I was accompanied by two people who are committed to the mission of the Makena Children's Foundation (MCF) and to bringing us into an even bigger future.

Elizabeth Sesma-Olinyk and Rob Holloway, volunteers for Habitat for Humanity, traveled to Kenya last September and built a home for a family. Elizabeth and Rob expected to fall in love with Kenya's animals but, instead, they fell in love with Kenya's people and its culture. They bring extraordinary skills to this work. And they will lead us in the future.

Infinite gratitude to United Way of Jackson County's Executive Director Dee Anne Everson who brought us together!



Elizabeth (left), a retired teacher and principal, understands the role of education and its relationship to poverty.

Rob (right), with a background in international marketing, as well as in nonprofit and for-profit organizations, understands the role of MCF in both Kenya and America.

I know you'll enjoy reading their impressions of our trip.

Elizabeth and Rob are joining another new member on the Makena Board of Directors:



Bryce Smedley served nine years with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), holding senior education leadership roles in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar. Prior to federal service, Dr. Smedley held international faculty and advisory appointments across Africa and Asia, including early service in Kenya as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer. Now, he leads the Master of Arts in Teaching program at Southern Oregon University.

I'm not resigning, not yet! This transition will be organic and gradual. But I need to add another feeling to the potpourri of emotions that accompany this work: *serenity* that the Makena Children's Foundation will thrive into the future.

A Working Trip to Kenya

Elizabeth Sesma-Olinyk is retired from over 30 years of teaching and being a principal in the San Francisco Bay Area. She taught both typically developing students and those with disabilities. Elizabeth brings amazing intelligence and curiosity to this work. She understands families, children, students, schools, teaching and administering.

Rob Holloway is originally from Britain. He did marketing for Levi-Strauss, a job that brought him to America. Following that job he started and sold two companies. Rob then started a nonprofit, a dog rescue organization. Realizing he needed to make money for the nonprofit, he started a for-profit dog walking business, which he still runs.

Here are Elizabeth's and Rob's impressions of their time in Kenya for the Makena Children's Foundation:

Our first trip to Kenya representing Makena Children's Foundation was a whirlwind of activity. We were literally moving from one meeting to another, meeting alumni, students, parents and guardians and trying to keep up with the force of nature called Anne Batzer. Everything we did was a new experience so we had a steep learning curve.

Elizabeth's background is in education and Rob's background is in business and non-profits. This was helpful but we had to understand how to apply it to a Kenyan system, which was unfamiliar to us. Our goals were: meet our team and students, visit five existing and four new schools. Besides Anne, the MCF Kenyan volunteer, Charles Karanja, was amazing with his depth of knowledge and relationships with students. Charles assisted us in building our knowledge base. We are fortunate to be working with high quality schools who care for the students' welfare.

The trip provided us with some next steps: continue to explore school partnerships and build relationships with Kenyan businesses for fundraising and alumni placement. We were so impressed with what has been achieved by MCF over the past years to support Kenyan children from Nakuru County achieve greatness.

We are excited to continue our visits in subsequent years.



Elizabeth, Charles and Rob in Nairobi

TVETs Lead to Jobs

By Mary Jo Baich

Twenty years ago, with Kenya facing high unemployment, the government responded to this crisis by establishing Technical Vocation Educational Training (TVET) centers. In the first 10 years Kenya established 700 centers of learning, today there are 2,000 countrywide.

These centers canvas the needs of businesses in a given area then vocationally train the kids to meet that demand. Students learn both in class and through an attachment to a specific business toggling back and forth from classroom to business. This gives students an opportunity to use their newly learned skills in real time while the employers communicate with the schools how else they might help the student become proficient in the required job.

The centers cover a wide range of learning opportunities including electrical, mechanical, construction and restaurant work. Only a small percentage of the population can afford to finish college so the need is great to give a lifeline to young adults to earn an income that provides for their and their family's wellbeing. Surveys show that businesses prefer TVET graduates as they have the practical skills to accomplish the required work. It is this program that will move those in poverty to sustainable middle-class income providing stability to the family and satisfaction at work.



In Kenya, we spent time touring Kabarak University's TVET in Nakuru.



Alumni: Moving On

Our alumni find innovative ways to further their careers:

Our pioneer: Hannah Wanja (top left), was the first child to enter the Makena Children's Foundation. In 1995, she was 8 years old and had never been to school. What's more: she knew no English which is the language of education in Kenya! Hannah and her husband recently built a home near Nairobi where they live with their two children, Josephine and Antony. A CPA, Hannah does the accounting for Ezzi Group Company Limited, which imports paper and paper products from Egypt, Russia and the UAE.

A passionate teacher, Duncan Kahoro (top center), recently completed a year-long internship at Lizar Junior School in Naivasha. He is now educating elementary students at Acacia Ridge School. But Duncan loves the give-and-take of educating older students—he says he especially likes teaching girls "because they challenge all my ideas!" So, he continues to look for a secondary job.

Simon Maina (top right) takes a selfie with his fellow trainees at Jambojet, a Kenyan Airline. For several years Simon has worked for this airline doing all things on the ground. Now he is in their difficult-to-get-into training to be a flight attendant. This will fulfill his lifelong dream to travel. His ultimate goal is to be a pilot. With his shiny personality and history of persistence, we know he'll succeed.



"None without a gift" ...

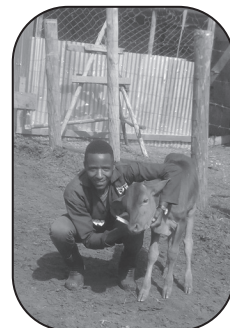
... is the way a principal at Lizar School summed up Kenya's new educational system, now called the CBE: Competency Based Education. These Lizar students, asked to send a message to America, immediately made the peace sign. From left are Margaret Njeri, Esther Wakiuru, Martin Chege and Margaret Wambura. The three on the right are all members of the Music and Drama Club which travels throughout Kenya performing in competitions with other schools. Margaret Njeri says she loves her work in the school's Debate Club.

New Makena Graduates!

We are so proud of the two young men who graduated this year. John Muiruri (top right) received his Bachelor's Degree In Hotel Management from Chuka University. Thanks to Makena's good friend, Oscar Ongalo, the Food and Beverage manager at the beautiful SOPA lodge on Lake Naivasha, the day after John's graduation ceremony he went straight into an internship program there.

Solomon Wanyoike (center & bottom right) graduated in Veterinary Medicine from Nairobi University. As part of his academic journey, he needed to personally find a one-year internship to complete his training to be a full-time Vet—making this a 5 year program. Working with large animals is Solomon's preference and he loves this work! Solomon says that keeping cows healthy for Kenyan families is his life's mission.

These Makena graduates join the 5% of Kenyans who complete higher education!



A New Campus for An Enthusiastic Student

Visiting a new campus is always exciting and spending time with Terisita Kabura, with her positive energy, heightened our experience in Kenya. Terisita is working toward her Bachelor of Science Degree in Hospitality Management at Mount Kenya University. The day we visited she was the first in her class to be chosen to direct a huge Indian meal the next day. She was excited to be responsible for the set-up, decorations, food and the service. Delicious!

Your Donations Meet Our Children's Needs!

By Mary Jo Baich

The commitment of educating a Makena child is both rewarding and challenging. Sponsors generously provide our kids with an education including tuition, room and board, books, uniforms, transportation and toiletries—but, oh, there is so much more to the challenge.

One child needs glasses, another needs dental work and still another child needs shoes. Now a few schools require laptops starting at an earlier age than was previously required. Even our high school graduates often lack lunch money as they take extra classes following graduation, but before further education.

All essential needs but how to cover these required expenses? Our donors' vital contributions help make this possible.

Would you help us meet these important needs too?



Would you help us meet these important needs too?

- \$50 buys many a lunch at \$2 a day
- \$100 buys an eye exam and glasses
- \$200 buys at least 8 pair of shoes for growing feet
- \$500 buys a laptop and a carrying case to protect it
- \$1,000 buys many uniforms after unexpected growth spurts
- \$2,000 buys lots of overnight educational field trips for our children who've never traveled

Won't you join us in continuing the Makena Mission of educating the children of Kenya?

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 \$2500 annually.
- I wish to lend a hand to the smooth operation of the Makena Children's Foundation with a gift of
\$50 \$100 \$200 \$500 \$1,000 \$2,000
- You have permission to mention my support in your publications(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 _____

Telephone _____ e-mail _____

Silly girls!

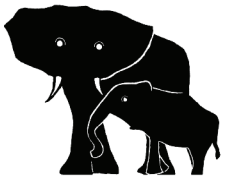
Sometimes it's not easy being the sponsored student—the poor kid—in a private school. Our Makena students form lifelong friendships with each other that are a source of support. But these high school girls tell us they also create deep bonds with other students who come from privileged homes. So beneficial for all of them!

And there is ALWAYS time for fun...



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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.

Check us out:

Makena Children's Foundation on Facebook

"What you are doing is incredible, but not enough people know about it!" is how Rob Holloway summed up his experience working with us in Kenya. So he jumped in feet first to help. His enthusiasm reveals itself in his daily Facebook posts. If you haven't read them, you are missing out. Please take a look, follow us and spread the word!



Rob Holloway with his new friend and colleague, Kenyan volunteer Charles Karanja

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