

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Fall 2026 Vol. 27, No. 3

JAMBO



A Message
from the
President

Anne Batzer

It's been an exciting summer for the Makena Children's Foundation! I have been working with Elizabeth Sesma-Olinyk and Rob Holloway who bring such a fresh perspective, full of heart, creativity and practicality. They will eventually take over for me. The extended time we are taking for this transition means only good things for our beloved organization.

My prediction: the transition will be smooth, retaining what is so special about us, but propelling us into a modern future. What could be better?



Elizabeth, with her long experience as a teacher and principal in the San Francisco Bay Area, brings her incredible understanding of the value of education to this work. But, even more, her empathy for the desperate lives of our families means she is often in tears. It's beautiful to learn from her and witness this deep caring.



Rob, with his Levi-Strauss marketing experience and his both for-profit and nonprofit business experience is already elevating our organization in so many important ways. His interest in focusing on helping our alumni get good jobs is essential as Kenya goes through even more challenging economic times.

This newsletter is too short to begin to describe all that is happening, but I know you will relish reading about our four new students. For much more information, please check out Rob's daily Facebook posts and the beautifully written Substack posts from Makena Board of Director's member Bryce Smedley.

Enjoy!

Announcing our New Makena Family Members

Four brilliant fourth grade children have just joined the Makena family. We are so pleased for you to meet them:



Abigael Wanjiru comes from a family that cannot even name the last time they could afford to have breakfast. Abigael knows well the pangs of hunger and she has witnessed alcoholism and mental illness in the community. She misses her brother because he lives elsewhere in Kenya with his father. In spite of these unimaginable hardships, Abigael shines academically.



Victor Gatheru has lived some of his life homeless because his devoted mother cannot always pay the rent. A widow, Victor's mother understands the value of education. She has lobbied the public school to refrain from sending her two children home because she cannot pay tuition. Sometimes she works in the school's farm in order to pay these school fees. Victor is quiet and very focused on academics.



Bianca Nyambura lives with her grandmother ever since her mother's death. Teachers at her public school share food with her since she comes to school not having had breakfast and bringing no lunch. One dinner a day is all the grandmother can offer to all her children and grandchildren. Because of this lack of nutrition, Bianca is tiny—but bold in sharing her opinions and jovial with her outlook on life.



Victor Kamau lives with his very old grandparents who are doing their best to raise four grandchildren. Victor's mother lives in Nairobi's slums and works as a "house help" in its suburbs. She sends home any money she makes and is the sole support of this family. In spite of her worries, Victor's grandmother has a great sense of humor. Victor's teachers say he absolutely loves school.



These four students will start their Makena journey at Destiny Premier Academy. Known for its stellar academic record, Destiny is a joyful, nurturing environment mainly because of Principal Charles Miano. His career includes teaching stints at two schools where we have previously placed Makena students, so he understands our children's needs. We can't wait for you to follow these four students as they grow into who they are meant to be!



The new students and their families enjoyed touring their new school.



They loved sampling the harvest from Destiny's garden.



(Left) Abigael and Bianca are all smiles when trying on their new uniforms.



(Right) Victor G. and Victor K. are proud of their new sports uniforms.

Persistence Pays Off!

By Mary Jo Baich

It takes determination to get a college degree in Kenya but it takes real pluck and courage to land a job. Peris Gitundu has plenty of each.

Makena alumnus Peris graduated from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology. Fearlessly she moved to Nairobi after graduation despite not having any job. Peris opened “Her Wardrobe”, a thrift shop selling clothing, which reflected her personal style, to university students. The business thrived, teaching her independence and resilience. When the pandemic hit she paused her business and got an internship with the Coffee Directorate for a year. Following this employment Peris returned to her thrift clothing business, adding a juice bar next door. During this time Peris gave birth to her daughter Anayah, but all the while she looked for permanent employment. Closing the other businesses to spend time with her daughter, she started an enterprise raising poultry.

And then it happened: she was given an internship at her former university where she worked hard showing she was a problem solver and a team player. After the year’s contract she returned to Naivasha to stay with her mother and daughter, but with great persistence she applied every month for another job at the university, and it paid off. Peris was hired to be a Crop Technician at the university’s farm. She is responsible for crop establishment, crop monitoring, irrigation management, marketing and data recording. Peris has a lively personality exhibiting great curiosity. She loves learning and is always seeking new ways to grow personally and professionally.



High Peak Schools

By Elizabeth Sesma-Olinyk

Sponsors have supported four students that now attend High Peak Schools (Martin Chege/10th grade, Margaret Njeri/10th grade, Margaret Wambura/ 8th grade and Esther Wakiuru/10th grade) since they were in primary school. They began their third term (in Kenya they are called semesters) in September. Their school calendar begins in January and ends in November. This is a different time frame than American schools.

High Peak provides students with a full schedule of classes, physical education, tutoring support and of course field trips. All four students are doing well in their studies. During their second semester our tenth grade students participated in a field trip to Mount Longonot, a dormant volcano rising 9,100 feet in the Rift Valley that provides magnificent views of this breathtaking valley. As young, fit people they were able to climb to the top in 2 hours and descend in 45 minutes. Oh, to be young and energetic!!

While the climb was fun they also learned about the geology that formed Mount Longonot. Our High Peak students were filled with wonder during their field trip along the caldera of Mount Longonot. Makena makes sure that our sponsored students participate in as many extra curricular activities and field trips as possible.

Makena Alumni Club

By Elizabeth Sesma-Olinyk

We are proud of all of our students’ successes, but we could not be happier to have such an amazing alumni. These adults have completed or are completing their university or trade school degrees, they are employed or seeking employment, but they still have time to meet with each other during the year.

This past spring the Makena Alumni Club met to focus on mentorship, learning from each other and making connections. For the first time, they also invited Makena senior students in high school to join their meeting. This gave the seniors an opportunity to see the power of supporting each other in school and the transition to employment.

The Makena Alumni Club has identified projects to give back to their community. They believe that having been supported by others, they, in turn, should support others in need. Joseph Njoroge. and Martha Waithira visited Sunshine Rehabilitation Center, an orphanage for youth that have had challenges through addiction. Their goal is to have the alumni club visit the center, donate food and supplies, play games with the students and provide some mentorship. Their commitment to giving back is a wonderful example of the leadership, compassion, and sense of community that we hope to inspire in all of our students.

You can see why we are so proud of them!!



Short-term Sponsors Needed

Because of a sponsor’s serious illness, two of our best students no longer have support.

Students Caroline Wanjiru and Andrey Mungai will both graduate from top high schools this December. Caroline will leave Happyland; Andrey leaves Rockfields.

The good news: both need an annual \$2,500 sponsorship for only 3 or 4 more years. This will get them through their post-high school education.

A little history: It took intervention from local officials, prompted by our lead Kenyan volunteer Charles Karanja, to prevent domestic violence in Caroline’s family after her parents separated. Safe now, her mother works as a casual farm laborer whenever she can find a job. Caroline hopes to pursue education in the legal field.

Andrey Mungai’s father died when he was a young boy. His mother also works as a casual farm laborer to support her three children. Often, there is not enough food to feed the family. Andrey hopes to pursue education in the medical field.

Are you able to support one or both of these amazing young people? Perhaps you could join with family members or friends to sponsor one or both of these students.

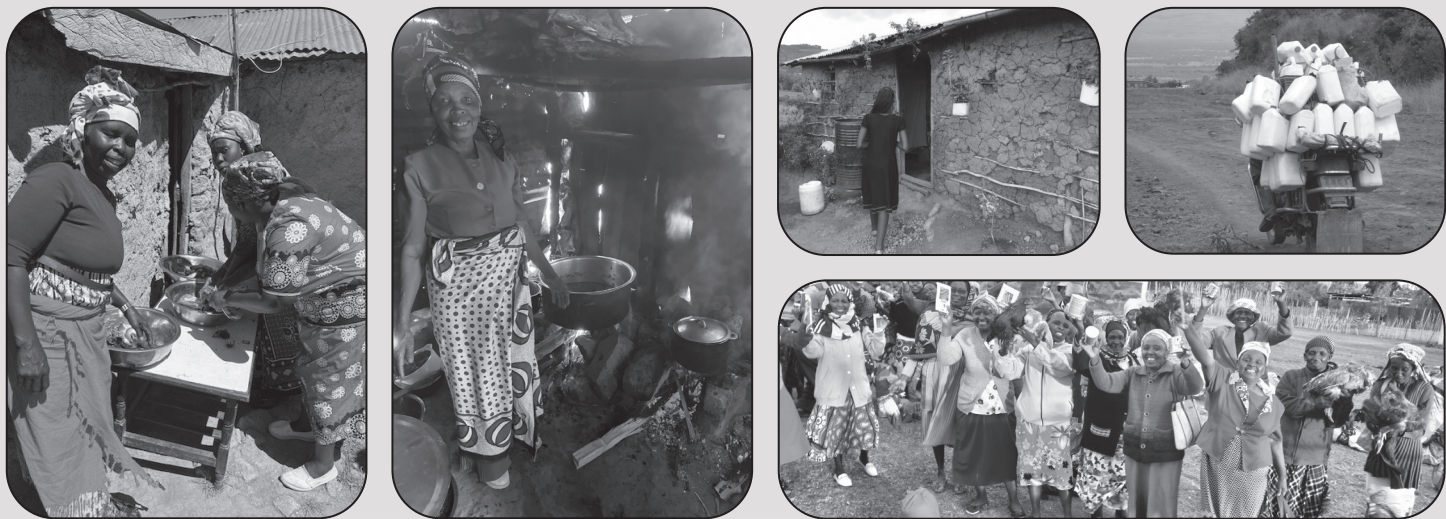
If you have questions, contact Anne at annebatzer@aol.com or call 503 957-3451.

Thank you!

Sometimes Statistics Say It All

50% of Kenya's 55 million residents live in poverty	46% of Kenyans earn less than \$3.00 a day	40% unemployment rate	46% of Kenyans complete high school	5% of Kenyans have a university degree
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In our Makena families: over 54% live in homes made of mud and animal dung, there is no running water, now 35% have "electricity:" this means a small solar panel that powers one or two lightbulbs!



We know that education is the most sustainable path out of poverty.
It is only through donations that we are able to cover the rising costs of inflation.

Please donate what you can!!
Thank you.

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 _____

We are on Facebook!

By Rob Holloway

Our Facebook page is now the best way to stay up to date with our students and everything Makena. You can see us here:
<https://www.facebook.com/MakenaChildrensFoundation/>

Please click the "Follow" button and you'll get all the news as it happens. Just this month we have covered the selection of our 4 newest students and their trip to their new school, with many photos. You can see them trying on their new uniforms and touring their school with their parents. It's lovely!

Every day there is a new story. We hope you'll check in and support us. Thank you.

Right: An example of a short Facebook post from June 19

Below: excerpt from recent Substack post



The Measure of Small Things

Mary Jo Baich, Sherri Mills,
and the friendship behind Makena Children's Foundation

The wave was meant as hello. Daniel Kimani, five years old and shy, was riding up front in a Land Rover somewhere in Kenya when he took it as an invitation. He climbed out of his seat and into Mary Jo Baich's lap. Sherri Mills was sitting beside her.

And We are on Substack!!

By Bryce Smedley

For years, Makena Musings has shared Makena's news: a student entering school, a graduation, a first job, a photograph, a message sent home years later. It will continue. Our new Substack gives us room to stay with those stories longer, to ask what came before the photograph and what happened next.

I joined Makena this year, but my connection to Kenya began years ago, when I served there as a Peace Corps volunteer. I learned to listen first. A diploma records an achievement. It cannot capture everything that made it possible. Makena's history shows us why. Hannah Wanja Karuku entered school at eight, earned an accounting degree from Kenyatta University, and became an accountant. John Njoroge joined Makena while beginning to learn English and later graduated from Embu University with a degree in agriculture. Neither story belongs to one person alone. Families, teachers, Kenyan staff, sponsors, friendships, setbacks, and years of work helped carry them forward.

Those are the stories we want to tell on Substack. We will hear from students and graduates, return to people readers may remember from Makena Musings, and introduce others whose stories rarely fit inside a photograph or caption.

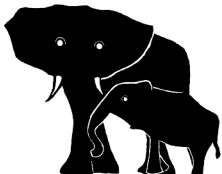
If you are on Substack, we invite you to follow us. Here's the link:

<https://makenachildrensfoundation.substack.com/>

We want to know what happened beyond the photograph: who went to school, who helped them get there, and where life took them next.

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Medford, OR 97504

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.

English, please

In January when we arrived at the parent/guardian meeting, we were greeted by these wonderfully curious children. Anne asked the boy on the left, "Do you say Jambo ("Hello" in Swahili) or do you say Muriega ("Hello" in Kikuyu)? The boy rolled his eyes, looked at Anne and said, "We just say 'Hi'!"



Please help us modernize

Send your email address and phone number to annebatzer@aol.com or rob@pupwalks.com. Thanks!

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