

Suitcases for Africa Annual Report 2017

In 2017 Suitcases for Africa was privileged to once again be working with our great team on the ground in Western Kenya. Our colleague Susan Nanjala is a very experienced administrator. As a highly trained healthcare counselor and social worker, Susan has, over the course of many years, overseen numerous projects which have improved the lives and wellbeing of so many. Together with the SFA Executive, Board members and Administrator, we made a conscious decision to focus most of our available funding on **Education in 2017**. The **Educational Sponsorship Program** is one of our finest, long term commitments. We feel it will have a far reaching effect on the future of these young people.

Through this program in 2017, 60 children received the opportunity to attend school. As orphans or vulnerable children living in poverty they would not have had the funds necessary. Each child received a school uniform, books, school supplies and money to pay for exam fees. Another important component of support is the provision of a daily nutritious meal at noon. This improved the student's ability to focus and do better at their schoolwork. It also took some pressure off their caregiver or family with one less mouth to feed. Female students also received monthly sanitary supplies of pads and underwear so they did not have to remain at home and miss school. This is often the case for girls in developing countries. We are excited to now be seeing children who started this program in 2012 beginning to graduate thanks to the love and support of their Canadian sponsors.

In 2016 we began a **Special Emergency Educational Fund** to assist those children in the sponsorship program who suddenly encountered crisis situations. There are many such unexpected challenges or events beyond their control. These may include a health crisis, abuse, abandonment, violence or danger within their home or community. In 2017 those special funds helped several children to stay safe and remain within the SFA program. In some cases children had to be removed from their homes for their safety but are still funded and part of our safety net.

The children benefit from the extensive experience of Susan and her assistant Esther who have knowledge of the community healthcare and local support systems available in each case by case situation. Even in the worst cases this support made for very positive outcomes. Our administrator showed great sensitivity, compassion and moral support for the children. She also locates the children most in need when a new SFA sponsor arises.

The team of Wendy and Michele visited the SFA projects in April/May of 2017 and met with Susan, Esther and the children in the program. It was a delightful visit with letters to and from their sponsors exchanged. The children were very excited to receive their letters which are often colourful and contain photos of snow, pets or a sponsor's family. A day of celebration followed with the children reading their own poems or enacting skits and singing songs. Food and special treats were shared by all. The children also enjoyed the donated crayons and colouring books as did their caregivers! The many soccer balls were also a big hit.

While in Kenya the team visited with members of other SFA funded community projects for follow-up on their progress. They spent time learning the ropes at the Chevoso Posho Mill meeting many community members who came out to celebrate. The Shitochi Goat Project is still thriving and expanding with the birth of healthy new kids and the team got to enjoy them in person and hands-on. The team were unable to visit the Maisha Mapya Cow Project but it was reported that the group is doing very well. It was heartening to learn that our Masha Mapya members are hoping to inspire other groups to form and follow their dream by using the same approach that was used in the formation and development of our group.

Wendy and Michele also managed to visit some other NGO's working in Nairobi while in Kenya. Heshima, which means dignity in Swahili, is a facility for severely disabled children and their mothers. While the children receive their much needed therapy sessions the mothers are employed to make beautiful jewelry which is sold to help provide an income for their families. The team also visited the Hanne Howard Foundation which offers a safe and secure space for children from neighbouring slums.

The foundation provides shelter for approximately 40 students including meals for them and other drop in students. They also provide assistance with homework and life skills. Both facilities were very inspirational and a joyful experience. Some of what was learned and observed will possibly be implemented or of benefit in our own future initiatives.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers and donors who made this work possible in 2017. Suitcases for Africa is 100% volunteer based and we rely on the support of local community groups, churches, schools and individuals to help us fund these great projects. SFA is the connection between our two continents and communities. We feel privileged to make real change for those we serve through that connection. Thank you for caring.

Darlene Anderson

President, Suitcases for Africa