

Suitcases for Africa Annual Report 2020

Annual Team Visit to Kenya Feb/March 2020

The year 2020 started like any other year for SFA with planning for the annual visit to Kenya by our team. The plan was to oversee the completion of some projects and to participate in the celebrations of other recent projects within the communities we assist. Like the rest of the world we did not know this would be a year unlike any other. Covid 19 was brewing in China and it was a mere whisper of concern at this point. The trip was a very enjoyable and successful one. **Two SFA Water Projects** were wrapping up with the final stages of installation when the team of Wendy and Michele arrived in February of 2020.

Kicker Academy is an Early Childhood school serving 90 young children whose struggling parents would not otherwise be able to afford to educate their children. SFA funded a desperately needed water tower for storage. Pipes were installed to run the water to a large sink with taps for the children. At the time we did not then know how even more important and life- saving handwashing was about to become. An enjoyable celebration and snack ensued and was a highlight for the children. Thanks to the success of our Christmas Card Gift Campaign we were able to purchase 150 mosquito nets to distribute to all the staff and students at the school as well as some community members.

The team also visited and observed the completion of the well in the community of **Shamoni**. Wendy and Michele really enjoyed the singing and dancing that was held in celebration of now having clean accessible water for so many people.

Next on the calendar was taking part in the **Jigger Treatment Project** being conducted by “Volunteer Jigger Africa” This was organized by director Martin Acheru.

SFA was able to raise funds through a special Christmas Card Campaign in late 2019 to provide a new pair of shoes for each of the 271 children in the project. Treatment for this painful and debilitating parasitic infection changed the lives of so many. The shoes will protect their feet from re-infestation and allow them to return to a more normal pain free life.

The annual celebration with the students in our **Educational Sponsorship Program** was the last official event of the trip. The current 50 students are drawn from several districts in the Kakamega region. The students receive school uniforms, all school and exam fees, educational supplies and a very important nutritious meal each day at noon. Our dedicated sponsors have provided over 80 children with educational support since the program began in 2010. They also exchange supportive letters that the children delight in. A highlight of the day was the return of some former student graduates in the program who counseled and shared their successes with the younger children. It was an inspiring moment for the children and all of our SFA members! Before saying goodbye to our colleagues a wrap up session was highlighted by a delicious lunch that Wendy and Michele prepared as a thank you to our team. Susan presented reports on all of our projects showing how well they are functioning.

Impact of Covid 19 on SFA IN 2020

The visit to Kenya was completed and Wendy and Michele returned to Canada on the 10th of March just ahead of the explosion of Covid19 across the entire world. On the 12th of March country after country went into full lockdown. Schools closed and people were quarantined in the effort to contain the spread of the virus. Canada was no exception. The lockdown effectively ended the ability to fundraise for SFA. All of our planned events were cancelled and our funds were greatly impacted. We estimate our funds were reduced by 70 % of any normal year. Fortunately the majority of our education sponsors were able to continue their support despite financial stresses of their own due to Covid 19. SFA's Board of Directors decided to put all of our remaining funds for 2020 toward maintaining our Educational Sponsorship Program throughout this crisis.

We needed to ensure support continued for these children who had worked so hard and come so far. Their world was already upended and family and social chaos was evident all around them. All new projects were put on hold indefinitely so we could maintain that program at all cost. It was a huge challenge for our administrators to cope with the impact of Covid19 on our Kenyan students and on our communities. People already marginalized and struggling day to day saw their meager income sources evaporate. Schools closed and children were at home and often unattended at times. Conflicts and social upheaval took a toll on life. Our administrators had many sleepless nights worrying that our girl students could be one of the statistics. Increases were seen in teen pregnancies and forced child marriages. Family violence and suicides increased among young people who lost hope in their futures. Through their tireless efforts Susan and Esther linked with key persons by phone and tracked down the children wherever possible. They maintained communication with practical, moral and emotional support. Some of the children were scattered to relatives. Two were as far away as Nairobi. Ground workers made unannounced visits to homes of the children within reach and counseled them to remain cautious and avoid groups that could derail them. They were encouraged to continue to study at home despite very limited resources. As restrictions eased they were able to meet with small groups of the children hoping to keep them motivated to stay in school. Only 2 of our girls became pregnant. During the lockdown Susan even managed to ensure the continued delivery of SFA funded sanitary supplies for the girls.

We are very grateful to have had loyal, hardworking and determined colleagues on the ground during this year like no other. We are happy to have survived the year financially as a charitable organisation. This crisis has been a challenge to all charities and we owe our survival to our amazing supporters. We do not know what 2021 will bring but we are optimistic that we are on the road to recovery. The awareness that we are all connected has never been more evident!

Thank you to all who make this work possible.

Darlene Anderson, President SFA

Wendy Buchanan, Treasurer SFA