

Suitcases for Africa Annual Report Covid years 2021-2022

As reported in the Annual Report for 2020, the whole world was upended in March 2020 by the surprise arrival of the corona virus now referred to as Covid 19. No country was spared the great loss of life, the fear, despair and chaos it brought with it. Kenya was impacted greatly with fewer resources to cope with the challenges faced in the struggling rural communities where SFA works. Our ability to fundraise was also shut down as everyone went into lock down and social isolation became mandatory. Our normal activities hosting events in schools and churches and communities in Canada were no longer possible.

We decided as a Board to focus our work and available funds during this unprecedented time on maintaining the Educational Sponsorship Program. Over the years from the program's inception in 2010 with only 15 children, we managed to increase the number of students assisted to 83. We were determined to continue to support the 46 children who still remained in the program despite the turmoil of covid.

Originally the program hoped to help these children complete Primary school (grade 8). This level of education had little prospect of happening for the most - needy of children without the subsidies provided by our SFA sponsors. During the first few years the children had to adjust and some struggled very hard to catch up. Soon they began to flourish with the support of their sponsors and the encouragement of our administrators in Kenya. We watched as the children moved up through Primary School and then on to High School. The bond was strong between students and sponsors some of whom offered to continue their same monthly donation to help the children continue with post -secondary education. We have been excited to see some enter trade schools and recently even universities. Our administrator Susan told us in 2021 that three students said " They were going to make history in their respective families for being the only ones in their family to make it to form 4 "(grade 4)

This was something they never expected in their lives. Despite the many challenges along the way SFA, their sponsors and our administrators in Kenya journeyed along with them from childhood to adulthood. Covid 19 and the lockdowns would add immensely to the difficulties they faced in 2021 & 2022.

SFA tried to be creative to continue to fundraise where possible. Our supporters helped in any way they could.

In 2021 we held a few socially distanced events, for example the plants in our annual garden sale were posted on line and people made appointments to view them one by one outdoors and masked! We set up our bake sales and soup sales and Christmas Market with one way flow of direction and space between shoppers who were also masked.

Remarkably, despite Canadians having so many financial struggles of their own, our sponsorship families held fast and the children were still able to receive support. Families and school children in Kenya continued throughout 2021 and 2022 to go through many challenges that destabilized their lives. These included gender- based violence, child marriages, teenage pregnancies, substance abuse and alcoholism. Families became separated. Workers lost their jobs when industries closed down. Suicide became rampant among adults and even some children. Psychological problems increased as people lost hope in their future. Our administrators took inventory of the children in our program and worked very hard addressing all of the difficulties along the way. Some of our children took jobs such as becoming motorbike taxi drivers (Boda boda drivers) Some had a hard time being convinced to return to school. Some were sent far away to other relatives around the country due to family breakdown. They had to be tracked down, some as far away as Nairobi, and then encouraged to return and complete their studies.

We are very proud of and grateful for the way our Kenyan team worked with such great commitment to help these children. Two young girls became pregnant but were followed and received counseling to come back to school after the births of their babies. The schools reopened January 2021 and that school year ran until May 2021. The curriculum was compressed. The government said there was to be no repeating of classes which put a lot of pressure on the students and their teachers. As a result of so much societal breakdown, some schools in Kenya were torched by students and the parents were then held responsible for rebuilding of them. Fortunately, none of our students were affected by those issues.

During the school year of 2021 the students in our program were as follows; 2 at university, 6 at colleges and trades, 1 in the seminary for priesthood, 24 in high school and 7 in primary school. Two graduated from trades in auto mechanics and hospitality & catering. That this was even possible was thanks to Susan and Esther who accomplished so much despite it all.

In the school year 2022 the list of our students showed even more to celebrate. They were moving up in their educational achievements as follows;

2 studying at university for teaching degrees, 1 Seminarian,
7 in Trades (such as health services, electrician, mechanical engineering,
plant operation, health records, civil engineering and water engineering)
21 in High School and 5 in Primary School.

We would like to thank all of our supporters and well wishers for their kindness and caring in sharing the goals of Suitcases for Africa. You continue to make a difference in rural Western Kenya after so many years and in ways we could never have imagined. Together we have met many challenges. Covid19 was a very big one. We are still here and still committed to helping these students complete their education as far as possible. We know it will change the direction of their lives and those of their families and communities. Thank you for being our partners on this journey!

Darlene Anderson, President
Wendy Buchanan, Treasurer
Suitcases for Africa