



MJI WA NEEMA (HOUSE OF HOPE) ORPHANAGES NEWSLETTER

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Anne Mitchell reports



Saidia

Saidia Childrens Home

I've just come back full of news after a visit to the Orphanages. In the last Newsletter we were just starting Saidia, the orphanage at Gilgil. Children were arriving fast, and there was a drought which was making life very difficult for the community. The area is still very dry indeed (though there was a bit of rain, the first for months, while I was there). In spite of the difficulties, the local community volunteered to supply the food for the orphanage for January. On Sunday when I was there a young man with holes in his shoes arrived with a carrier bag of food for the children.

Plenty of progress

A huge amount of work has been done since I was last out. I arrived to find the building with a big sign on it, 'Saidia Children's Home'. There is a brand new gate, vegetables growing on one side of the drive and on the other a bit of grass with a seesaw, made by a young couple who visited. The seesaw was covered with children clambering around and laughing. They all came running up to greet us. What a wonderfully happy atmosphere and what a first impression! I visited the orphanage almost every day and was so impressed by it all. The staff are loving and caring and the children also look after each other with the big ones keeping an eye on the smaller ones. The staff at the local primary school commented that, whenever one of our children was upset or in difficulties the others would immediately come to help and that they also did the same for other children in the school.

I had been asked to buy a present for Peter from his sponsor. We decided that the best thing to do was to buy a football and to put Peter in charge of looking after it.

Much has been done to the building but there is still more to do when we have the funds. The floors need to be re-surfaced, the guttering and water tanks are not quite complete and some of ceilings are in need of repair – but we'll get there. There isn't a great deal of furniture and much of what there is has been lent to us by Jane de Nuthia who has been such a stalwart and manages all the officialdom and also keeps the accounts and oversees everything.

We do need to try to get more furniture made in due course and, more urgently, we need to get a more reliable water system to the building. There already is a pipe from which we have permission to take a branch to our building.



Seesaw

Great news!

But we have great news. We now own the plot next to the orphanage thanks to Daniela Kratz who organised a collection from the staff at Deutsche Shell in Germany. The staff gave what they would have spent on Christmas presents to each other to us and with the money we now have the plot. Jane owns the plot next to that one and has said that the orphanage can have full use of that too. The first thing is to fence the whole area and the money for that has been raised by a collection in a church in San Francisco organised by Karen Ande. Once that is done, sisal, a plant with very sharp prickles, will

be planted right round the plot so that it is completely secure. Then a door will be made in the orphanage wall as the entrance for the garden area. The plot is large enough for a good-sized vegetable garden, a chicken coop and run and some space for rabbits. These will all help to feed the children and give them the chance to learn to care for them. And of course there will be plenty of space for a playground and to run about. All we need now is to get the money!



Some of the kids

There are a few chickens in the orphanage now but they are being kept in a dark room which is not ideal. One of the children, Kanyari, was given a rabbit and two babies which he loved and looked after. Sadly, the mother and one baby were stolen and the other one is now living with Jill's rabbits at her home. Kanyari came to stay at Jill's one weekend and was able to see his rabbit again. His face was a picture when he got it from the hutch to give it a cuddle. He also helped look after the sheep and geese as well as the rabbits. Kanyari is going to stay there in the holidays and learn how to care for all the animals which will give him some very useful skills for later on.

Schools and skills

Although all the children are going to primary school, they will not all pass the exam to attend secondary school. Last year there were over 3000 children in Kenya who did pass and who were unable to get places. Many of our children have had a very late start and malnutrition in their early years has left its mark. The aim is to make sure that



The nursery classroom

everyone leaves the orphanage with the some skills to enable them to earn a living. Jill is trying to arrange for someone to teach the girls to mend clothes and also to give some of them work experience in a local hairdresser's. The children will be taught to look after the chickens and rabbits when we get them and they already help with chores. All wear shoes to school but many take them off as soon as they get home (they are not used to wearing them). Shoe cleaning materials are going to be made available and the children will then learn to clean and look after their shoes.

New cookers

Just before I arrived Jill had been given some money to buy solar cookers. These are wooden boxes lined with aluminium with a glass top and a hinged solar panel as the lid. The solar panel can be positioned to catch the direct sunlight which beams down into the box. Saucepans are painted black with blackboard paint to absorb the heat. The food is put into the boxes early in the morning and is then ready by lunchtime.



Solar cookers

Stews are the easiest to cook but the cookers will also bake bread and biscuits and boil water for kettles. The big secret is not to open the boxes at all

during cooking which the staff found quite difficult at the start. We all like to stir and taste while cooking. Can't do that with solar cookers! The big advantage of these cookers is that less wood and charcoal will be necessary. Both charcoal and wood are expensive and the cookers will both reduce our bills and help the environment.

The Outreach for Grannies Project

This is a project we have started to help destitute Grannies in the community to make items to sell in order to support themselves and the children in their care. It is going very well thanks to Teresa who has put in so much work into finding the grannies and assessing their needs. They are working very hard making 'kiondos' the traditional sisal Kikuyu bags and are now enjoying having a little money from their work. The bags that have been brought over here have sold very quickly. The next idea is to decorate leather 'flip flop' sandals with the beading which is traditional in some of the tribes as decoration and to sell them too.



Making kiondos

I went out with Teresa to visit three grannies who live about two kilometres from Gilgil in an extremely dry area. A local farmer let them stay in a corner of a plot where they have been allowed to build a shack from bits of corrugated iron and discarded boards. They have no water on site and have to walk some distance to fetch it each day.

Two of the children have an uncle who is an alcoholic and a bachelor and isn't able to look after them. One of the grannies used to make bags in her younger days and also remembers the various plants they used to dye the sisal. She was busy teaching the other two how to twist the sisal and is going to collect the leaves she needs and they will dye the sisal in small saucepans over their fire.

The dye they make will be used for all the bags, including those made by the grannies in Gilgil itself. These grannies are destitute and very excited at the thought of making a little money to support themselves and the children.



Finished bags

Another group lives in a shanty area of Gilgil and they come to the orphanage each week to make bags, have a chat and a cup of tea. One of them sold her plot up country and bought this small one in Gilgil. She has let several others each build a small hut on the land and they live there rent free. Virginia, one of this group, is over 80 and is looking after two great-grandchildren having lost both her children and grandchildren to AIDS.

Teresa is also helping the outreach children in other ways. For example, two of the children have a grandfather living out in the country. She has been to see him to ask that the children are not forgotten and get their share of his plot when he dies.

Mji wa Neema

Our aim is to set up, support and run facilities for AIDS orphans until the local community is able to take over. And we are delighted to have had our first success. Mji wa Neema orphanage in Naivasha is now being managed entirely by the local community. It has received a substantial grant from the Kenya government and also from a church in the United States. We stepped in and helped with food when the drought was at its worst and, until January, we paid the staff salaries. We shall still, of course, be there if we are needed.



Recent Fund-Raising Events

Murder Mystery Evening raised £295

Future Events:

Drop in meal with authentic Kenyan cooking Quiz

Thanks to:

The staff of Deutsche Shell for the plot of land
Karen Ande's Church for the fencing
Everyone who has supported us

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