



Christmas Newsletter

Seasons Greetings!

Welcome to our Christmas newsletter.

2008 has been a challenging year for AfCiC! We have helped hundreds of acutely vulnerable children and their families off the streets through the generous support of our friends, but many more remain on the fringes of Kenyan society in desperate need of assistance.

Horrific post election violence destroyed the social fabric of Kenya in January – March 2008. Over 1000 people were killed and over 300,000 displaced in tragic ethnic violence. Houses were burnt, property and businesses destroyed and many lives lost. Farms were abandoned as people sought safety in towns and their ancestral homes, food prices escalated beyond the reach of poor families and tourists stopped visiting; leading to a rapid increase in unemployment.

This all left the Kenyan economy in a critical situation and tragically, after many years of progress, poverty levels have significantly increased this year. AfCiC has worked tirelessly to protect the most vulnerable in Thika: children, to ensure that our good work is not undone and that new children have not been forced into street life because of these new circumstances.

AfCiC is a very small, but highly effective organisation, providing community based sustainable solutions to impoverished families in Thika District, Kenya. We try to ensure that

penny we are given directly benefits the children we aim to serve – but this also means that we don't send newsletters as often as we should due to lack of administrative support! Next year we hope to have a communications volunteer to help us with this mission!



Some of our new recruits at our Interim Care Centre for Street Children in Thika Town October 2008

In this newsletter we will reflect over two new projects established this year – one in response to the post election crisis (Internally Displaced Children's Support Programme), the other planned to ensure ostracised and disadvantaged young people have the opportunity, means and skills to educate others through theatre advocacy (Hear Our Voice). You can also read about two of the wonderful children we are assisting through our programmes and reflect on the experiences of a member of staff, local volunteer and international volunteer this year.

We would have achieved nothing without **you** our supporters. Please know the incredible difference you are making to many lives. Please continue

to support this vital work in any way
that you can and please come and visit
us soon in Thika!

Yours truly,
Eleanor Harrison
Director
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A New Business: A New Start



Mercy Wangui & family after their house was burnt down in Molo

A disputed General Election led to ethnic violence on a scale never witnessed before in Kenya.

Some of this violence was planned prior to the election during intense political campaigns; some of the violence was spontaneous, following the muddled announcement of election results. Kikuyus living outside Central Province were targeted for brutal attacks, alongside Kisii and other perceived economically successful communities. Many lost their lives, businesses and homes and fled to relatives and hastily set up camps.

Vicious retaliation attacks by Kikuyus against Kalenjin, Luos and Luhyas then began in late January, and Kenya felt close to civil war in early February. In Thika we had an IDP camp in the local stadium and many Luo and Luhya families crowded the police stations at night. Fear permeated everyone's actions. Some of our own staff were attacked but we managed to rescue them and get them to safety.

A tenuous peace was brokered by former UN boss Kofi Annan and a team of international mediators, and a truce was established in March. Mwai Kibaki remained as President, but Raila Odinga, the opposition leader, became Prime Minister. The Grand Coalition Government was formed and the Government bloated overnight, doubling

Cabinet Ministers and the costs associated with them.

As the economy deteriorated, MPs continued to pay themselves hefty tax-free allowances and enjoy an affluent lifestyle whilst their constituents could not afford even a loaf of bread.

Tensions remain and problems have not been resolved. The roots of the violence lie in high youth urban unemployment in slum communities; lack of access to pastoral and arable land; high levels of social inequalities and perceptions about the dominance and corruption of the Kikuyu tribe. Land and unemployment are the two most important issues. These are yet to be addressed. If they are not addressed, there will sadly be more violence and more lives will be lost unnecessarily.

6000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and their families fled to Thika District, considered a safe haven for the many Kikuyus living in Rift Valley and Western Province. Action for Children in Conflict was inundated with desperate pleas for assistance from families fleeing the violence with little more than the clothes they were wearing. We worked closely with the District Commissioner for Thika District, Thika Red Cross, the local business community, and all other interested parties. We quickly realised that our funds were not sufficient to provide relief assistance to all those affected and that our expertise lies in ensuring genuine access to education and developing new sustainable economic opportunities for impoverished families, alongside professional counselling and legal aid.

To meet these new needs, we launched an Emergency Appeal in February resulting in additional funds of £7500 being dedicated to our work with IDPs. After conducting an in-depth needs assessment in April and May, we launched a unique business loan scheme for IDP families, to enable them to get back on their feet as quickly as possible. We assessed their

business skills, training requirements and home environments.

Following the formation of IDP groups and business training workshops, we distributed loans to 78 IDP families through this programme.

We have a 100% repayment rate on our loans and many businesses are flourishing despite the bad economic situation. Inevitably there are many more families in desperate need of our help, but we are doing what we can with the limited funds we have.

We also purchased and distributed school uniform to over 200 children following consultation with their families and local schools, to enable them to return to school and not miss out on primary education. We have also assisted 20 vulnerable girls with small school fee bursaries to enable them to continue in secondary school. Many families have benefited from emergency medical assistance to prevent treatment plans for serious conditions from being undone (i.e. HIV/AIDS).

We are extremely concerned about the future for the many more families who have not been able to access support from an NGO or the Government; a new underclass could be developing and we must try to prevent this happening.



Evans (staff) & Simon (his father in law) in his old house

Case Study – Eunice, 8 years

Eunice is the youngest in a family of seven children, now hosted by an aunt in a single room in Landless, Thika district following the post election violence.

The family is from Kimuri village, Uasin Gishu District, in Rift Valley Province. Their house and possessions were burnt during the crisis by their neighbours. Thankfully they survived the tragic fire in a Church in Eldoret in which many lives were lost.

Eunice had not been attending school in Thika because of lack of uniform, and was spending her time loitering on the streets near her home and thinking about the past and the friends she has lost. She was unhappy and also in danger of being exploited by the many young men who are out of work in the locale.

Following the intervention of the IDC Support Programme in May we were to purchase uniform for Eunice and she is now attending Mountain View Primary School. Eunice is now a much happier, more settled child saying “now I am like other children again”.

We also identified that Eunice and her brothers and sisters were going hungry due to lack of food in the home. Following the needs assessment we gave an initial small loan of Ksh 1,500 to the mother to develop a business of selling porridge to construction workers in Landless. This is proving to be a very small, but successful business and they have now been able to rent a small room for themselves. Food, shelter and education are basics they now have thanks to the IDC Support Programme.

Significant challenges remain as two of her older sisters should be in Secondary School but have been chased away due to non-payment of fees. We do not have sufficient funds to pay for full secondary school fees in the programme at present, but we are investigating how we can contribute to ensure the girls return to school and do not end up being exploited sexually or forced into early marriage.

A New Challenge



Edward Osore is the House Father at our Interim Care Centre for street children. Edward is responsible for the welfare of the children who reside at the centre during their intensive six-month rehabilitation and reintegration programme.

Edward joined AfCiC in 2004 when we were first starting out, as our security guard. It is common in Kenya for talented young men to either be unemployed or underemployed. Edward was an eager, hard working young man, passionate about issues relating to vulnerable children, but had been unable to complete his education due to poverty.

In June 2005, we opened the Interim Care Centre and Edward applied for the job as House Father. Despite few qualifications, we hired Edward because of his attitude, ability to learn and dedication to our work. We have never looked back.

Provided with ongoing training and development in child counselling, child therapy, sports and cooking, Edward has developed into an outstanding House Father who inspires our children and provides them with a vital father figure they have often missed at home.

Edward's daily routine

I arrive at work at 4.30pm for a de-brief with the other staff on the children's activities and behaviour that day and so that I can know if there have been any problems. I then organise the children for bathing, prepare and serve supper and then I usually sit down and discuss different issues with the boys, such as health, relationships, football – whatever interests them that I can link to education and getting knowledge. I then prepare them to sleep around 9pm. In the night I escort children to the toilet who are scared of the dark and deal with any issues that emerge, such as nightmares and bed wetting. I get up at 6am, get the children up and bathed and then I make breakfast – usually porridge. We have a daily staff meeting at 8am that I attend before heading back home for some rest.

This year, Edward travelled to Nairobi to complete the Standard Charter Nairobi Marathon 10km race for AfCiC, as part of our efforts to involve all our Kenyan staff in fundraising initiatives for the charity.

Edward, finished 265th nationwide, raised over 5000ksh for AfCiC. This made Edward very proud, “I didn't expect I could provide funds for the organisation... This was the best day of my year. I feel so glad because I was not expecting to finish! Completing such events is very important for the interest of our children. They are proud of me!”

Next year Edward plans to do the 21km race and is already training hard, even getting the boys at the ICC to form a running group to join him in runs around the town. Besides the 21km race, Edward has many plans for the new year. He intends to be more involved with counselling and life skills coaching following his recent training and plans to conduct more home visits to the families of the boys “so that [he] can learn problems children are facing directly from home.”

A New Home

Helena Kaliniecka has been volunteering with Action for Children in Conflict for the past nine months.

Helena is based at the Interim Care Centre where she is working alongside our excellent Counsellor Catherine Mugo to develop a structured counselling package for our rehabilitation process. Helena has also been using her expertise from working in mental health services at home to train the other staff in attachment theory and is an active participant in our ongoing monitoring and evaluation work of the centre. Alongside Catherine, Helena facilitates both individual and group counselling situations and helped to coordinate the School Holiday Club in August 2008, to keep acutely vulnerable children off the streets and in education.



Before coming to Kenya Helena worked as an assistant psychologist for the NHS Mental Health Services. Despite her relevant background and her pre departure preparation, Helena was still shocked by the extremity and frequency of cases of abuse she has encountered.

However, she adds, “Whilst the counselling has sometimes been emotionally challenging at the ICC, it’s also been so rewarding to see how far the boys have come, gaining in confidence and self-esteem from finally being listened to and accepted.”

Helena believes her time with AfCiC has helped her to gain practical experience of

working with vulnerable children. The different cultural context has had a significant impact on her work and she has gained a new perspective of her professional field.



In turn Helena has helped the staff to have more awareness of effective counselling strategies and she hopes that her time here will have helped to inform and develop the counselling services offered to acutely vulnerable children.

One of the greatest opportunities Helena feels she has had is being able to live in such a vibrant local community and see a side of Kenya that most visitors are not fortunate enough to experience. Helena has made many new friends and is sad to leave soon as she must go back to work to earn some much needed funds. She plans to start a Phd in Clinical Psychology in September.

When asked to pick a favourite memory, Helena says, “It’s hard to put a finger on one time... but the most rewarding thing has been seeing the progression of the boys during the rehabilitation process.”

“During my time here I have learnt so much, grown personally and if anyone is considering volunteering, I couldn’t recommend it more”.

If you are interested in volunteering please contact info@actionchildren.org or visit our website to find out more www.actionchildren.org

A New Start

Julius Githengi joined the Interim Care Centre in October 2008. Prior to this he was living on the streets in Ruiru, begging, taking on small jobs for shop keepers, collecting scrap metal and plastics and doing anything else necessary to survive.

Julius is the last born in a family of four. Despite his older sisters being grown up and married, his mother still struggles to financially provide for him. His father died several years ago and Julius took on the responsibility of helping his mother with money. It was this pressure that led him to drop out of school and take to the streets.

When Julius arrived at the ICC he was given food, clothes and a bed to sleep in. A far cry from life on the streets where he slept hungry, under a blanket of cardboard. At first Julius was quite an angry and perturbed young man. He has left his gang on the streets and is anxious about what they think of him and how his mother is coping. He is fearful to go home because he knows his neighbours do not like him.



After 2 months in the centre Julius is beginning to enjoy life though. He feels happy for the first time in a long

time at the centre, especially playing football with the other boys. Julius is very independent and has made new friends fast.

Julius is happy at the ICC as he feels people listen to him and respect him. Most importantly the centre provides him with a place of safety where he is free from abuse, violence and drugs.

He faces challenges daily in learning to follow rules, following a routine, working in a team with other troubled children, in not using violence to solve problems, in trying to catch up on the education he has lost. But Julius is determined to stay at the centre and succeed. "It is the best and only opportunity I have to change my life".

Julius is adamant that once he leaves the centre he will not go back to his old way of life. Next year he wants a fresh start at a new school where he can work towards his Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. Eventually he wants to learn to be a mechanic.

Our outreach staff will be conducting our first home visit to Julius's mother's place in late December to assess the home environment. Following this we will be inviting Julius's mother to the centre in January for parental training and to investigate how we can assist her to set up a small business, so that she does not depend on Julius working on the streets for money. Through intensive education, counselling and the rebuilding of his familial relationships, we hope that Julius will be returning home in April or May 2009.

Julius is very bright, well-mannered and has the potential to go far in life. Like so many of the boys assisted by AfCiC, he just needs someone to give him a chance in life.

If you would like to find out more about Julius or would be interested in sponsoring Julius back to school please contact Kenya@actionchildren.org

A New Talent

Newton Njoroge, a former street child and adult, joined Action for Children in Conflict in 2005 as a volunteer at both our Day and Interim Care Centres for street children.

In his former life Newton was known as a dangerous street adult, and prior to this a dangerous street child. Newton is an extremely intelligent and capable young man and enacted his own rehabilitation and reform into the caring, talented young man he is today.

Newton originally came to the streets when he was very young because of lack of food at home and an abusive, alcoholic father. "At that time street children were known as "parking boys" in Thika because we use to look after parked cars and get paid a small fee by the owners".

"Things got worse when drugs started coming into Thika, the bakeries stopped throwing away damaged breads and too many children started coming to the streets because they were hungry. Things got more violent and abusive and I just got drawn in."

Newton was given the opportunity to finish primary school by a well-wisher who came to know him on the streets. After completing his KCPE with good results he was admitted to a government secondary school. Without support Newton fell back to the streets. Another well-wisher later sponsored him to secondary school but died when he was in form 3. Again, Newton fell back to the streets. This time, however, the headmaster recognising how bright he was and how much in need, enabled him to stay at school and complete his education.

Newton completed with a C+, indicating how bright he is, despite all the interruptions to his education.

After completing secondary school, Newton returned the streets and started selling glue to make a living for himself. Street life was what he knew and did best.

Unexpectedly he was reunited with his mother who had relocated from the rural area to Kiandutu Slum and had seen him on the streets. He began to support his mother and his brothers.

Through selling glue, Newton was able to sponsor himself through a driving course and a mechanics course, but still he could not find legal employment. By the time Newton joined AfCiC as a local volunteer in 2005 he had stopped selling glue and had started assisting others through the Kiandutu Street's Children's Welfare Association.

In Newton's own words, joining AfCiC "transformed my life and the ways I see things". "I have grown in confidence, understanding, self reflection and professional ability."

Newton is an incredible asset to AfCiC; he has an in-depth knowledge of the street families and older street youth on the streets; he is very active in the Kiandutu community in helping children to stay in school and is an excellent role model to our children at both centres: yes change is possible and you can become someone good and an asset to society.



Newton at our Day Care Centre for Street Children

Through AfCiC Newton is being sponsored to complete a Teacher Training Diploma in Early Childhood Development. A visiting teacher trainer from the UK in August commented on what an excellent teacher Newton will be in the future, "his is so talented and innovative, much better than many others I have seen in both the UK and Kenya!"

Through teaching he will help so many children in need.”

Likewise the charity has also grown over the years. Newton says, “Every year AfCiC is reaching out to more and more children and their families... touching more people. Were it not for AfCiC there would be three or four times more street children in Thika.”

This year Newton has also been assisting with our new performing arts project Hear Our Voice, where he acts as a mentor to the children involved. He teaches the children to understand their talents and to use their talents to do something constructive.

Newton feels that the successes of Hear Our Voice are most evident when you listen to the testimonies from the boys.

They have started to express themselves, to have confidence and now feel able to stand up for their rights.

In turn Newton has also had the chance to express himself and develop. He says he has a “talent for speaking on behalf of the larger community, especially the marginalized and this is evident in my poems and songs.”

In turn Newton has also developed greater belief in his own abilities and attributes this to the good relationship he has with other members of the team.

If you would like to hear more about Newton's life please log on to our website www.actionchildren.org and see his video interview.

A New Voice

Joseph Musomi is 17 years old. He joined AfCiC in late 2006 when he started attending our Day Care Centre for street children. Due to critical problems at home he was referred to our Interim Care Centre for intensive rehabilitation. He attended the ICC from June to December 2007, before returning to school in January 2008.

Before he joined AfCiC, Musomi lived on the streets in Kibandutu Slum. His mother died when he was very young, leaving him to be brought up by his grandmother and father. Sadly, his father was a violent alcoholic and the family struggled to find adequate food for Musomi and his four siblings.

Before he came to AfCiC Musomi says his life was very hard. He survived by begging, scavenging and collecting scrap metal to sell.

He is grateful to AfCiC because they took him from the streets to the ICC where they taught him “how to stay with people” and how “to have good manners”. Musomi is now living back at home, attends school and will sit for his Kenya Certificate of Primary Education next year. He attends our Day Care Centre daily for lunch to prevent him from going hungry and spends his weekends at ICC to prevent him from being tempted to go back to the streets.



Musomi learning bike repair earlier this year

Through the ICC Musomi became involved in the Hear Our Voice Project, a “performing arts project that gives street children undergoing rehabilitation the chance to turn their real life experiences into pieces of drama as a means of education and advocacy.”

Musomi is very grateful for the opportunity to be involved with Hear Our Voice and has nothing but praise for the Hear Our Voice team (Chris, Newton and Mark) who he describes as “good people” who “respect the children and listen to them”. He believes that Hear Our Voice has encouraged people to change their negative perceptions regarding street children. He also thinks that Hear Our Voice has helped him to improve his English, to gain confidence and to grow in strength.

At first he was shy to stand in front of people and found it difficult to talk about his problems. However, he no longer fears to stand in front of a crowd and he doesn't even mind when people laugh at him when he plays a woman in performances of “Chokora”, the play devised by the street children during the project.

Hear Our Voice has given Musomi endless opportunities. He has travelled as far as Nairobi to perform, was featured in The Daily Metro and appeared on Inoro FM Radio. Musomi is happy that he has a chance to tell his story and that people now listen to him and respect him. His success is an inspiration to the boys currently undergoing rehabilitation and he is happy to serve as a role model to them.

Thanks to AfCiC Musomi has high hopes for his future. Right now he is determined to improve his English and finish school next year. He has plans to cultivate sukuma wiki at his home in order to assist his family and is looking forward to doing more drama in 2009.

If you would like to find out more about Musomi or would be interested in sponsoring him to secondary school please contact Kenya@actionchildren.orgg

A Confused Child

This poem was written by our children for the Hear Our Voice project

Am confused am bothered
Am confused not understanding
Is hurting, its confusing, my life confused!
Where did my life start?
Where does it end?

Am confused, no one bothers about my living
People assume me, and the authorities look down on me
Am confused not understanding to whom do I belong?

Police bear me rough, neighbours call me a scavenger
And give me rotten food.
Am confused not understanding to whom do I belong?

Mother not feeding me, dad not taking care of me
Government do not mind where and why am on street
I sleep hungry and suffer cold at night,
Am really confused
Who is responsible of my needs.

It confuses me more when am beaten
Sodomized, chased from home or even when abused
Am left emotionally stressed,
Not understanding to whom do I report?

Am confused and worried, till when will I suffer
For am tired of all this, but still very confused
Is there away out of my problems.

I am tired of this confusion
And here I cry, I cry for help.
I hope you will hear me
Then take an action
To rescue me soul.

The Marginalized's Cry

This poem was written our children for the Hear Our Voice project

Am sure you wonder why am here
In home no peace, no food, no care
Neither is there appreciation
It's with enough reasons that I'm here.

To the streets I went hoping it was
better
To my dismay was more pain
When people called me chokora
And in stinking rubbish I pursue
In search of food
But it's with enough reason that am
here.

Though dirty, shaggy and stinking
Some men must be mad
For they give me coins in return for
sodomy,
Some even rape me.
It's only with enough reasons that am
here.

A mountain of problems the young
suffer on streets
For the big take advantage of them,
Hence the street philosophy:
Survival for the fittest,
It's only with enough reasons that am
here.

No matter how coward a dog is,
it shakes its tail
Whenever at home I pity myself
For never have I been in a position to
shake my tail.
It's only with enough reasons that am
here.

Brothers and sisters its clear we are
desperate.

Last Sunday in church a pastor dared
mention
That God has a reason for everything
that happens.
It's only with enough reasons that am
here.

A question we pose to the righteous:
Does God have a reason for my
suffering?
Is this reason or inhumane?
It's only with enough reasons that am
here.

A yes or no leaves me curious.
I wish an interpreter would come in
And explain to us,
For if yes then this must be fair.
It's only with enough reasons that am
here.

Whether yes or no,
Whether explained or not,
I wonder why me? And why not you?
I wish we share this pain with you.
It's with enough reasons that am here.

We cry unto you all
It's with enough reasons that am here.
You who are in a position to help,
It's your support that will cause
A difference in my life.

*For more information on Hear Our Voice log
onto www.hearourvoicekenya.com or contact
Kenya@actionchildren.org*



Christmas Appeal



This Christmas, YOU could do something really amazing.

You could support a vulnerable child or family in Kenya by buying a friend or relative (or perhaps yourself!) an Action for Children in Conflict gift.

All of our gifts are designed to empower and protect the children that we are supporting and will give them the opportunity to have a brighter future.

School Uniform - £10

Your donation would buy a vulnerable child a school uniform which is often the only thing that is preventing them from attending school. This Christmas, give a child the chance to access education

Skills training - £50

Your donation will provide valuable skills training to former street children who are unable to return to school. By giving them a chance to learn a skilled trade, you will be giving them the chance to have employment in the future. Training can include tailoring, bicycle repair, mechanics, hairdressing and welding.

Rehabilitation for a month - £15

Your donation will provide food, shelter and counselling to a street child for a month, enabling us to explore what led them to the street and work to resolve the problems.

Creative Therapy Kit - £5

Your donation will provide former street children with art materials for the use during our creative therapy sessions. Your kit will include paints, brushes and paper in order for children and will enable children unable to talk about their problems, the opportunity to explore them through art work.

Back to School Kit - £25

Your donation will provide a rehabilitated child the necessary items to return to school including uniform, school bag, books and stationary. Often, lack of uniform is the only reason that children are out of school.



Boda Boda - £50

A boda boda is a bicycle taxi, popular in Thika as a economic and efficient way of getting around. Your donation will provide a former street child with a bicycle to use to set up a taxi business and generate income therefore preventing them from returning to the street in search of money.

Games Kit- £8

Your donation will provide our Street Children's Day Care Centre with a recreational kit containing a skipping rope, football and table tennis bats for use in our after school and youth clubs. Creating fun, supervised activities in a safe environment helps to discourage children to spend time on the streets.

Food Package - £7

Your donation will provide essential food stuffs to the family of a street child and will include beans, maize, cooking fat, sugar, salt and rice. Food packages are given to families in absolute poverty who can not afford to feed their children in an effort to prevent them from coming to the streets in search of food.

Going home kit - £30

Your donation will provide a rehabilitated child the necessary items needed to return home including a shirt and shoes, toiletries, paraffin, candles and a contribution for the parents. By providing a good start at home, children are less likely to return to the streets in search of these items.

Bed kit - £20

Your donation will provide a vulnerable child with a mattress, mosquito net and blanket to ensure they get a better nights sleep and are protected against Malaria. Often families share a mattress and mosquito net or don't have one at all meaning that sleeping arrangements are inadequate. By getting a better nights sleep and being protected from Malaria, children are likely to perform better at school.

Goat - £50

Your donation will provide our Interim Care Centre with a daily source of fresh milk to give to our children to help them grow strong. It will also give them a sense of responsibility as they will take it in turns to feed

and care for the goat. A pair of goats, will allow us to breed them and sell the offspring, creating an extra income for the centre.

Sewing machine - £60

Your donation will provide a sewing machine and a starter kit to a rehabilitated child who can not return to school but has completed skills training in tailoring. This will enable them to put their skills to use to set up tailoring business and generate their own income thus preventing the temptation to return to the street.

For more information please visit our website

www.actionchildren.org

Or perhaps you would like to make a more sustainable lasting difference by giving a regular donation, there are many ways in which **you could help** including **Family Sponsorship** or **Child Sponsorship**.

