



Protecting street and other acutely vulnerable children in Thika, Kenya.

September 2009

Welcome to AfCiC's September Newsletter!

Director's Summary

Training workshops on child abuse for local teachers, a Holiday Club for 400 of the most vulnerable children in Thika throughout August, a successful afternoon building relations between street children and the local police, self sufficiency for displaced families and the tragic, unnecessary death of a child on the streets: the last 3 months in Thika while we all waited for rain (still waiting)! Read on, find out more and get in touch!

Eleanor Harrison, Director, AfCiC Kenya

Failed Rains Bring Drought and Hunger to Kenya



More than one million Kenyans are currently facing hunger as a result of the failed rains. The drought is having the biggest impact on South-eastern and some Central areas of the country where crops have failed and cattle-herders are struggling to keep their animals alive. This is the worst drought the country has faced since 2000 with one in ten Kenyans now in need of outside help.

Last year's post-election violence has also meant that many displaced people were unable to plant their crops, adding to the food shortage, and causing further increases in food prices. Maize prices are now up to 130% above last year and many families are struggling to find the food for even one meal a day. Farmers have been beginning to abandon their rural homes where they have to rely on aid and are moving into already over-congested slums in towns and cities. Households in these slum areas are chronically poor and the malnutrition rate amongst young children is increasing.

As a means of survival, parents are pulling children out of school to work or beg for food. This is a big problem we face in Thika, as many of the children we work with are forced onto the streets by desperate parents. Our School Feeding Programme is an incentive to many of the most vulnerable children to stay in school in the knowledge that there they will at least receive one meal each day. However, as the food crisis worsens in Kenya, we increasingly struggle to cover a much greater demand than we can cope with.

August School Holiday Club

When the schools are closed and there's no food at home where should I go???



This is a common dilemma faced by many children in Thika during the school holidays. During the school term, over 1000 vulnerable children benefit from our school feeding programmes but unfortunately during the holidays, a lack of food at home forces many of them onto the streets where they spend their time begging for money or scraps of food.

This August over 400 children attended our School Holiday Club and benefited from a free nutritious meal every day. The purpose of the Holiday Club was to engage vulnerable children in fun and educational activities whilst keeping them in a safe environment away from the streets. Our staff worked together with local and international volunteers to promote positive behaviour change through provision of important life skills and extra-curricular activities.



In addition, the children in the upper classes at St. Patrick's and Garissa Road, two of Thika's poorest primary schools, were given access to academic tuition which they would otherwise be unable to afford. This tuition, given by their class teachers, ensures that they do not fall behind in the curriculum and that they are prepared for the end of year exams.



"We want to take this opportunity as a class to thank everyone who helped with our holiday club. We are all happy because it has helped us a lot. It has prepared us for our exams. We also want to thank you for giving us free lunch, we are happy nobody went home hungry! We are happy because we have seen that the volunteers have helped the street children go back to school. Those children liked the idea of going back to school. The holiday club gave us hope for the next years to come. We enjoyed the games we played and

we want to thank the volunteers for taking that opportunity to teach us those games. We would be happy if the holiday club can continue!" (Margaret Mwhaki, class 8 St. Patrick's Primary School)

Improving Relations Between Street Children and Local Police



The boys in our Interim Care Centre had a rare opportunity this month, when P.C. Maureen Wambui visited them as part of our "Kids and Cops Dialogue". The relationship between local police and street children at best could be described as troublesome, with street children often being blamed for crime and accused of loitering. In extreme cases, as is the case with one of our current boys, Kevin Kamau, aged seven, children have been arrested simply for being on the streets. Luckily for Kevin, he was picked up

by AfCiC after his arrest and given a place on our rehabilitation programme. The police also face difficulties as they have limited options in how they can effectively deal with the issue of street children who are often in close proximity to crime.

The "Kids and Cops Dialogue", which was first initiated last year, allows the children to speak safely and directly with a local officer, and voice their opinions and concerns about the problems they face on the streets. The aim of the project is to increase respect between both parties and lead to greater co-operation and understanding between local officers and street children. The meeting was a great success, many of the children said they had learnt that "the police are people too" and that if they want to avoid arrest they should "avoid trouble on the streets so we are not connected to it". P.C. Maureen also thoroughly enjoyed the discussion, particularly once the serious questions gave way to more interesting topics, such as AK-47s, Tear Gas and "why do people jump when they are shot?" "I think they have been watching too many films," she commented, "They are still children after all."

After this success, we hope to facilitate further meetings in the future, hopefully involving more officers in an attempt to further improve life for Thika's street children.

Internally Displaced Family's Business Success!

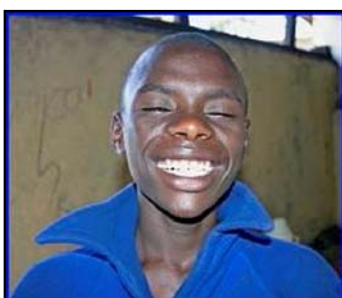
Prior to the post election violence in early 2008, Elizabeth was living with her husband and four children in Rift Valley province. She had a small successful business selling clothes and was making enough profit to care for her family. During the violence everything they had was destroyed and the house they were living in burnt down forcing the family to flee their home town with nothing but the clothes they were wearing and some small savings.



The family moved to Kibandutu slum in Thika district where they were able to rent a cheap room. Through our Economic Empowerment Programme, Elizabeth was assisted with an initial loan of 5,000 shillings which she used to re-establish her business in Thika. Some of her children also benefited from provision of school uniforms and another was enrolled in a computer school through our support.

Within ten months, Elizabeth had repaid the loan and was given a second loan of 10,000 shillings to expand her business further. She is now making a good income and is able to meet the basic needs of her family. Elizabeth is one of many IDPs in Thika who have successfully set up businesses with the help of our loans. We believe that by giving people the means by which to help themselves out of poverty, we are ensuring a sustainable income which will enable them to support themselves and their families in the future.

A Tragic Loss



In July we tragically lost a boy called Francis Maina, after thugs beat him unconscious in Thika Town in an act of mob justice. They left him with serious head injuries and substantial internal bleeding and his body, already weakened by a bad diet and lifestyle, could not recover. After a week in hospital he passed away leaving us saddened and angry.

A victim of chronic neglect and abuse at the hands of his step father, Francis had been on the streets of Thika for years. He was part of a small group of long term street children for whom rehabilitation is incredibly difficult to achieve. Francis had a serious glue habit and very little education and this created lots of obstacles to him moving on with his life. Despite this, recently we were making progress and there was hope and opportunity. This somehow makes his death even more difficult to bear.

Francis was a child who many people loved. He had character, a wonderful smile and a good heart. To lose him in such an utterly futile, violent way is hard to come to terms with. He did not deserve to die in this way and yet the perpetrators will not be brought to justice because he was a street child. The incident has left us shocked, angry and determined to do more for children like him.

The Francis Maina Memorial Fund has been set up to ensure Francis did not die in vain and is dedicated to helping his friends on the street survive and change their lives for the better. If you are able to give please do so through our Just Giving page (www.justgiving.com/Megan-Burley) and help us to ensure other children don't end up in the same tragic situation.

Christmas Gifts With a Difference!

This Christmas why not send someone a gift with meaning, a gift that's different, a gift that will help **support a vulnerable child in Kenya...**



From school uniforms and running kits, to lunch for a year or skills training, we have a variety of unique gifts specifically designed to support the children and families we work with!

Each gift purchase comes with its own gift card containing details of how your donation has helped to support our valuable work.

Check out our [website](#) to buy funky presents. New gifts will be added soon!!!

