

Be Kids Newsletter



MARCH 2010

BE KIDS AUSTRALIA INC: VISIT TO THE KENGELE CHILDREN'S NETWORK PROGRAM

DATE: 20 January to 4 February 2010
LOCATION: Korogocho, Nairobi, Kenya
PARTNERS: Child Peace International
Rotary Club Western Endeavour, Perth
Rotary Club Karura Kenya

BACKGROUND

The Kengele Children's Network ("KCN") has been active for over 18 months. Its main purpose is the creation of a ground swell for child participation in social and governance issues affecting children in the Korogocho Slum which is one of the largest in Nairobi, Kenya. It is a program through which children help themselves and each other to change their environment and seek to reach their goals – goals that become redefined through mentorship, encouragement and love. We are now in Phase Three of this project.

Phase One of KCN focused on getting the children, meeting to:

- Identify problems and selecting a problem in their part of the slum
- Analysing the problem

- Planning for action
- Mobilising the actors from government, community leaders etc
- Taking action in addressing the problem, in many cases empowering children by the successful outcomes reached.

Phase Two of KCN focused on providing children with various options for communicating and expressing their concerns, ambitions and plans for social change. This was accompanied by teaching required skills in safe environment for experimentation, namely art, photography, newspaper, radio and puppet theatre.

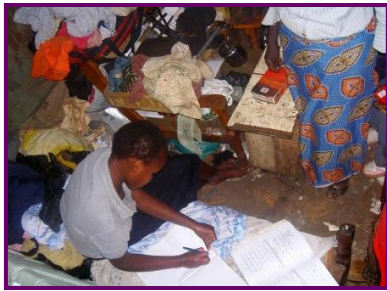
Phase Three commenced in January 2010 and is focussed on education, careers opportunities and mentorship. In the spirit of the theme "Education My Freedom",

Phase Three continues to awaken the community and influence positive change in the best interest of the children. One of the main aims is the installation of 5 study centres around the Slum to overcome the problem of lack of space where children can study. Another important aspect is access to good role models and mentors.

Considering the safety of the children as they seek for a space to do their academic homework and revision, the centres will offer easy access without children having to cover long distances in inclement weather and after night fall.

Overall, the KCN Program works on 5 thematic areas of need:

- Education
- Health
- Environment
- Security
- Peace and Culture



Children doing their homework in their very small homes where about 8 people sleep, cook and live in a 3 metre shanty structure

WHERE IS KOROGOCHO?

Korogocho is in Nairobi. It is the third largest slum in East Africa. Korogocho has an approximate population of 150, 000 within a radius of 1.5km with more than half the number being children. Most of these children are born from single parent homesteads.

Crime and drug abuse (especially alcohol) is very high in the area. This has negatively affected children as most of them are sexually abused. Some of the sexually abused children end up affected with HIV, while others drop out of school. Children are often badly punished by the guardians/ parents. This has been associated with social frustrations

amongst the adults stemming from lack of jobs and severe poverty.

Most of the children from Korogocho end up accepting and emulating this negative social life. As a result, the worst criminals in this area are persons under the age of 18 and early pregnancy is on the rise.

BE KIDS VISIT

Saturday 20 January to
Thursday 4 February 2010

It was great to be welcomed back to Korogocho after only 6 months away and we slipped back into our old friendships so easily, names remembered and conversations continued.

Korogocho was much denser in population with a large number of Somalian refugees adding to the pressures in this difficult area.

Crime is on the rise, though I always felt safe whilst living there, probably because Be Kids is now well known around the area, thanks to the children's awareness of who we are and the work we are doing. The upgrading of the main road as part of the Korogocho Development plan is well on its way. I stayed in comfortable and secure accommodation in Lucky Summer, just across the putrid Nairobi River that runs along the Slum. It was good to be back in Korogocho.



The main roads in Koch are being graded for bitumen, a much awaited improvement to the lives of the people. Structures have to be pulled down to make room for progress.

CHILD PEACE FACILITATORS

I enjoyed many opportunities to share time with the Child Peace members who keep the KCN Program going on the ground. They are committed, hardworking and all know what it is like to have been born and raised in the Slum.



Child Peace facilitators: From left, Winnie, me, Carol, Wilkister, Peter, Charles, Jamima and Dorothy (Ibrahim taking the photo)

Child Peace facilitators for Kengele Phase 3 project number 11 in all. Child Peace has already five existing facilitators while some

Mentors have been doubling-up as facilitators in some of the villages. The facilitators have been meeting the children and working with them in groups per village. It is intended that the facilitators will also form part of the management committee for the proposed Study Centre in the respective villages.

I was fortunate enough to attend two of the regular Monday meetings where the facilitators evaluate the week and plan for the next. The facilitators/mentors have demonstrated commitment through their attendance and participation in the process.

Each facilitator is responsible for about 20 KCN Children in their respective villages and is responsible for encouraging and profiling each child. This process is currently underway. We have doubled our intake of children to 200 for Phase 3.

THE CHILDREN'S STUDY CENTRES

The main purpose of the recce was to investigate the prices and logistics for the installation of the Children's Study Centres in Korogocho, the focus of part of Phase 3 of the KCN Program.

As a culmination to the efforts of last year, Child Peace with the KCN children have been lobbying for spaces to put up the study centres in the community. Attitudes are hard to shift -- Often it is heard: "Education is not a priority in this community". Due to scarcity of spaces in the community, the process has not been easy. Numerous informal and formal meetings were held with the residents committee for the upgrading as well as other different stake holders including Community Based Organisations on the same.

One study centre is planned between the following paired villages:

Kisumu Ndogo and Nyayo	1 study Centre	Approved, MOU signed
Korogoch o A and Korogoch o B	1 study Centre	Approved, subject to accommodation of increased cost because of the need to install on top of an existing container

High ridge and Gitathuru	1 study Centre	In progress
Grogon A and Grogon B	1 study Centre	Approved in principle
Ngomongo and Ngunyumu	1 study Centre	In progress

I visited all these villages and met with as many community leaders as possible to express the need for children to have a safe place to study in and that education was of primary importance, constantly reminding them that education is a basic right of a child.

Because of the lack of suitable structures and secure tenure it has been decided that we would purchase 40ft high cube containers and fit them out as required. Containers are a popular form structure highly sought after by soft drink and telco companies to be used as street stalls. As such, the quotes were very similar with no room for negotiation, costing at an average of 280,000 ksh before transport, installation and modification costs.

We are currently investigating the locations that can be cleared for this installation, bearing in mind 2 villages in the slum are to pair up to share one study centre, bringing the total required to 5. Our first success is in a location in Kisumu Ndogo whose elder, Mr John Okello, has been a strong

supporter of the KCN and a champion of children's rights. The Korogocho Poverty Eradication Development Group has given us a plot next to the Biocentre. Discussions were held between Mr Okello, Mr Phillip Mango (Chairman of the KPEDG), Child Peace representatives and me. A short memorandum of understanding has been signed to evidence the intention that the Study Centre is to be used only by the children and that the upkeep of the Centre will be a joint responsibility. The location is rent free. I was pleased that the location was adjacent to the community centre and the police station for the village.



The first Study Centre is to be located on the left of the Bio Centre in Kisumu Ndogo

We also secured the consent of Koch FM, the community radio station to install the Children's Study Centre for Koch A and Koch B villages on top of their existing container (bearing in mind that securing location is extremely difficult in a crowded slum as this.)

The other villages we following up is Grogon A and Grogon B where we held plenary lobbying meetings and talks with the Redeemed

Gospel Church which has excellent grounds within a school they run , sitting conveniently between the two villages.

The locations for the other 2 centres are being investigated.

SCHOLARSHIPS

We are so very proud that the following children from the KCN have earned scholarships in Shepherd's Junior School, a well-established private school in Buruburu:

Ferdosa Ali	Grade 7
Abdi Nassir	Grade 8
Issa Bukura	Grade 7
Raphael Kituku	Grade 8
Faith Wanjera	Grade 7
Dennis Okoth	Grade 6
Belinda Auma	Grade 5
Gabriel Odinga	Grade 5
Barnice Wakonyo	Grade 6

I visited the school and thanked Mr Wangi, the founder of the school, and his son Peter (who studied in Perth) for their generosity. It was heart-warming to see our children being so readily accepted by their peers who are from well-to-do families. I was told that they will accept more of our children if our membership would assist in the fees.

We are working with other schools to encourage the same support.

I met personally with each of the children and told them how proud we were of their efforts. They told me that they had to be ready at 4am to catch the bus to take them to their new school but they were only too happy to do so and considered themselves blessed to have been given this opportunity.

Upon invitation I visited Gabriel, Belinda and Denis's homes and they also took me to see their previous very over-crowded government schools, where they had as many as 70 children in a class. It was a privilege to share their excitement and aspirations as they look into their future. At the end of the day of visiting we enjoyed a meal together much to the delight of the children.



Gabriel Odinga (left), scholarship recipient, with his friend Kevin, a KCN child, on the way to visit Gabby's former school in the slum.



Belinda Auma, another recipient of a scholarship, delights in her meal after she took us to visit her home and her former school (yes, she did finish the entire meal). Belinda is determined to be a pilot (an inspiration fired up by her visit to Wilson Airport engineering section as part of Phase 2 of KCN).

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Much time and meetings were held for the selection of mentors, people who can influence and guide the KCN children positively, and, through this, help them improve their academic and social lives.

It was decided that there would be 2 kinds of mentors:

Professionals -- those people in professional careers which children also aim at pursuing later in their

lives. It is intended that the professional mentors can take time and talk to children during the career talks in holidays, during the career field trips or actually inviting specific children to witness them on job and therefore have a feeling of what it is to be say a doctor, lawyer, engineer and so on.

Students – from various higher learning Institutions (Universities and colleges), to encourage children and guide them on a more

regular basis especially academically. KCN encourages those students who have excelled academically and are from the Slum to feel obliged to mentor those behind them in achieving better results and slowly narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor.

Two meetings with mentors were held while I was there. A committee has been set up to make sure that the goals of this program are achieved with best practice

principles. The committee worked to prepare and develop strategies, policies and list documents to be used in the mentorship process,

such as children's profiles, mentors profile, child's accountability form, evaluation

form and rules of conduct for children and for mentors.

OVERALL ACTIVITIES

Whereas when KCN first started, children were grouped by village, during this, my third visit, with the growing confidence of the children and the friendship that they had formed, the children wanted to meet as a general group dividing themselves into age-groups. They have opted for each week to be focused on a certain activity, generally being Educational /mentoring activities, teambuilding games/ life skills activities and Special Interest Clubs (such as journalism for their newspaper, radio, photography, art, theatre etc).

Children decided on this so as to make it easier for them to actively participate in all the planned activities. The order of the weekend activities has been left open so that specific villages can set their custom-made programs, if they chose to.

What was very close to the children's minds was their connection to the children in Australia – they constantly asked to send their greetings to our children in Australia and one Saturday they took time to write letters – it was very heart-warming to see their genuine gratitude that there were children over the seas who cared for them. *I have these letters with me and any Be Kids members who wish to assist me in sharing these letters with children here, please contact me.*



KCN children writing to children in Australia



Amina (left) who wants to be a politician and Ferdosa (centre), a surgeon, write to Australian children to tell them this. Both girls are child facilitators for KCN.

Mandarin Classes: In view of recent technological and economic advances, the world is increasingly becoming a global village. This is what informed the decision to explore possibilities of having a number of KCN children study basic Mandarin. We visited the Confucius Institute at the Nairobi Institute and we are progressing with enrolling 15 KCN children to attend tutorials each Saturday morning. A different foreign language can significantly improve and also increase their academic and professional opportunities.

Craft Classes: Hobby Craft Creations-a crafts school operating in Muthaiga suburbs-through the director, Mrs. Rita Rogers have indicated willingness to support eighteen(18) KCN children to take craft classes in card making, mosaic ,collage and jewellery making. This came about during

the briefing meeting at Karura Rotary Club that I attended whilst there. The children will be selected from the Art team and therefore have an opportunity to advance their craft skills. Such opportunities will never have been realised if the KCN process never was.

Arts for environment: The Art team have been producing art and craft materials about the environment since the month of December 2009. I have brought some home to auction at the next BE Kids event on 21 May 2010. The works speak openly about the environment the children live in. The art was displayed in an exhibition due on 27th and 28th February 2010 in Nairobi to show the effects of the Dandora dumping site. The exhibition is in support of an ongoing campaign given the name "Stop Dumping Death on Us".

The campaign aims at mobilising all the stakeholders to move the Dandora dumping site and establish a better waste management system for the surrounding communities. The industrial and chemical waste, dumped and set fire at the site is a major cause of respiratory diseases and other complications. It is recognised that the dumping site, on the other hand, is also a major source of income for a significant number of homes in the community. Children also go looking for scrap metal and plastics in the dumping site so to sell to recycling agents. Many children earn easy money this way and in most cases their education is adversely affected as a result.



A very interesting collage showing the Dandora dumpsite, the black fumes rising constantly and the very putrid Nairobi River below which flows through Korogocho. Made from scrap material. On auction at our Be Kids party on 21 May.



Our KCN children challenging the community to clean up the environment.

PREPARATION FOR THE KENGELE MAGAZINE MARCH EDITION

Children have continued to write more articles from different areas attracting children from other areas of Nairobi. The editing of the March edition was well underway. The Kengele Magazine produced by the KCN children for children has attracted the APHIA 2 Nairobi project that work with the children affected and infected with AIDS. The organization also hopes to support the production of further 16,000 copies to reach to the children they work with. This is a true indication that the KCN is a process achieving its vision of a network of children championing for their own better future.



KCN Children discussing the proposed magazine articles and what photos to use



Children on the way to the KCN meeting. They often have to bring their siblings with them in order to attend.



Some of our girls wanting to say hello. They had come to watch the Be Kids DVD about them taken on our visit in July 2009 and also a "Harry Potter" movie. There is Belinda again in the pink!



Children reading the Kengele Magazine prepared by the children. For copies, please contact me.

CONCLUSION

It was a very busy few days with lots of walking, lobbying, meeting, brain storming, sharing stories, eating together, laughing and making steadfast friends.

You are most welcome to visit Korogocho knowing you too have friends there who hope that one day you will visit them.

I am confident that Phase 3 will progress well. The Study Centres will be installed and put into operation progressively so that we can work through any challenges that the process may highlight.

One thing that is certain is that the KCN Children have found their voice. We now need to guide them through education, encouragement and love.

Report by Joan Peters
7 March 2010