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KOINONIA

We belong to each other

Marching for Children's Rights

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Lihanda did not leave it at that. He suggested some interventions that were to be implemented as follows; there be a sensitization programme on children's rights at school level, organizing forums with media and the community, analyzing the challenges and problems of drug and alcohol sale and use, developing family life orientation programmes and embracing a conducive learning environment for all regardless of the background and disability.

The march came hot on the heels of an intensive six months process of creating awareness on the state of children's rights in our local communities. It was achieved through workshops/trainings and meetings targeting people in the south of Nairobi. A major conference was also held in Nairobi on December 4 that deliberated on the Children's rights issues.

KAP is a new initiative of Koinonia launched mid this year. Its mission is to promote sustainable peace in informal settlements and local communities in Kenya. The initiative was conceived with the aim of reducing levels of conflict in the marginalized areas of the country caused by socio-economic, political and cultural barriers.

December 11 marked a unique entry of marching for children's rights at the heart of Kibera slums in Nairobi Kenya. The peaceful procession was organised by Koinonia Action for Peace (KAP) in collaboration with youth united for peace in Kenya (YUPK).

puppeteers led the way to the terminus, attracting huge crowd on the road side in addition to putting business on a standstill.

Entertainment of all categories was staged at the arena, as children and public took a back seat to enjoy the rest of the day. Quite a few short speeches sprinkled here and there as the day got warmer.

Children's representative Victor Lihanda said in his speech, "In Kenya, most of us are exploited and lured into forced labour under poor conditions. Some of us live in deplorable conditions, with little or no water and food, with no sanitary service whatsoever. Many are denied the rights to an education, just to mention but a few."

The day began on a chilly morning with thousands of enthusiastic children, civil rights activists, parents and the public adjusting to start off the short journey aimed at proclaiming the rights of children. The mood of the day could be read from the majority, who proudly came in white t-shirts and blue caps carrying banners with a catchy message: "All rights for all children". The march kicked off at Nairobi's Kibera, Kamukunji grounds, ending at Kibera DC grounds. Bands and

Letter from Fr. Kizito

It is the end of a year that was still difficult for us in Nairobi, but marked by hope and the resumption of normal life in our homes, together with the boys and girls with whom we have chosen to share a part of our life journey. It was a big step forward from the very difficult moments of 2009.

I want to thank all those who have remained close to us and supported us with their friendship. Finally, after more than a year of investigation, the Kenya Attorney General has instructed the Police to close the file because not a shred of evidence has been found to support any of the accusations.

Your friendship has been for me and for all boys and girls of Koinonia, a source of strength. The Baby Jesus that we are getting ready to receive in our hearts will bind us together even more, And renew our determination to always stay close to Him.



Have a nice Christmas,
Fr. Renato Kizito Sesana, m.c.c.j.

Koinonia Newsletter 2010.

Published by the Koinonia Media Centre.

Koinonia is a lay Christian Community with a commitment to the plight of marginalized members of the society, especially street children, women and young people from deprived backgrounds.

Our initiatives are found in Kenya, Zambia and the Nuba Mountains of Sudan.

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Homeward Bound



The small house was a beehive of activity, unusual for a Sunday afternoon in Kibera. A group of adults and children bustled about in the kitchen, preparing steamed rice, beef stew and cabbage sauté. A short while later they sat down to share lunch in the living room, chatting and sipping soda as they enjoyed their platefuls.

This simple meal was the centre point of a small celebration. The children were all former street boys rescued from the streets of Nairobi last year, and on this day, their parents and guardians had come to take them home after one year of rehabilitation at the Ndugu Mdogo Rescue Centre. Each boy was equipped with a schoolbag, schoolbooks and uniforms, and the Centre had already arranged for their placement in local schools.

This group of children was the first to graduate from a new accelerated rehabilitation method adopted at the Centre. The new approach aims to take children off the streets and reunite them with their parents or immediate guardians within one year by first tracing each child's immediate relatives and then isolating the reason behind the child's sojourn on the street.

This new approach was adopted after the Koinonia social workers realized that almost every child roaming the streets of Nairobi has a parent, an aunt, a grandmother or guardian somewhere. In most cases, they have simply adopted the drifter's lifestyle as a recourse from an unbearable home environment.

Previously, a child would go through a one-year preparatory phase at the Rescue Centre before being transferred to one of the main Koinonia children's homes for more comprehensive formation.

The rehabilitation process now starts right on streets. The social workers identify the children and create friendship with them. They engage the children in sporting activities and welcome them to drop by the Rescue Centre, whenever they can, for a hot meal and a bath.

With time, the children open up, and the social workers get a chance to understand the situation that drove them take to the streets. This information helps the social workers trace each child's closest relative or guardian, with whose approval they admit the child into the Rescue Centre. The next step is then to tackle the immediate problem facing the child, often a drug addiction or the haunting effects of an abusive past.

The Rescue Centre's Coordinator, Jack Matika, said the

new approach was a success in its first year.

"We were able to reintegrate 27 out of the 30 children we admitted a year ago," Jack said. "Only three children could not be reintegrated."

Jack said the three children came from families with deep-seated problems that would certainly impede their reintegration, mostly issues around extreme deprivation, violence and abuse of alcohol. The three will be referred to Koinonia's main children's homes.

Back at the Rescue Centre, a few parents shed tears as they regarded their little boys, little angels who had previously vanished into the streets, now seated calmly in their brand new uniforms, ready to accompany them home and resume their schooling. Three Muslim boys made their parents very proud; they had faithfully progressed through their Madrasa (religious classes) at the local mosque without prodding from anyone.

There was one girl among the 27 children, a unique case. The girl, aged about 11, was not rescued from the streets. She was brought to the Centre by a neighbour to protect her from her father. The girl's mother had abandoned the family, leaving her under the care of the father. Unfortunately, the father had slipped into depression and alcoholism, and on one night he arrived home extremely inebriated and tried to take advantage of his own daughter. Panicking, the girl escaped through the window and ran screaming to a

female neighbour, who gave her shelter for the night and brought her to Ndugu Mdogo Rescue Centre the following morning.

"We usually admit only boys, but we felt we had to address her case too," Matika said

The social workers were fortunate enough to find her mother in another part of Kibera. The girl moved into her mother's tiny shack and began attending counselling sessions at the Rescue Centre. Her formation was also successful and she is now a Grade Six pupil at a local school

Jack and his fellow social workers will continue to follow the progress of the children after their reintegration. Every Saturday they will all assemble at the Rescue Centre to share their experiences. The social workers will pay regular visits to each child's home and school to ensure everything is going well, and they have already discussed the temptation to run away from home and back to the freewheeling streets.

"We have tried our best to impart in them that running away does not solve anything," Jack said. "Instead, we encouraged them



Aiming to Excel

Koinonia's Domus Mariae School seeks excellence as it holds its 2010 Annual General Meeting. This year, the two-year-old school has presented its pioneer candidates for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education.

Elizabeth Owiso strode confidently towards the lectern amid clapping from her fellow students, teachers and parents. She stood briefly, her hands clasped together, before shaking hands with the man behind the microphone.

"This is the student who will emerge tops in the national examinations next year," Mr. Bernard Muthengi, the Dean of Studies at the Domus Mariae Secondary School, predicted as Elizabeth received her prize for best student in the school's senior class.

Elizabeth and several other students were being awarded at the school's 2010 Annual General Meeting (AGM) for being the best in academics, sports, personal improvement, discipline and exemplary leadership.

This year will be a turning point for Domus Mariae. For the first time, the two-year-old school will have its Form Four class sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations, and the school community has begun preparing early for good results.

Judging from the speeches at the meeting, it is clear Domus Mariae is raring to build a strong tradition founded on academic excellence, keen discipline, community service and the provision of opportunity to bright students from poor backgrounds.

The school's PTA chairwoman, Ms. Amina Karama, informed the gathering at the AGM that the candidate class would spend two extra weeks in school during the April holidays so that the teachers can accelerate the syllabus towards completion, freeing more time for revision later in the year.

Ms. Karama also announced plans to reprise a volunteer community service programme that the school had initiated last year.

"Last year's community service initiative was very successful, and we received impressive feedback from the places where our students volunteered. We will do it again this year," Ms. Karama said.

School principal Peter Apiyo commended the parents and guardians for their cooperation and for allowing the teachers to infuse discipline without interference. He however urged them to prevent their children from carrying mobile phones to school because they have been used in other schools to cheat in examinations and to access negative aspects of the internet, especially violent and pornographic material.

"We deal with discipline very decisively, and we thank the parents for allowing us to instill discipline using our trained hands," Mr. Apiyo said.

As if to prove their level of discipline, the students were remarkably neat in their white shirts, maroon pullovers and well pressed navy blue trousers, and all of them were shod in gleaming black shoes.

The principal was full of praise for School's PTA and the teachers. He also paid tribute to the Koinonia Community and its founder, Fr. Renato Kizito Sesana, for building and continuing to support the school.

"Domus Mariae is a young school," Mr. Apiyo summed up. "We started out in January 2008 and we keep improving. Our donors have already constructed the facilities; it is now upon us to build a strong tradition that is unique to Domus Mariae."

Koinonia's Administrator, Esther Kabugi, confirmed the organization's dedication the school's development.

"Our commitment is to ensure the youth are well educated and well groomed to face the future," Ms. Kabugi assured the school community.



Nuba Wrestling In Nairobi



Nuba wrestlers won Koinonia's inaugural African wrestling tournament in Nairobi.

On Saturday 20 March, Koinonia's sports association, SYDI, organized an African wrestling tournament in Nairobi, modelling on the 3,000 year-old tradition of the sport in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan.

The contest involved three teams. The Kivuli Bull Wrestlers represented Nairobi, there was a team from Kakamega (Western Kenya) and the toast of the day a team from the Nuba Mountains.

Unlike the stunt-laden wrestling matches common on television, the simple aim of each African traditional wrestler is to slam his opponent down on his back. The Nuba team won the tournament with nine points out of ten, followed by Kivuli with five points and Kakamega with two points.

Please click on the video link below to catch a glimpse of what went down at the tournament.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEDglg34vk&feature=player_embedded

The Koinonia Children Team Tour in Italy

13 children, a trainer and a social worker - have toured Italy from April 7 to May 18. Everywhere they performed a show entitled Simba na Mende (the Lion and the Cockroach) a traditional African tale about the importance of water for life, and a variety of mimes, songs, dances, acrobatics.

An enthusiastic public applauded them in Bari, Putignano, Matera, Potenza, Numana (Ancona), Riccione, Bologna, Santarcangelo di Romagna, Cavallino (Venice), Brugherio, Lodi, Milan, Lecco, Verbania, Turin, Perugia, Assisi and Rome.

It was also a time of learning, visiting historical places and museums, praying, doing new experiences. In Turin the group prayed in front of the Holy Shroud, in Assisi, on May 16, participated to the Perugia-Assisi Peace March (25 km), that attracted more than 100,000 people, mostly youth, in front of them at the arrival.

In Rome they had the honor of having among their public a delegation of the Kenya Embassy.



Taking Lead in Rehabilitating Street Children



"The taste of street life is bitter, and only those who have experienced it have the right to speak about it" say Duncan, a twenty years old boy who is now in technical training and hopes to be self-employed within the next six months. He adds "I do not know I was able to stand what happened to me. Now, when I think about it, I feel like crying. At that time I as very careful not to shed tears, tears are a sign of weakness, and in the streets you cannot show weakness". Yet it is estimated that the children going each day and night through such desperate life are over 60,000 in the streets of the Nairobi.

Koinonia is among the NGOs based in Nairobi Kenya that make a special effort to address this issue by rescuing the little children left in vulnerable situations. The number of children under rehabilitation and the length of it experience - Koinonia started this work in 1995 - makes it one of the most effective agencies in this area. The NGO has six centers situated in different localities within and in the outskirts of Nairobi.

Ndugu Mdogo Rescue center is one of Koinonia's model programs. It is operating from a small house located in the heart of Kibera - often referred to as the biggest slum in Africa - and it rescues children directly from the streets. Before accepting the street kids into the house, even as a temporary measure, the

rescue center personnel spends 3 months of intensive scouting at street level to understand and share life experience with the children. Through this experience the personnel are able to identify the most vulnerable children. A decision is then made together with the children, with some being taken to the centers while others are placed in an outreach program.

Bokada Buluma, a Koinonia Community's street mediator, says, "We do street visits to participate and share with the children the hustles and bustles of street life. They have to test us, otherwise nothing can happen. In the meantime we can offer a smile where none exists."

At the center the children are placed in simple academic, educational and rehabilitation programs which gradually help them to regain a sense of future and direction in life.

The process takes few months and after the children have adjusted to their new context at the center, they start a methodology of rehabilitation that addresses their traumatic experiences through group therapy and individual counseling sessions. "The children are introduced to different aspects of social well being with emphasis on behavior change and socialization, education, health care and talent development. We do not leave out spiritual formation, according to the different faith traditions, as chosen by the children" says Buluma.

During their time at the center the relationship between the children and their families is regenerated with a focus on resolving the problem that led them to the streets,

when possible a network of family members is involved. This process takes about one year. After that, if possible, the children are reunited with their parents. On its side the program staff makes a pledge to continue educational support.

It is to be noted that not all the children are able to reunify with their families. This could be as a result of the unstable state of the child or the unfavorable conditions that exist within the family relational networks. The children are therefore referred to secondary rehabilitation level, sending them to residential homes run by Koinonia Community.

In these homes they are offered an opportunity to enjoy all their rights through an individualized approach that aims at resolving their relational challenges and those of their families 'Building consensuses'.

The children are again prepared for family reunification through a session that addresses their fears, uncertainties, interests and they are equipped with life skills. Their family networks are at that moment engaged in responding to the concerns of the children through a process dubbed family group decision making.

With the participation of the child, the strength and weakness of the families are evaluated and a realistic plan is developed for each family to be able to transform the family environment. Buluma affirms, "The intervention ranges from economic empowerment, dealing with drug and alcohol addiction, family health care and family traditions".

With the plans in place, a short

ceremony is organized for the children ready for reintegration with their families. Celebrating their life and times at the center, The children share their thought with their remaining comrade's, social workers and parents as they share a common meal.

A follow up mechanism is put in place. This enable the children adopt to the family realities with assurance of a continuous educational support through a comprehensive outreach program.

"One challenge experienced during this process is the stigmatization of the children by the society who view them as criminals due to their street past and this is felt also at family level," stresses Buluma.

Friday 3 December 2010 marked a memorable moment for Ndugu Mdogo Center located in Kerarapon in the outskirts of Nairobi. 10 children were reintegrated to their families. Through an initiative known as family to family, a group of families in Italy have devoted themselves to support Kenyan families in a transformative process which enables them to care for the reintegrated children who have had street life experience and prevent those within the families from being lured to the streets.



From the Low Streets to High Fashion



A social enterprise at Anita's Home helps former street girls earn a living by making fashionable clothes for women.

One year ago at the age of 17, Monica Nzembi dropped out of high school to marry her slightly older boyfriend.

A former street girl, Monica had grown up at a rehabilitation centre for former street girls on the outskirts of Nairobi. She had found a family and an education at Anita's Home, and the following year she was scheduled to sit for her secondary school certificate when she chose marriage over everything else.

A few months afterwards while she was heavily pregnant, her husband left for the city centre and simply never returned. A frantic search for him began when he did not show up for three days, and it was two long weeks before his mangled body was found at a public morgue, the cause of death unclear.

Monica was devastated. Widowed before the age of eighteen and her future suddenly a thick cloud of mist, she had no idea how she would support herself and her unborn child.

Her hope was rekindled last February when two Italian ladies founded Get Together Girls (G2G), a fashion project for former street girls at Anita's Home. The project targets former street girls who are unable to continue with their education and especially single mothers like Monica who have no income. Its objective is to help these girls achieve self-reliance.

The project is run by Grazia Orsolato, an Italian lady who first came to Anita's Home in the summer of 2004.

A professional in administration, Grazia worked in Milan for 13 years as a customer administration manager with Pirelli. In 2004 she chose to spend her vacation as a volunteer in Africa instead of taking the traditional Western holiday at the seaside or some other exotic getaway. Aged 32 at the time, Grazia had won a place in a "work camp" sponsored by the Italian

NGO Amani to enable young Italians to volunteer in Africa. Amani implements the work camp every year in partnership with the Koinonia Community, a non-profit organization that runs Anita's Home and several other projects in Kenya, Zambia and Sudan.

The time Grazia spent at Anita's Home had a profound effect on her. Most of the girls at the Home were either rescued from the streets or were born to single parents without the proper means to take care of them. The centre met their basic needs and provided an education, but Grazia felt there was a need to assist those who were not guaranteed of a future through formal education. She felt it was necessary to equip them with some practical skill that would earn them a living.

Grazia shared this idea with her friend, Italian stylist Roberta Vincenzi, and six years later in February this year, they travelled together to Anita's Home to launch G2G.

They identified a pioneer group of eight girls, and for two weeks Roberta, taught them the basics of the craft. They learned how to handle a sewing machine, how to develop designs, work with patterns and how to sew straight without weaving off course.

"They learned very fast even though most of them had never even touched a sewing machine before," Grazia says proudly.

The group operates from a small room at Anita's Home with just eight sewing machines: four of them manual and four electric. They work six hours a day, starting at nine in the morning and punching out at three in the afternoon, Monday through Friday.

The G2G products are all handmade. Their couture covers all body sizes, and they target both the Kenyan and international markets. "In Africa, our target is the middle class," Grazia explains. "We make classy garments for them using African materials such as the kitenge."

On July 3, the G2G Collection participated at a premier fashion and beauty expo held at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi. The three day event hosted by former Miss India-Kenya Pinky Ghelani featured the crème de la crème of East Africa's fashion industry. Prominent design houses, fashion magazines, indie creators and franchise owners were all present, including Sylvia Owor, the eminent Ugandan designer whose creations have been modelled in Milan and Paris.

The crowd's interest was roused

when Pinky Ghelani introduced the G2G Collection as the creation of former street girls. Just in time with this introduction, the first G2G model emerged in African print trousers and a loose Western-style maroon top. Cameras flashed as the next model strutted her way out in a brown African kitenge blouse and European-style trousers, drawing applause from the sizable crowd ringing the catwalk.

Grazia says the originality of the G2G designs has already drawn considerable attention. A few local companies have expressed interest in stocking products from the collection and the group has also received some orders from Italy through their website.

Grazia wants to ensure G2G gains a firm footing on the Kenyan market before she returns to Italy, from where she will work to introduce the collection onto the European and American fashion markets.

My motivation is to assist the girls get employment; that is why I am volunteering. I could always go back home to Italy and get a good job," she explains.

"My dream is to achieve a fashion centre, a sort of complex where production, training and selling all go on, hopefully along Ngong Road," Grazia muses when asked about the future of G2G. "I hope the girls will have the skills to run everything on their own when this time comes, including administration and marketing. We will introduce some management training for them in the future."

The G2G project does not have any external funding and Grazia sustains it from her own personal savings. She gives each girl a \$4 daily allowance, a modest amount that nevertheless makes an impact considering the high levels of poverty and unemployment in Kenya.

Despite having existed for just about half a year, the project is already touching lives. It has for instance become Monica's sole hope for her future and that of her little baby girl.

"From my earnings I have my own place, I can afford a babysitter, and G2G has reunited me with so many friends I had left behind at Anita's Home. I feel less lonely because we lean on each other", Monica says with a sigh.

15 Boys from Tone la Maji Graduate in Computer Studies

15 boys from Tone la Maji aged between 16-18 years graduated with Certificates in Computers Foundation Course on Tuesday, August 17. The Training was conducted for 3 months at Shalom IT center, an affiliate of Koinonia Community. The certificates award ceremony was officially graced by Antony Kamau-Tone la Maji Project Manager, Fr. Kizito and Work campers after the Tuesday evening Mass



Referendum Vote in Kivuli Centre, Nairobi

4 August 2010 marked the first ever voting processes to be held in one of our centers. From five o'clock in the morning people were waiting patiently to vote for the draft Constitution. The queues were long but the determination was high. Results will be out in two days time.

A video report by Arianna azzolini
<http://vimeo.com/13880621>

New Sport Shoes for Tone la Maji Football Team

Tone la Maji football team got a boost in its sports kit with a donation of new sports shoes by its sister center Ndugu Mdogo Rescue in June.

The Rescue Center donated in support of bringing the centers together and improving the social well being of the children at the centers.

The shoes will help the tone la Maji football team improve in their quality of playing football. Fr. Kizito, Projects heads from both side and well wishers were among the people who witnessed the occasion.



To South Africa By Matatu

Two Italian NGOs - namely L'Altropallone and Karibu Africa - , have organized a "Matatu" trip from Nairobi to South Africa. ("Matatu" is what public transport minibuses are called in Kenya). The aim of the trip is to promote football as a game that brings people together across race and tribe, and of course as an enjoyable physical activity

Wherever the travellers go, they stop and organize small tournaments with local children. They arrived in Lusaka on June 5, in a team of five people, and we organized to receive them. That same day we played together in our

primary school, Tubalange, and the following day they organized a tournament in Kanyama, one of the most populous compounds in Lusaka

We, the Mthunzi football team, won in the under 17 category. Their matatu developed some mechanical problems in the meantime but our mechanic, Chavu, fixed it

The presence of these matatu travellers in Mthunzi was an occasion for a lot of drumming and dances. Much to our regret, they left for Kafue and Zimbabwe the following day.

By Protazio Phiri,



Children at Ndugu Mdogo Rescue Learn from Danish Artistes



Modern art is known as a powerful tool of communication. One drawing can be interpreted in a million dimensions. With all this in mind Jan Lundum an art teacher at Silkeborg Højskole in Denmark made it to Kenya with a delegation of 10 of his students. The mission was clear, to make the vulnerable children communicate their fears and strength through the medium of visual arts and address the need for shelter.

Visual arts are art forms that create works which are primarily visual in nature. The team's emphasis was on drawing and painting. Having on black t-shirts labeled Ly-Danish for shelter and Makaazi Swahili for shelter, the team landed in Kibera at Ndugu Mdogo on Saturday October 30. Painting materials, colours and umbrellas filled their bags ready to make the children drill their brains.

"The uniqueness of this exercise is for the children to tell an enticing or troubling story that can be felt within a shelter which is symbolized by the umbrella," said Lundum.

An emblematical umbrella was used to signify protection through shelter and security. In a swanked ground each

child was issued with a black umbrella with instructions to paint inside and outside the cover of the umbrella.

Inside the cover was to express the fears and troubling situations the children had gone through. On the outside the laid colours and drawings were to send a message of the expectation of the children, hopes and future aspiration to be specific.

"This exercise is also aimed at exploring talents from children and their products to be sold at an art exhibition which means that they will not only be dependent on donations from well wishers and the donor community but use their skills to generate money to sustain their livelihoods", said Lundum.

Patrick Mukambi, a professional artist in Nairobi was part of the exercise that saw over 25 street children holding their brushes for the weekend art practice session. He has been in the industry for 12 years. Although trained as a graphics designer he found his strength on fine art which helps him express his ideas freely to earn him a living. He has worked with many organizations on children projects teaching them on how to be creative and expressing themselves using the art of painting.

"I have been working with this Danish academy for 3 years through painting exercises and studio drawing. The project will run in two

phases, where a choreographer will take the children through a short dance piece with the painted umbrellas", said Mukabi.

Being the facilitator of the day, Mukabi was comfortably throwing the shots of the day's programme. Children excitement flew over the serene environment. With great anticipation and palpability the children cracked their heads to recall their best and worst moments putting all in a figurative painting.

On his perception about art, Mukabi sated: "I focus on the positive part of life in my art work. No one wakes with their problems written on their faces. No matter the situations one still cracks jokes and moves on with life."

11 years old Tobia Muide, was keen to bring his fears out in a pictorial. As he sat down to put the paint and brush to work, his undistorted vivid recollection emanated to a sketchy house design. On its side, some inferno pulling the house down.

"I drew the house burning in clear memories of what happened during the post election violence and that's my greatest fear," said Muide timidly while scraping the paint brush with his fingers.

The art work will not remain at that, a big exhibition this month in Denmark showcasing the art from Kenya on children rights issue is underway which will run for 2 to 3 months. All the products including the umbrella that were done by the children will be the

centre of attraction on the d-day. "This will bring the Kenyan children and those from Denmark together in their minds. The western world tends to forget that children in need are like their own children that they should protect", stated Lundum.

James Mweu, the choreographer had something unique for the children; teaching them how to dance and perform some acrobatic spins with the umbrella entirely delivered through juggling, facial expressions and body movements.

"The children are getting the experience of an umbrella which is one artistic discipline to a prop in a performance", said Mweu during the vigorous exercise.

The majority of the street children would not wish to continue with street life and need a better life if given an opportunity. About 77 per cent reported that they would not wish to continue with street life, while only 23 per cent wished to continue with street life. This is according to The African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCANN) study.

Special feature: Free Physiotherapy Provides Hope to Disabled Destitute



Paolo's Home is a ray of hope to the disabled children from poor backgrounds but its resources are dwindling.

Paolo's Home, the centre was established in response to a realization that there were many physically disabled children seeking assistance at the next door children's home called Ndugu Mdogo Rescue Centre whose mandate is to promote street interventions and youth empowerment programmes, besides supporting child rescue initiatives and providing in-house care, support and rehabilitation of children in need.

Paolo's Home was officially opened on December 10, 2007. It then started its operations in March 2008, with a full time physiotherapist and a counsellor, who also doubles as the initiative's coordinator.

Although the initiative had originally aimed to concentrate on 30 cases a year, the need for the services has proved to be overwhelming. This target was quickly surpassed when, in the first week alone, 46 children with disability were received at the centre.

In an interview with Janet Kiluu the administrator of the centre, she says, "The main challenges that we are facing is lack of funds to upgrade the centre to a fully packed facility

to rehabilitate the children with disabilities."

People with disability are still stigmatized in Kenya, and although disabled children basically have the same needs as any other children, their handicap makes it much more difficult to fulfill those needs, more so in situations of poverty and stigma. Moreover, they are seldom included in overall developmental programmes, even the most basic ones like education. It is for this reason that Paolo's Home was established to help such children make the first step towards realizing their potential.

"Our vision is to start a day care center which will help children to acquire simple Activities of Daily Living (ADL) as well as improve on speech therapy which will facilitate the care givers' duty to provide for the rest of the siblings in the family," said Kiluu.

This initiative was inspired by Paolo, a young man from Fabriano, Italy, who suffered from muscular dystrophy. Paolo made a daily commitment to fight for the rights of the sick and the disabled. In spite of his physical condition, his courage, smile and positive attitude was an inspiration to many, and he radiated joy and hope to all who approached him.

Paolo died at the age of 36 in 2006. In his last years, he used the internet as a means to support and encourage other disabled people. A

group of Paolo's friends, who had visited Nairobi and Kibera, pledged to support a project that would keep his memory alive and carry on with his commitment to improve the lot of the disabled. They provided funding for Paolo's Home, and continue to support its operations.

The centre's aim is to improve the disabled children's muscle function and mobility, ease physical pain and improve their blood circulation. This is done using methods such as massage, therapeutic stretches and exercise. The initiative also helps refer extreme cases to orthopaedic specialists. Unfortunately, most families or guardians cannot afford the advanced orthopaedic services, and Paolo's Home is currently unable to assist them meet the hefty costs.

The centre hopes to be able to facilitate access to artificial limbs, crutches and other physical aids for the physically disabled. In this regard, a closer relationship with the Association for the Physically Disabled in Kenya (APDK) and Kijabe Hospital in Kenya is being pursued. APDK has so far helped one child obtain a walking aid.

Many parents despair in the face of their child's physical disability. Paolo's Home provides a free counselling service for such parents. The aim is to give them faith that all is not lost for their children. The centre's group therapy programme especially helps these parents share their experiences and find strength in each other.

The initiative has an Outreach Programme where the physiotherapist and the counsellor visit the homes of registered children to follow up on their progress. Owing to resource limitations, this programme is currently confined to the precincts of the Kibera slums. The centre, however, hopes to expand its outreach into neighbouring areas, starting with the west of Nairobi.



*The Koinonia Community
in Nairobi,
wishes you joy and laughter
during this Christmas Season
and prosperity in 2011*

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year



We belong to each other

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