
Making A Difference

A 90-Year-Old's Struggle for Deaf Education

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Scores of deaf children in western Kenya are often punished many times over for their inability to hear, a condition they had no part in choosing.

In most communities, deafness—or any disability—in children is viewed as a punishment for evil acts committed by the parents or ancestors, making the children sorts of pariahs. Older men wishing to rid themselves of HIV/AIDS and who believe that having sex with a virgin will cure them, will often target deaf or other physically challenged children who cannot identify them. And deaf girls, rather than getting an education, will often end up as a fourth or fifth wife to an old man.

While this is happening in western Kenya, in far-away Britain, 90-year-old Nelda Kroll continues to be moved by the harsh realities of the deaf children. As a result, Mrs. Kroll has become a fixture in Safeway supermarkets in Acton, London. At an age when most people are enjoying their retirement years in leisure, Mrs. Kroll stands in the Safeway stores with a box, labeled “Deaf children – Thank you.” She actively solicits funds from shoppers to ease the children’s burden.

Thus Nelda Kroll, or “Nelda,” as she is affectionately called, is the voluntary fundraising coordinator for the Lambwe Christian School for

Deaf Children, a facility in Nyanza province that accommodates more than 40 deaf students. Situated on some 16 acres of land, the school offers these children a quality Christian education, sports, and other activities. Among other things, students are taught sign language, speech reading, auditory training, typing, and basic agriculture.

Crops such as maize, sunflowers and tomatoes are grown on the land, cows provide milk, and there is a bee-keeping income-generating project, making the school at least partly self-sufficient.

Mrs. Kroll’s involvement with Lambwe Christian School for Deaf Children stretches back to several decades ago when she first met Enoch Aloo, a person Mrs. Kroll recalls as being “a committed Christian of integrity and an amazing example of Christian service and testimony in the community.”

At that time, Mr. Aloo was working as chief clerk at Molo Research Station, where Mrs. Kroll’s husband was stationed as an agronomist and geneticist. The two struck up an acquaintance. Not long afterwards, Mrs. Kroll returned to Britain, but came back to Kenya and reunited with Mr. Aloo.

By that point, Mr. Aloo was a retired Justice of the Peace in Nyanza, and had started a one-roomed school for the many deaf children in the area. But Mr. Aloo was getting weak. On his deathbed

in 1992 in Kisumu Hospital, he implored Mrs. Kroll not to “let the deaf children down.” That is when she took up the challenge of fundraising for the school.

In addition to collecting money, Mrs. Kroll also gathers supplies for the children. For instance, in 2002 she dispatched a large container of aid to nearby Homa Bay filled with clothing, kitchenware, stationery, educational books, typewriters, and sewing machines, all from well-wishers.

The school has at least six teachers and two volunteers to teach the more than 40 students, who range in age from five to 17 years old. In addition to the funding that Mrs. Kroll sends the school through the UK-based Siloam Christian Ministries, the school also receives assistance from World Vision, Concern Worldwide, the Peace Corps, and private local and international donors.

Mrs. Kroll refers to the students at Lambwe School as “her children,” and says she is motivated by her faith: “A Christian zeal does not grow out of intellectual belief, nor out of theological arguments, but out of love.”

“I felt privileged to be called to contribute a little towards the world’s healing of prejudices,” she says. “So much could be done with even the little each of us could add.”