

A Home for Children in Nakuru

Since it was established in 1967 under a charter from the Child Welfare Society of Kenya, children have come to Arap Moi Children's Home from all over the Nakuru region of western Kenya. Some are placed at the home by the Children's Department in the Ministry of Home Affairs or by the Ministry of Health.

Other children are abandoned in hospitals or recovered from the streets by police and later brought to the home. "The community knows we are here, and knows we can help," says Mrs Justine "Mama" Oduya, the home's director and regional coordinator of the Child Welfare Society of Kenya, Nakuru branch. It is not uncommon for desperate young mothers, churches or the organisation's own social worker to arrive at the door-step with another addition to the Arap Moi family.

It's a family that accepts children as young as a day old up to those aged 10 years. Infants sleep in a nursery area, while older children live in dormitory style units and are looked after by 7 'mothers' who take care of them on a daily basis. The project's main objective, however, is to rehabilitate the children and help them return either to their guardians or to foster or adoptive homes. Once placed, the child and family are visited by the home's social worker to ensure that all is well. "We try to see that children are settled as fast as

possible...so that they do not spend all their lives [here]," explains Mama Oduya. "They need that love and warmth that a child only can get from a family circle."

Arap Moi Children's Home

currently houses about 150 children, 105 of whom are among the 14 million African children who have lost their



"MOTHERS' FEEDING INFANT"

parents to AIDS. Five of the children admitted to the home in the last year were found to be HIV positive after screening, but three of them have since turned negative. Sister Juliet Makokha, the nurse in charge of Arap Moi's small clinic is hopeful about the future of all sick children who come to the home. "With the assistance of HACI, with the drugs and a little bit of extra care I am sure we will make a breakthrough with the two who are still HIV positive," and the many more who are sure to come.

The clinic began out of a desire to reduce the increasing amounts of time and money spent taking sick children to the local hospital. Because they are found in varying circumstances -including dustbins and alleys- children often come to the home in very poor health. Some have been left out in the cold or the hot sun and often have pneumonia and other illnesses. "We were going to the hospital at all hours of the day and night, and it was expensive," recalls Makokha. "The fee for the AIDS test was so high. We felt we

could do better ourselves." Makokha now runs the clinic in consultation with a local doctor who volunteers her services, and visits regularly to examine the children and prescribe medication to be dispensed by the nurse.

A portion of the grant of 500,000 Kenyan Shillings (about 6,410 US dollars) that the Home received from the Hope for African Children Initiative will be used to improve the clinic's ability to provide HIV/AIDS primary health care. KSh 255,000 has already been used to cover the cost of clinic equipment, drugs, HIV/AIDS testing kits, and training of counselors. "The HACI grant...will go a long way towards helping with the running of the clinic. We will be able to help the children's guardians too, which we were unable to do before," says Oduya. Plans are currently underway to open the clinic to members of the surrounding community as a means of generating income for the home.

The clinic would offer services for comparatively small fees, thus operating much like the nursery school housed at Arap Moi. Younger children who live at the compound attend the school, which means they no longer have to face risks associated with the long walks involved in attending local schools. The school has also opened its doors to other needy children in the area as an alternative for those who cannot afford the fees at Nakuru's public schools. Families who can afford to pay the KSh 1800 (about 23 US dollars) school fee per three-month term subsidize the children from families who can't afford to pay the fee.

The home pays school fees for the older children who live at the

compound but attend the nearby municipal primary school and for the teenagers attending computer courses at the Nakuru Christian



Professionals College. Many of the children living at Arap Moi, however, attend school thanks to outside financial help. Helping out with the educational needs of Arap Moi kids is one of the many ways that the community partners with the home to address the needs of Nakuru's many orphans and vulnerable children.

In Africa, there is a rich tradition of strong community and extended family networks to provide care for orphaned and vulnerable children, and that tradition has been a great support for the children at Arap Moi. Although nearly every household in Nakuru is dealing with the effects of poverty and HIV/AIDS, many sponsor children at the home by paying a portion of their school fees and medical expenses. The home also works with community members to increase HIV/AIDS awareness and decrease stigmatization in Nakuru. Volunteer counsellors lead discussions and workshops that target high-risk groups. A recent session visited 30 local commercial sex workers in their own neighborhood to discuss issues concerning HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

Volunteers from a local youth group often participate in the pro-

grams by performing dramas, songs and poetry aimed at promoting responsible sexual behaviors and awareness among young people. The

group also performed at a training session held in July 2002 for teachers and Head Mistresses from local schools. The teachers had recognized the growing number of children in need of counselling and support in their classrooms, so they came to Arap Moi for help. The session, facilitated by a local medical doctor and a magistrate, provided a unique opportunity for the teachers to ask questions, voice concerns and share best practices.

The tradition of working in the community and with the community to meet the needs of the community's children is central to the success and future plan of Arap Moi Children's Home. "You have to listen to the people, but let them claim their own problems. These are bright people," Mama Oduya says as she watches a small boy enter the clinic with his mother. "They can develop a solution if they seek it out." By partnering with programs like the Arap Moi Children's Home, the Hope for African Children Initiative is supporting efforts that help people from villages and towns like Nakuru develop the solutions they seek.

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