

Hands of Love Report

January & February 2018

The beginning of the school year is always a hectic time, though I didn't mean for over two months to go by this year before I started regularly updating you on activities at Hands of Love. And yet, here we are. After a tumultuous 2017, we started the new school year in January full of energy and hope and then proceeded to have a very busy two months. We had to figure out how to implement the new curriculum. With little help from the government this was more challenging than anticipated. Then there were home visits. These took a lot of time but are very important for us. Following last year's events, some families moved houses and there was some disruption to livelihoods. We therefore needed to get better a sense of the situation. Now that I have a bit of time and energy (we are on mid-term break), this post is going to be a little longer than usual.

New School Shoes

Thanks to support from HoL USA we have been able to buy new school shoes for 85 children (slightly more than half the school population). We bought these shoes at Bata Shoes Company factory shop in the scenic Limuru some 40 kilometres from Nairobi. The trips to buy shoes also served the purpose of getting the kids away from the slum to a place where they could run around, play and generally have fun. Providing shoes to the children means a lot to them and their families. The past few weeks all the talk at the centre has been about the shoes and the trips. Kids who are yet to get shoes (about 75) are wondering when they will get theirs and some parents want to know if we can give shoes to their other kids who do not school at HoL. A good pair of shoes may not mean much to a lot of people, but for our kids it is a amenity their families usually cannot afford. Many of these kids come from families living hand-to-mouth and often miss out on things that most people take for granted. So Peggy, on behalf of the kids and their families, thanks a lot for spearheading the shoes campaign.

New Kids at the Centre

Sixteen children joined the centre in January bringing the total number of children to 158. We therefore did not meet our target of having not more than 120 children at the centre. All the new kids are very deserving and it was very hard to say no to their families.

Take the case of Monica Saida for example. Monica has lived a life no child should have to endure. She was born with cerebral palsy six years ago. Her parents who hail from

Tanzania believe her condition is as a result of witchcraft and have therefore never sought any professional help for her. Instead they have kept her inside their house hidden from the public for fear of stigma. We “discovered” her while on a visit to a HoL family who are their neighbours. It took a lot to convince the family that it was Ok for Monica to come to school. Although taking care of her at the Centre means extra work for everybody, we are glad to her because all of us and the kids learn a lot from doing it. Knowing that we can somehow make a small difference in the life of this innocent and adorable child makes our job worthwhile.



Implementation of the new curriculum

As mentioned in the annual report, in January, we started implementing a new curriculum. Although we had done a lot towards the end of last year to prepare for the new system we still needed to do more. There were more training workshops and teachers have been working hard to adapt to the new system. They have had to rework daily lessons and come up with new formative and summative assessments. This hasn't been easy. Although things are much better now, to be honest we do not have as yet a clear sense of what is going to happen. Many schools around Kariobangi and indeed in the country have not been able to implement the new curriculum.

Welfare and food program

We wanted to improve our food program this year. I am happy to report that we have been able to do this successfully. Our menu now includes more fruits and vegetables, eggs on Tuesdays, and meat on Thursdays.

One big challenge that we had in January and February is that our building did not have running water (a unrepaired broken line in the neighborhood) and we have had to get water from outside at a cost of 1,500ksh daily (\$15). This is huge cost that was not budgeted for and has delayed some of the other things that we wanted to do.

Two kids lost their dads in January. Josephine's dad died in a boda boda (motorcycle taxi) accident and Celestine's dad was shot dead by the police. I had a very moving conversation with Josephine in which she asked me if I could be her new dad. The thrust of this conversation made me realise that despite their young age (Josephine is five) HoL kids appreciate the support we give them; I could see that she understood that they are poor and I had a sense that she didn't want to worry her mum. She wanted me to be her dad so that I could buy her the things that her mum cannot afford. Children here experience life very differently.

We want to be able to help kids like Josephine as much as we can and with the gracious support of our partners in the US and Italy we are already doing a lot. But there are times we can't help and that can be heart-breaking and has often left me with lingering feeling of guilt but I am learning we can't be everything to everybody and it's OK to say no to somethings and not feel guilty.

We held two successful parents – teachers meetings, one in January and the other in February. The main aim of the meetings was to explain to the teachers the changes in the education system and to chart the way forward for 2018.

Visitors

In the last week of January, we were blessed to have Diego Stellino, Marilena and Stefania from Bologna visit the centre the three joined us on home visits during which Marilena who is a nurse offered health advice to families. The trio donated first aid kits and medication, as well as clothing to the centre which was much appreciated.

In mid-February we were happy to receive Paola Ramello again at the centre. Paola joined us on a trip to Limuru to buy shoes for the kids and also stayed with us at the centre for two days. The kids enjoyed her company and we are looking forward to her next visit.

Play Area

Work on our indoors play continued at slow pace. We have cleared the areas and now we need to paint, put AstroTurf on the floor and install things like swings, slides etc.

