

Upendo Orphans Project

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Dear all

At last a newsletter from Upendo! It has been a very long time since the last one. 2007 was a hugely busy year for all of us. I hope you haven't given up waiting.

As you know, in December 2006, we completed the new building which houses two classrooms, kitchen (well, two of these actually....), an administration office, a toilet and shower bloc, a dining room/play room and a large verandah. As anybody who has seen it in action will know, the building is very well used and enjoyed. The gardens have also matured very quickly so that the border fence is covered in bougainvillea, the gardens beds are fully of flowering shrubs, the trees that visitors have planted are growing quickly and the lawn of buffalo grass is well established, even surviving the dry season and constant playing of football on it. We have swings, a slide and a sandpit which are very popular - the smaller children never seem to tire of these.

Over the last year we have increased the number of children supported from 24 to 31. We employ 2 cooks, 3 nursery teachers and 2 helpers. Grace Mzungu, the chairwoman, who is employed by the church, takes care of most of the daily matters in addition to doing her social work job for the church. She spends most of her spare time on Upendo. As we have grown so rapidly over the last 18 months, her workload has become enormous, and so from 2008, the project will employ her as a full-time Administrator.

Another consequence of this rapid expansion has been that the Upendo ladies have taken more of a back seat when it comes to taking care of the children. In order to increase the involvement of the ladies, we have assigned each child to a Upendo lady and they are responsible for chasing up on health matters, school attendance, and the general welfare of the child. Many of the guardians of the children do not take these responsibilities, and we were finding that some of the children were in desperate need of attention, both physical and emotional. This scheme also helps expand the childrens' social territories thus increasing their sense of security.

The children themselves are pure delight. Most of them spend their after-school and weekend hours at Upendo playing and socialising. They are getting good nutritious food three times a day and some of them get washed and a change of clothes at Upendo on a daily basis. We have a store-room full of toys, puzzles, balls, etc which are very well used. We do have a constant stream of jiggers, boils, sores, and fevers but these are seen to at the hospital. And put a flower behind their ear or put on some music, and they dance and sing as if their world was an easy, friendly place. Our crippled boy has been having treatment on his legs and is having another operation next week with the hope that he will be able to walk properly again soon.

The highlight of the children's year was the volunteers that came to help out. Brigid and Katherine Howell from Australia, Janna Cressman from Canada and Dani Kulenkampff from South Africa all came and spent many months at Upendo playing and helping teach and take care of the children. Everyone had a whale of a time, and now the kids and girls miss each other enormously. Each of the volunteers was assigned to one of the Upendo ladies who have offered to host such visitors in the future.

We also had many visitors from church groups and individuals from the UK, the US, Australia, Germany, and elsewhere. We absolutely loved showing them the project, and they were very generous with their

gifts. We received sizeable donations from the Karibuni Trust and Heswall United Reform Church. Our local church also held an Orphans Sunday and generated considerable support for the project. With the help of a donation from the UK, the ladies started a tree nursery for growing seedlings for sale to supplement our income. This has been a great success.

Well, the above is just a few highlights of some of the things that have been happening over the past year. Of course there are many more - a couple of these are described in the separate boxes below. But perhaps I can best summarise how the project is going by telling you how I found the place last Saturday upon returning to Kenya after being away for 6 weeks. The first classroom was occupied by a meeting between church leaders and the bishop, the second classroom was being used for interviews for school-fee paying scholarships from Rotary by a group we work closely with, the children were happily playing while waiting for their lunch and lined up to show off their sores, bumps and scratches, and then a minibus load of loudly singing ladies arrived into the compound arriving back from a visit to a family who Upendo now takes care of as part of their outreach programme (see below for their story). So we are in full-swing, doing what you support us to do.

Best wishes

Margaret Mackinnon (Fundraiser) and Grace Mzungu (Chairperson).

The Karisa family

In January 2006 the mother of 10 children died by accidental electrocution while collecting water for her family. Her husband, a fisherman, abandoned the children. In February 2007, Upendo took on the care of the three youngest and KESHO, a school-fee paying organisation arranged to pay for the 4 older children to go to boarding school. When Johnny (10), Sande (4) and arrived they has to school still traumatised - Sande wouldn't even speak. Now John has completed his nursery school and started in primary school. He is very diligent and always the first to arrive at school. Manu and Sande are very fun-loving and happy. The boys get transported to and from their house by bicycle every day as it is too far to walk. They are washed and given clean clothes every day at Upendo as their aunt cannot take care of them. The older children are doing very well at school.



Volunteers Brigid, Janna and Dani



The Omar family

In early 2008, a mother of 7 died when a lamp caught fire in their hut. Two of her children, Aziza (2) and Ibrahim (4) were very badly burned. The sister of the father came to look after them but died within a month. Then the grandmother stepped in to help - she also died soon after. The two burned children spent 6 months on the ward and were released in November 2007. They extra operations which have arranged. The night the local also looks after 5 older children on a very small wage. Now, with donations from well-wishers, Upendo has organised the building of a new house for the family and for food to be delivered monthly to the father.

