

Children Alone Newsletter Spring 2007

Kimilili Revisited.

On the surface not much had changed since my last visit to Kimilili, in the Western province of Kenya, six years ago. The busy market was alive with colour and noise; assorted livestock still roamed the streets; brightly painted bicycle taxis waited for custom at the roadside and the pot-holes still made driving a challenge! I don't remember noticing the New Hangover Hotel or the Blessed Vision beauty parlour on my last visit but, apart from some new business enterprises, the place seemed gloriously the same with all the fascination and alluring charm of a small African market town. Once again I was accompanied on my travels by our Trustee, Hilary Spranger, whose help was brilliant. We were able to divide our time between different projects and therefore covered more ground. Her skills as a photographer are impressive! I am so grateful to her for making a very valuable contribution to the trip.

Nothing however had stayed the same with our Kenyan partners, IcFEM (Interchristian Fellowships Evangelical Mission) who are based in Kimilili. There has been phenomenal growth and development in the number of staff and range of projects designed to reach the spiritual and practical needs of the people in the area. It is an exciting and vibrant work that has succeeded in bringing transformation to many people's lives.

Dreamland Education Centre

Nowhere is change more evident than at the Dreamland Education Centre, the school managed by our Kenyan partner IcFEM. The school, situated 2 kilometres out of Kimilili and set in stunning scenery in the foothills of the Mt Elgon range, now has 275 children, 75 of whom are boarders, and 15 teachers. The school has done extremely well in state examinations and now everyone wants a place at Dreamland!

Last year Children Alone started a **scholarship scheme** that enabled 26 orphaned or severely disadvantaged children to have an opportunity for a high quality education in this Christian school.

It was absolutely thrilling to hear the way that so many of the scholarship children had changed beyond recognition by coming to the school.

MAKEOVER FOR MERCY AND MILDRED.

Soon after her father's death, **Mercy's** mother disappeared leaving her 5 abandoned children with an uncle. The uncle was young, newly married and totally overwhelmed by the sudden responsibility of being guardian to 5 children. Mercy was bright but extremely uncooperative. She was rude, arrogant and refused to submit to her uncle or aunt. Considering the upheaval in her life, her defiant behaviour is hardly surprising. The uncle was not an unkind man but he was unable to cope with Mercy. When he heard about the scholarships being offered at DEC, he loaded the sullen girl on to the back of his bicycle and they made the 30 kilometre trip on rough dirt roads to the school. The uncle was very relieved when his niece was offered a place. Several weeks later they returned to the school for the start of term. The bicycle, in addition to its human cargo, was now laden with a mattress and many bundles and packages precariously balanced on its slender frame. Apparently their arrival caused quite a stir at DEC as no-one could believe they had actually managed to make the journey with so much gear. The uncle was in a state of near collapse after the exertions of the ride. Mercy struggled to settle down. The discipline was alien to her and she was a real challenge to the teachers. The school has a chaplain who spent a lot of time with Mercy, counselling her and teaching her. Gradually she began to

change as she learnt of God's love and began to feel secure and settled in her new environment where people genuinely seemed to care. She began to obey instructions, smile and work hard. When she returned home in the holidays she did not revert to her former behaviour but continued to behave well. Her aunt was so astounded by the transformation in her niece, that she made a special visit to Dreamland. She told the teachers

'I had to visit this place that has caused my niece to change so much.'

Mercy started off as 12th in her class and is now 3rd. She is making steady progress and achieving higher and higher scores in statutory tests. She now has an opportunity for a whole new quality of life and a bright future.

Mildred was brought to DEC by a teacher who was deeply concerned about her welfare. The girl did not smile and looked perpetually miserable and oppressed. Her mother was dead and her father was an alcoholic. He did not seem to care about the children and a step-mother was making life very difficult for Mildred. She obtained a scholarship place at DEC and the teachers at her previous school clubbed together to buy her all the equipment she would need to start her new life. At first Mildred was extremely withdrawn and refused to talk. At break-times she would stand by herself and just stare at the other children. She seemed isolated from all that was going on around her and appeared to trust no-one. Once again the school chaplain, other teachers and pupils worked hard at getting alongside her showing her love and understanding. Now Mildred is a totally changed girl. Her personality has been transformed, and she now smiles, talks freely and takes a full part in the activities of the school. Everyone has helped her to become a child again and she is able to relate normally to other people. Unfortunately her academic progress has not matched her emotional development but it is hoped that, as her confidence grows, she will be able to improve her performance.

Sydney's story.

Sydney wandered to the front of the school dining room that had been transformed into a chapel for the boarders Sunday service. In contrast to the other neatly dressed children, his appearance was decidedly dishevelled with the neck of his check shirt awry and his small frame swamped by an over-sized maroon sweater. Apparently his own sweater had gone missing. This was a typical Sydney scenario. He was constantly losing things and seemed unable to concentrate. He took no pride in his work but scribbled everything at top speed. Sydney did not seem to care about anything. It transpired that his parents had split up and used their son as a kind of pawn in their own games of trying to manipulate one another. Sydney had spent most of his life floating between the two of them. His mother would take him to school and then his father would arrive and abduct him at the first opportunity. The mother felt that boarding would offer the boy more security. At the end of January, true to form, the father arrived at DEC and tried to snatch Sydney. The school has so far successfully thwarted all his attempts to take the boy. Now in a more stable and secure environment he is slowly beginning to change.

Emmanuel's escapades. Originally a day scholar, Emmanuel stayed with his mother who was a single parent. However the school discovered that Emmanuel was a great source of anxiety to his mother as he would often disappear for several days at a time. He would get on the school bus at DEC but fail to arrive at home. His mother would go out to Dreamland to look for him only to discover that no-one knew where he was. News would reach the distraught mother that he had been seen in a certain town or village and then, much to everyone's relief, he would eventually return home. His mother and teachers questioned him closely but he did not go with anyone else and he did not seem to have a clear idea about why he kept wandering away. At certain times he just seemed to feel

compelled to run away. Emmanuel became a boarder at Dreamland and in the last 3 months has made no attempt to leave the school.

Joy for John

John is 17 years old and in standard 8. He is obviously much older than the average DEC scholar but is highly motivated to complete his education. This situation is quite normal in African schools. John is from Mount Elgon district and was brought for an interview at DEC by the head teacher of his previous school and his mother. He was identified as having potential that could not be developed in the school he had attended. Last year soon after the second term, tribal clashes began in the Mount Elgon district. There was serious fighting and the children at the school John was attending dispersed as their parents fled the conflict. Children had to abandon education. Some went to other areas and became herd boys or house boys and others even joined tribal guerrilla forces in the forest. There is still tension in the area although an army presence has calmed the situation. John has made rapid progress academically since he has been at Dreamland. At first he was achieving only 47% in English tests but that score gradually increased until at the beginning of 2007 he was achieving 73%. He is currently the school head boy. He was at first very anxious about what would happen in the holidays because his mother had fled Mount Elgon but the headmistress, who first suggested he go to Dreamland, took him in during the holidays. He does visit his mother when it is possible. At the Dreamland Boarders Service one Sunday morning John told the story of how he came to DEC. 'A boy told me that I had been called to the home of the headmistress. I was very worried and tried to think what I might have done wrong. I was very anxious when I went to see her but she was not angry with me. I was told that scholarships were available at DEC and that I could apply to go there. I went for my interview and was so happy to be offered a place. I am so grateful to God for bringing me here. Since I have been here there have been clashes in the place where I was. I don't even know where some of my friends are. People have died in the clashes and I thank God for protecting me from the conflict and keeping me alive to study.'

New Life for Loice

In a previous issue of the newsletter we featured a piece about Loice who had walked 40 kilometres to attend an interview for a scholarship place. Loice was successful and became a DEC student. Loice was too poor to buy the 'shopping' or basic equipment needed to be a boarder. She arrived with a plastic bag with just a few tattered rags for clothes. She did not even possess shoes.

Ruth Nabie, the former head of DEC, said that she felt like crying when she saw the state of the girls few possessions.

Loice started off as the bottom of her class but has slowly improved her score in the three tests carried out each term. It was decided that although there had been a big improvement she would benefit from repeating year 7. In the first tests Loice scored 244 marks out of 500 but she has improved enormously and has achieved a top score of 354. When she first came she had virtually no English or Kiswahili but now she is among the best in writing essays.

We praise God for the work of DEC that is bringing healing to hurting children and providing an opportunity for them to have a future and a hope. Spending time at DEC filled me with a desire to help as many as possible, who still live in the sadness and despair of abusive homes, to have an opportunity to be transformed by God's love and power.

Items required for each boarder to bring at the beginning of the school year.

Mattress 3 inches

2 blankets	Black Shoes
2 light green standard bed sheets.	Underwear 3 pairs boys 6 pairs girls
2 pairs of pyjamas	3 petticoats girls
Bath towel	5 pens
Plastic basin	Bible Good News and Golden Bells hymnbook
2 pieces of toilet soap	5 pencils HB
Washing soap	Hairbrush and comb
Black shoes	Geometrical set
Shoe polish and brush	

Typical School Day
 Preassembly lessons 7.30am
 Assembly 8.00am
 2 lessons 40 mins each
 Break Tea
 2 lessons Lunch
 2 lessons End of classes 3.10pm
 Compulsory Games
 Assemble for Home Day scholars 4.00pm

INTRODUCING PAMELA- THE CHAPLAIN OF DEC.

Beautiful harmonies accompanied by drums and other simple instruments, drifted through the air as we joined the Boarders of DEC for their Sunday morning service. The children organize and lead the worship and introduce testimonies, memory verses and action songs and dances. It was a very moving experience. Later in the service Pamela, tall and slender and graceful in a smart grey suit drew a selection of leafy branches from a plastic bag. Amongst the foliage she pointed out the snail that she had inadvertently collected. 'These are all part of God's creation even the snail,' she told the 75 attentive children. Married with two small boys, Pamela has been chaplain at DEC for 3 years. Every class has two forty minute lessons of Bible teaching each week and the children also come to her for personal help, advice and counsel. As we have already indicated, Pamela also attempts to get alongside those who have come to the attention of the teachers as children with particular problems. It is apparent that her influence and contribution is crucial to the ethos of the school. Later as we drank coke and sampled some delicious mandazis (a sort of Kenyan doughnut without the sugar) we asked Pamela some questions.

How did you become involved in children's work?

My father wanted me to become a broadcaster and I was determined to join the army. I ended up as an accountant! At 13 I became a Christian and was very involved in the activity of my church. One day while still at school I heard someone speaking behind me. I heard the words

'I want you to serve me.'

I turned round quickly as I thought my teacher was speaking to me but there was no-one there. I thought this was strange.

Later in secondary school I went to help with a mission. One day I was invited to speak to the children and many children turned to Christ. I was totally amazed as I could not believe that such simple words could have such an impact on the children.

Several years later while working on some accounts I was startled to see some words on the computer screen.

'I want you to serve me.' These were the words that I read.

I believed that God was trying to speak to me and I told my pastor what had happened. He counselled me to pray and wait. The following Sunday I was invited to help with a

huge gathering of 2,000 children. Once again many came to know Jesus as Saviour. At around this time I had a dream. I was standing on a mountain and on the lower slopes were thousands of children singing and lifting their hands in worship. In the dream I prayed

'I need the courage to help them Lord. I can't do it on my own.'

Did you receive any formal training?

Yes I attended the East Africa School of Theology and trained as a pastor with special interest in children's work.

I love working with the children at Dreamland but I feel so inadequate for the task.

There are several children who are quite disturbed and I do not feel that I understand enough about the reasons why they are behaving in the way they are. I praise God for the way He has helped me so far to deal with some very challenging situations. It is wonderful to see how some of them have changed.

PORTRAIT OF A HEADMASTER.

CORNELIUS WEKESA

Cornelius is about to take over as head teacher at DEC. He started teaching at DEC in 2002 just one year after the school began. Smartly dressed and with a warm smile, Cornelius agreed to have a break from marking to answer a few questions.

What is your vision for this school?

'I want to see children treated as human beings.

In many of our public schools here in Kenya there is unfortunately a culture of abuse. At one of the schools I attended as a child I well remember a teacher constantly speaking harshly to a particular girl. This teacher would say things like

'You are as stupid as your mother,'

Finally the girl could stand it no longer and dropped out of school. Her whole future was compromised because of the attitude of teachers.

Physical abuse is accepted as a common practice and even sexual abuse occurs. It is not uncommon for male teachers to befriend girls in their classes and then betray their position of trust by assaulting them. This is a Christian school and the attitudes are totally different. My core interest is in developing teachers so that they genuinely care about their students and look upon them as human beings. I want the teachers to understand how God sees these children. I want them to see their work here not just as a way of earning a living but as a Christian ministry of building professional but caring relationships with the young people.

I also want this to be a place of academic excellence. There is now free primary education in Kenya but the infrastructure is currently too weak to accommodate the large rise in numbers. Classes are too large and teachers are sometimes inadequately trained. There are poor resources and often very dilapidated buildings. This makes it extremely difficult for children to benefit effectively from this service.

I hope that we can develop a relationship with our students that lasts even beyond their time in Dreamland. I would like to follow up their progress and have correspondence with them so that they remain a part of the family here.

I want to develop a disciplined, yet secure and caring atmosphere.'

Why did you become a teacher?

My father was a Primary school headmaster and he was a wonderful role model for me. I was brought up in a Christian home. My father even gave a piece of our land for a church to be built. I observed the high level of commitment that my father had to his work and the

way he did things. When I went to high school the teacher was very helpful to us and would allow us to use her class notes if we had got behind with note taking in lessons. I was the one chosen to write the notes on the board for the other students who needed extra help. I enjoyed writing on the board!

After taking my O level in 1997 I was invited to help out at the school where my uncle taught. I quickly went to join this school and very much enjoyed the work. After a year of voluntary work they gave me a small salary for my services. These experiences and my success in helping some students gave me desire to train as a teacher. So I trained for 2 years and then came to Dreamland Education Centre. In my high school days I had had links with the mission and therefore it was natural to want to join their school and help in its development.

How did you come to Christ?

'As I have already explained my family are Christians. At first I just accepted everything but I did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When I was about 12 I developed an interest in reading the Bible. My elder sister did not seem to use her Bible much and so I borrowed it, hid it and avidly read it at every opportunity. I was deeply touched by what I read and gradually repented of my sin and gave my life to Christ. I had 5 friends at school who were all Christians. My father gave us permission to use the school on Saturdays so that we could read the Bible and share together. Within a year we had 20 members of our fellowship group. This was a tremendous help to me as I grew in the Christian faith.'

WHERE HAVE ALL OUR STUDENTS GONE?

One of my aims during this trip was to try and gather news about those who Children Alone had sponsored through secondary school. Patrick Biboko, who has headed up the sponsorship programme, was happy to help me. He keeps good records but he also still has contact with many of the students and so could answer my questions without needing to consult any notes.

Rebekah

It was a wonderful surprise to discover that one of our former sponsored students is now the Matron in charge of the girls' boarding house. Rebekah told Hilary who interviewed her, that she greatly enjoyed her work. She loves the evenings and weekends when she can spend time with the boarders. They share their problems and concerns and she is able to act like a mother to them. The increase in the number of boarders is an improvement as it means there is more to do and Rebekah is not one to be idle. She sometimes finds the days boring but she often helps in the kitchen with the preparation of drinks for the staff and other tasks. She has a small bedroom in the dormitory block and although it is simply furnished she does have separate washing facilities. She has her own radio but is looking forward to the day when electricity comes to the Dreamland site as then she will have a greater range of activities open to her.

Rose is also working for IcFEM helping with the COREL scheme. This is a loan strategy to enable people to set up in small businesses. She also has a diploma in medicine.

Violet, Caroline and David are all teaching and **Collette** is training to be a teacher. **Abraham** is at the final year of Moi University Eldoret where he is studying electrical engineering. **Sammy** is in the final year of training as a clinical officer in Uganda and **Elizabeth M** is in the third year of a Diploma in journalism course. **Martin** is working as a clerk for a bus company in Nakuru and **Elizabeth K** is doing computer training.

We praise God for news of the students and evidence that they have benefited from the investment in their education.