

Our Foundation Diary

By Fran Masheder and Tracy Connolly

When we found out that we had been lucky enough to be selected to visit the Foundation programmes, neither of us ever envisaged what an incredible, awe-inspiring time we were to experience. After hearing accounts from previous Sumerian's who had visited the programmes, you'd think we would be pretty well prepped for what we would see. But nothing can prepare you for what you witness first-hand. From the volunteers and support workers that dedicate their energies coordinating the programmes and building community relationships, to the children and young adults who have faced such traumatic personal circumstances and loss, but who strive to continue their lives with determination and optimism - all were truly remarkable.



Fran, Tracy, Jeni and Deborah

Our hosts and fantastic educators for the week were Jeni Duck, who works for the Kate McAskill Foundation and who coordinates much of the Sumerian Foundation's ground work; Deborah Ross from Vision Africa, Seed of Hope and Johari; James Mwangi, who kindly drove us to all the programmes, and Priscilla, who made us feel so at home. We learnt so much from all of them and thank them for their kind hospitality.

Monday

Our first visit was to one of the Seed of Hope centres in Kariti, which is about 40 miles north-east of Nairobi. Teenage girls are one of the most vulnerable groups in Kenyan society, with many facing bleak futures due to poverty, abuse and poor access to education. The two-year Seed of Hope course provides the students with dress making, business development and life-skills to help them build a self-reliant future. On the day we visited, the girls were busy learning all about purchase ledgers and managing cashflow.

Next we went to Kariti village, where we dropped by one of Seed of Hope's latest success stories - Sammy's Dressmaking. The shop was a hive of activity, with the girls busy making clothes to sell at the local markets. It was great to meet the girls and witness this fantastic outcome first-hand.



Students at Seed of Hope Sammy's Dressmaking

Our next visit was to Kandara children's home, where we planned to stay overnight. The home currently looks after 191 orphans and vulnerable children from all different ages, giving them the support and nurturing they need. The home is run in partnership with the Kate McAskill Foundation and Vision Africa, and at the time of our visit, Vera and John

Packard, tireless supporters from Vision Africa, were in the process of putting the finishing touches to a new baby unit. We were shown round the facilities and met some younger pre-school children - all keen to give us a high-five!



the new baby unit



the twins at Kandara



with Kirsty

We then strolled up the hill to Kandara village with our host at Kandara, Kirsty (pictured above), a fantastically committed Vision Africa volunteer. Again, we saw for ourselves a true success story in action - whilst staying at the home, Joshua (pictured below) was supported to take a course in mobile phone repair, and has now set up a successful business. Joshua showed us his first premises - a basic kiosk, but the proudly showed us his new larger, fixed premises, which sells phone top-ups and access to the community phone - the one and only payphone for village.



Joshua (second from left) making scrapbooks

We then visited the local market, crammed full with local fruit and vegetables sellers - a whole bagful of fruit and veg cost us just 100 shillings, about 80pence. In the evening we ran our first scrapbook making session with some of the home's children. At first, the kids looked a little apprehensive, but Kirsty did a great job of introducing the idea and talking through some of the scrapbooks prepared by Sumerian employees' kids. We were soon having great fun taking photos of the children and decorating their scrapbooks with all sorts of things they liked - from which dorm they slept in to their favourite games and songs.

Kirsty made us a delicious curry from the veggies we'd bought earlier, and showed us that she too had been busy making jewellery to sell back in the UK to friends and supporters. With our bellies full and feeling tired from the busy day, we settled into our bunks for a night in Kandara with the crickets singing outside.

Tuesday

We woke up to a bright, sunny day in Kandara. First on our schedule was a tour of the "shamba" - the organic farming garden and soon-to-be site of the upcoming botanics business. Lucy, the head gardener, took great pride showing us all her hard work. The main garden had only been planted since June of this year, but was already producing vast amounts of cabbage, spinach and kale - the staple veg needed to keep the home with a

good, steady supply. Lucy and the home have been working with KIOF (Kenya Institute of Organic Farming) to learn all about the best yield techniques and methods to keep beasts and diseases at bay. The children are also encouraged to learn gardening skills and Lucy was currently running a competition to see which dorm had the best plot.



with organic angel, Lucy



From garden...



...to dinner!

We were also told about the plans for the botanics business scheduled to pilot in February of next year. The plan is to grow herbs and aloe vera to be used in a range of soaps and beauty products. If the pilot is successful, the plan is to also involve the local community to participate and share in its opportunity.

After the tour, we left Kandara and strolled up the hill to Karunguru Special Needs School. We had visited the previous day, but didn't have much time to meet everyone properly. This was our opportunity to sit in a class and gain a good appreciation of the work being carried out here. During the class, Juliet would keep the kids interest and energy up by nominating a child to stand up and sing a song, dance and march round the classroom. The kids absolutely loved this. Juliet then turned to us and started to recite our names to the kids so that they could learn. Many of the children knew Kirsty from her previous visits, but learning "Tracy" and "Fran" was a whole new challenge. After learning our names, we were then asked to stand up return the favour and sing a song for the kids. Needless to say, our renditions of "Hickory Dickory Dock", "Humpty Dumpty" and "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" all went down well the kids - the classroom filled with smiles and laughter. Saved by the lunchtime bell, the kids made their way out to pick up their food and sit in the canopy shade in the gardens below.



Karunguru kids playing in the sun

We were then met by James, who picked us up to take us back to Nairobi. We stopped by the new Johari shop in Westgate shopping mall and were instantly impressed by the beautiful clothes on display. This new shop is specialising in off-the-peg designs, with a more casual, everyday look. The mall is newly opened and many new units are still being filled, but with a new cinema and food hall about to open, the new shop is sure to get some great business.

Wednesday

Our first stop was to Thomas Barnado's children's home, which has been established in Nairobi for some 30 years. Peter, a social worker there, took us round on a tour of the facilities: the dorms, baby unit and nearby school. There was a difference between the facilities here and in Kandara, and Jeni explained to us that the homes have to service to the context they are in. Thomas Barnado's is based in a middle-class suburb of Nairobi and hence children here have to fit in with their peers and not feel isolated in any way. The

same rules apply in Kandara - if the home was providing more than what other local children get, then the imbalance will soon become noticed by their peers.

Jeni then took us to visit Ayany Primary school in Kibera to witness first hand the new support programme which supports children who have no or little means to attend school. We had heard so much about Kibera, the main slum in Nairobi which houses over 1million people, but no words can prepare you for witnessing it directly. The conditions were shocking - there are no street names or house numbers in Kibera; it's crammed full with basic shacks made from scrap metal and wood - most with no electricity, water, toilets and drains. The Kibera situation is hugely complex and getting to grips with its story, its issues and its future is difficult to understand.



But despite the obvious poverty, businesses still thrive here and people are making a living. One such business is Rosabella's. Rosabella was one of the first graduates from Seed of Hope, and although she doesn't live in Kibera, she runs a very successful dressmaking and clothes repair business here.

Rosabella

Not far from Kibera's perimeter is Ayany school. Ayany educates some 2000 children - with at least a quarter of them orphans. The Foundation programme is currently supporting 100 children with the basic needs (food, soap, uniform etc) so that they can attend school and get their rightful education. The programme has been trialling a new jewellery making club as part of an after-school activity. The jewellery being produced is truly ingenious - the beads are made from tightly rolled strips of magazine paper. The plan is to sell these in back in the UK, to help even more at-risk children gain support from the programme.



Ayany kids at the jewellery making club

We showed the kids at Ayany the scrapbooks from Scotland and left lots of materials for them to put together their own - we're looking forward to seeing the final books. The kids were so enthusiastic and wanted to know all about where we were from and asked lots of questions - from football to the latest pop music to how much a bike costs in the UK. Meeting these children whose lives and living conditions are so difficult was truly moving - but for all our supposed differences, we all had so much in common.

Thursday & Friday

The last part of our trip was spent around Nairobi at Seed of Hope and Johari stores. At Seed of Hope, Nairobi, we were shown around the classes and met girls from both first and second years. In one classroom, the girls were busy making outfits for the Johari store. In

another, girls from Year 2 were coming to the end of their course and were putting the finishing touches to their outfits. We ran a scrapbook session with these girls too and took photos of them holding their creations - from bags, rugs, dresses and their beautiful graduation outfits.



the wonderful girls at Seed of Hope, Nairobi

At the new Johari store, we ran through further plans to enhance the Johari Web site, and Tracy trained the girls up on a new customer database Phil and Janet had built. Later that day we met Juliet - it was brilliant to find out she too was one of the original girls from the very first Seed of Hope years. Juliet had graduated more than a year ago and was enjoying making Johari's clothes along with other graduates. She shares a flat with some of the girls and gave us an update on everyone's current situation - all the girls were either running their own business, working directly for Johari or now attending secondary education.



The new Johari shop



Juliet



the girls at their flat

Later that night we went round to see Juliet, Rosabella and the other girls in the flat they share in Nairobi. The girls were just taking dinner and watching their favourite soap on the telly, but couldn't have been more welcoming to us. Meeting the girls here, enjoying their home, really sums up the great work being carried out by the Foundation and our partners - give people an opportunity and watch amazing things happen.