

BRINGING AND PLANTING HOPE

Educating and Empowering Young Women in Kenya



kenya faces **poverty**, **disease**, and **corruption**, and few feel the brunt of these challenges more than the orphans who wander its streets. Vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, these children struggle to survive on a daily basis. But a determined group of people is championing their cause by providing shelter, nurture, rehabilitation, education, and a transformative vision for the future of Kenya. This investment in young leaders brings forth a new sense of hope to defeat social injustice and break the cycle of poverty.

meet Anna

"I am going to be a lawyer," Anna* states softly, but with strong conviction in her voice. "And I will fight for children's rights!"

Anna is an articulate, resilient, and poised 19 year-old woman living at Mudzini Kwetu in the remote village of Kikambala outside of Mombasa, Kenya. She is the first of the girls at Mudzini Kwetu, "Our Home," to complete high school, and she is preparing to study law at a university. Anna is determined to become an attorney in order to help children who have endured trauma like her own become successful, educated young adults empowered to create change in their community.

Currently, Mudzini Kwetu houses 43 girls. Ranging in age from 1 month to 19 years, the community of girls is interwoven by common threads. Each girl has already endured trauma in her brief lifespan, such as abandonment, orphanhood, forced child prostitution, childhood marriage, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, loss due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, starvation, disease, and a life on the streets where girls often care for younger siblings. In providing shelter, food, counseling, and education, Mudzini Kwetu serves as a healthy period of transition in these girls' lives. Each girl has the opportunity to begin her life again, belong to a family, develop coping skills for emotional scars, gain education and vocational training, and succeed as an independent, capable adult. Girls receive this support through Mudzini Kwetu's dedicated staff, which includes, among others: devoted housemothers; a knowledgeable attorney instrumental in rescuing the girls; an experienced counselor wearing many hats as a mother, peer, and pastor; a diligent accountant managing finances; and additional staff maintaining the house, crops, and tilapia farm.



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* Children's names have been changed to protect privacy

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fighting injustice through education

Kenyan journalist and Executive Director Anthony Mulongo founded Mudzini Kwetu in 2001, and Mudzini Kwetu Centre Trust Board members in Kenya oversee services. Justice Nzioki Makua, who volunteers resources, legal counsel, and assistance to the home, explains that Mudzini Kwetu is registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Department of Social Services. Police within the Coast Province in the Kilifi District routinely refer cases of neglected and abandoned children to Mudzini Kwetu. When possible, Mudzini Kwetu assists in placing the girls with appropriate, extended family in the region, and houses girls who have no options. Mudzini Kwetu becomes the legal guardian of such girls, incurring responsibilities of care and protection in accordance with the Children’s Act and the Constitution of Kenya².

Education is a primary focus at Mudzini Kwetu. Simply providing food and shelter would merely help the girls subsist in the impoverished community of Kikambala. In Kenya, girls typically encounter significant obstacles in becoming educated due to social



beliefs that boys' educations are more important for wealth, leadership, and providing for one's families³. Families are frequently reluctant or unable to educate girls due to tuition expenses, domestic and farm labor needs, and caregiving needs for siblings³. Mudzini Kwetu, however, recognizes education for women as an agent of change for economic development and the cultivation of leadership skills. Through education in primary and secondary schools, young women gain a sense of knowledge, hope, and security for a brighter future. Education will increase their job opportunities,

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their ability to make well-informed decisions about personal health, and their capacity to ask intelligent questions about their communities and government⁴. Women will develop a higher self-esteem and sense of independence, in addition to a greater likelihood they will marry later, have fewer children, and be capable of providing for their children⁵. Catherine Julius, the counselor at Mudzini Kwetu, explains, "School and education bring a hope for the future, the hope of getting a job and being able to care for oneself and others. School diversifies the thought processes, opens up their minds to new ideas, and teaches them as peers to relate, communicate, and understand the world. Education they say is the inheritance a parent gives to a child, and that gift is what we (Mudzini Kwetu) endeavor to provide for our girls because we are now their parents."⁶

many hopes for the future

Many Hopes, a grassroots non-profit in the United States founded in 2007 by Thomas Keown, is one organization providing funding for Mudzini Kwetu to operate and educate the girls. Many Hopes' mission is to love and educate this network of children who have endured the worst of poverty and exploitation in order to equip them to eliminate the causes of the injustice they and their neighbors have suffered. Many Hopes believes in tackling the causes of social injustice in this Kenyan community, not simply housing it's victims⁷. With committed volunteer chapters in Boston, New York City, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, London, Bristol, Belfast, and Mourne, Many



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Hopes contributed to building a 4-story home at Mudzini Kwetu that will house 60 girls and housemothers. In addition, Many Hopes' contributions help support Mudzini Kwetu's staffing, transportation, medical care, food, school tuition, and agriculture.

In 2010 and 2011, Many Hopes embarked upon an ambitious capital campaign to raise funds to build a school that will serve 720 impoverished children in the surrounding community. Through the generosity of individuals and corporations, Many Hopes successfully reached its financial goal to build the school and additional amenities necessary to accommodate the community. Many Hopes is preparing to break ground for the school in Fall 2012 utilizing local builders, teachers, and additional community members⁸. Supporters and volunteers of Many Hopes envision educating these children as a valuable investment in a generation of children who will defeat the causes of extreme poverty in Kenya and social injustice⁷. Regarding her personal experience and opportunities for the future, Anna—who's studying to be a lawyer—comments, “Having had a chance at Mudzini Kwetu to go to school has helped me realize many things which I never knew and most of all, my rights, children's rights, and all human rights. Being enlightened about my rights, I am not ready



to have someone abuse me or any other children in my position¹.”

planting seeds of change

Sitting beneath the trees at Mudzini Kwetu on a hot, dry day, volunteers from Many Hopes are honored to have a glimpse into the lives of young women like Anna and how the girls thrive at the home, how education impacts their cognitive, social, and emotional growth, and how they are capable of becoming leaders who will positively impact their community. Catherine Julius, the counselor, describes: “Mudzini Kwetu preaches love, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control⁶.” This mission is evident as you survey teens through the house windows studying in their rooms with goals to practice medicine, become attorneys, and open their own orphanages for girls like themselves. You observe school age girls’ interactions as they constructively create games rolling old tires on the lawn, chuckle at younger girls’ enthusiasm while running barefoot through banana and papaya crops and vigorously shaking tree branches to find and slurp down the ripest mangos, and smile at toddlers bouncing on older girls’ laps cheerfully singing the alphabet. Mudzini Kwetu’s nurturing, protective environment has united the girls as a family, reinforcing their sense of empathy and accountability, and affirming their accomplishments despite the social injustices they have endured at such young ages.

Reflecting on the value of girls’ education and ending social injustice in the future, Catherine sagely comments, “With the girls wanting to change situations because of their personal experiences, thousands of others will be helped, and in days to come, Kenya will be different. All because someone gave to educate 43 girls in remote Kikambala⁶.”

references

- ¹ Anna, personal communication, August 6, 2012.
- ² Justice Nzioki Makua, personal communication, August 16, 2012.
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- ⁶ Catherine Julius, personal communication, August 6, 2012.
- ⁷ Many Hopes. <http://www.manyhopes.org>
- ⁸ Thomas Keown, personal communication, August 5, 2012.



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