Dear Friends of Makindu Children’s Program,

I sincerely hope this newsletter finds you well and safe during this pandemic. I am extremely pleased and grateful to report that all of the children in our care, as well as their guardians, are nourished and remain uninfected with COVID-19. The virus is spreading through Kenya, however, and the town of Makindu currently has a handful of positive cases. International borders have reopened bringing much food relief and commerce, but also much more risk of infection. Sanitation and hygiene have been ramped up, masks have been distributed, and monthly food relief has been provided since the pandemic closed Kenya in April.

Thankfully, we had reserve savings to cover the huge increase in nutrition costs so far this year ($16,000 per month as opposed to $1,000 monthly pre-pandemic), but all of our safari fundraisers have been cancelled, putting much pressure on our one remaining fundraising event. The pandemic is forcing us to change our annual auction to a Virtual Fundraiser this year, to be held on Wednesday evening, October 21, 5:00 pm Pacific Daylight Time.

I do hope you can join us.

Please keep reading for further news in Makindu. Thank you so very much for your continued support.

Stay well.
Diana Richardson
Executive Director
The neighboring country of Uganda, from where Kenya imports maize, had locked their borders for over twelve weeks disrupting the vital food supply chain. Though the Kenya government had some grain reserve, it has all been distributed to areas in total lockdown, and experts have warned that the coming months in Kenya will not be food secure, and food supplies may not be available. Normalcy is not expected to resume soon, as the virus numbers increase each day.

MENTAL HEALTH
By Tom Mwanzia, MCC Director

COVID-19 is immensely affecting children’s way of life across the globe. In Kenya, anxiety, lack of peer contact and reduced opportunities for stress regulation are great concerns to the kids. The children are also greatly concerned about an increased risk for their guardians’ mental illness. Rising domestic violence adds to the kids’ extreme vulnerability. Further, for children and adolescents with special needs such as kids on HIV care, or those who have experienced traumatic experiences, their mental health status is greatly compromised.

There is the virus itself and the fear of it. On top of that, the restrictions of movement measures, closure of schools and kids being separated from their friends have completely changed their normal way of life. Most of the children we serve are already traumatized; having lost either one or both parents, and live in fear that they may even lose their current guardians. Over 80% of Makindu Children’s Center guardians are elderly, the age group which is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 debilitating effects. With these kids predisposed to seeing the world in pessimistic terms, their anxiety is growing as they feel so much more out of control.

Additionally, most of the children were used to coming to the Center for recreation, nutrition, sanitation, and general camaraderie. They were at least assured of some enriched porridge for breakfast, as well as a nutritious lunch. With the ban of literally all social gatherings due to social distancing enhancement, these children have no option but to remain at home, most of them in loneliness, since play activities are discouraged due to the pandemic.

However, thanks to Makindu Children’s Program, the children do not have to worry where their next meal will come from. Through the relief food program, they have been having enough to cook at home. This relieves them of some mental strain. Through the frequent home visits, MCC staff are able to identify the affected kids, offer the needed psychosocial support, and refer them for further counseling when and if necessary. MCC is determined to journey with the children and take all the necessary measures, including but not limited to the kids’ referral for further management, in order to ensure their mental health stability.

SANITATION AND HYGIENE

A new handwashing station and upgraded latrines were installed at the Center in March, just in time for pandemic-related increase in demand for sanitation and hygiene. The new station has 5 taps, allowing the line of almost 200 kids to move more quickly and efficiently. The lockdown in Kenya began in April, forcing everyone to stay home and allowing no visitors to the Children’s Center. To address this heightened need for proper hygiene, Tippy Tap wash stations were installed near every household. Because soap is in such high demand, costs have skyrocketed. Therefore two of the staff were trained on soap-making and now accompany the social workers on home visits and teach the guardians and children how to make soap.

Hand sanitizer bottles have also been provided to staff as they do so much travel now to the homes, since meeting at the Center is now prohibited. Masks were made mandatory in April by the Kenyan authorities, and so Makindu Children’s Program provided the funds to supply 1,000 mandatory masks to Makindu kids, guardians and staff.
HIV INFECTED NEEDS

MCC currently has 67 children on HIV care and treatment. They require enhanced nutritional supplements, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic period. A ten-week supply of green grams, eggs, millet and sorghum flour, and extra beans has been distributed to the 67 children. These children stop by the Children’s Center on a regularly scheduled basis to check in with their social worker, and pick up their medications. Fresh produce like kale and eggplant from the Center farm is also given to the kids to take home and supplement their evening meal.

With idle time on their hands, these kids helped make mud bricks for some MCC families that needed house repair. Other home improvement projects kids and staff have helped with include building latrines and tippy-tap handwashing stations near all households for sanitation and hygiene.

EDUCATION

The kids have not been in school since March and school will not resume until 2021. No school—primary, secondary, vocational, college or even university—will reopen in 2020 in Kenya. It is expected COVID-19 cases will peak in September/October of this year, the same time schools were to open. The government has moved the reopening of schools to January 2021, hoping that the COVID-19 situation will be under control then. State exams for finalist vocational students, those clearing primary school to join Form 1, and those clearing high school have all been postponed as well, so all these kids too, will now hopefully go back to school in January 2021.

2021 SAFARIS

All 2020 safaris have been rescheduled for 2021. See new dates below.
Visit our website for event updates.

Proper Walk & Safari
with Michael Farley
July 22—August 2

Safaris & Moore
with Marcia Moore
May 25—June 8
October 5—20
October 20—Nov. 5

JOIN US for our 2020 VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER

Wednesday, October 21, 2020
5:00—6:00 pm Pacific Daylight Time

The 2020 Virtual Fundraiser will be live-streamed from The AV Dept Production Studio in Portland, Oregon. Many supporters will be hosting house parties and Zoom parties for the event. The Shebeen Pub & Braai in Charlottesville, VA will be hosting a watch party. You can also watch and participate from the comfort of your own home.

Check our website for details
https://makindu.org/events/2020-Virtual-Fundraiser

Register to bid at the event and support the Makindu kids
www.auctria.com/auction/Makindu2020VirtualFundraiser

Help us help the kids at Makindu Children’s Center!
“Sometimes the problems of Africa seem overwhelming and insoluble... The magnitude and multiplicity of miseries in that plagued continent are not subject to any wholesale fix. Sometimes it seems as if the only reasonable response is utter despair. Or a person could choose a charity or program and work on one small aspect in one small place where it is possible to see tangible evidence of problems solved. That was what was happening in Makindu: the orphans had been taken off the streets, lived in the community and were both well nourished and well educated. *The Makindu Children’s Center was an example of selfless people doing what they could for others.*”

Tim Cahill, *National Geographic Adventure Magazine*, September 2005

Pre-pandemic photo by Hut Hato