We bounced down a long dusty lane, goats scurrying out of the way, children waving and running alongside the car. At the end of the lane, a very old woman shooed away cows and camels. She had the most captivating smile, accentuated by twinkling engaging eyes. As we approached, three children raced to her side to greet us. The children all had the same smile and twinkle and I felt instantly warmed and welcome. She held my hands as we were introduced, I to Grandmother Zena, and she to Diana from Makindu Children’s Program in America. She pulled me into her home, delighted to show it off to me, and offered me one of two chairs in her possession.

Somewhat larger than most I visited (keeping in mind that I visited the poorest of the poor), Grandmother Zena’s house has 3 rooms: a sitting room at the front door, her own bedroom, and a bedroom for the kids. The bedrooms have elevated sleeping platforms and well swept floors. The front room has two plastic chairs and a bench. At most houses, the chair offered to me was simply a bucket turned over. Five of the children sleep together on a full sized mattress and one of the boys sleeps on the floor because he still wets the bed.

As we chatted away, with the Makindu Children’s Centre Director and Social Worker as our interpreters, I became more and more enamored with Zena, her family, and her remarkable story. Like most of the guardians in our program, Grandmother Zena has suffered the loss of her own children to the AIDS pandemic that relentlessly ravages the region. Also like the other guardians, Zena finds herself raising many grandchildren - some infected with HIV – and with very little resources.

She works hard but makes very little selling fruit at the local outdoor markets. Many years ago, when she first heard of MCC and the help it offered orphaned children, she enrolled her grandkids in the program.

I am delighted to share this story of Zena’s family. It is but just one example of the hundreds of households with children receiving full services from Makindu Children’s Program. These elderly grandmotherly guardians are the true glue of the program, opening up their hearts and homes to the most vulnerable of children, with little to no resources. Together, with lots of help from MCP and love from guardians, these children are living meaningful lives full of HOPE. Take, for example, the stories below:

**GRANDMOTHER ZENA** lost two children and their spouses years ago to AIDS, and found herself head of household with 9 grandchildren, 4 of whom are HIV+. Eeking out a meager living selling vegetables at one of the local outdoor markets, keeping her house in order and raising all the children has aged her skin and body; but her spirit, drive and resourcefulness has kept the remaining
family relatively healthy, happy and together. She has a permanent smile, which many of the kids have too, and that twinkle in her eye. With help from Makindu Children’s Program, her grandchildren are beginning to reap the benefits of a strong family base, broad community involvement and access to nutrition, education and advocacy.

ZENA, the oldest granddaughter and Grandmother Zena’s namesake, came into the Makindu Children’s Program in 2008. Zena has always been determined to do well in school and so secured the top position in her class most years. Her unrelenting efforts bore fruit when she secured a national school slot after she scored 408 out of 500 on the KCPE exams. She was excited to join Karima Girl’s High School in 2014. She worked very hard, and posted excellent grades throughout her high school education. December was reaping time for Zena. The KCSE results were out and wow! Zena managed an A- despite all the challenges and struggles she has faced! Zena says her dream is to become an engineer. She says she will not rest until her dream comes true. Zena sends her gratitude to MCP, for without the support she wouldn’t even have stepped into a secondary classroom considering her family background. Here at MCC we congratulate Zena and wish her all the best!

NAOMI was born HIV+ and has had the toughest time of all Grandmother Zena’s grandchildren. When Naomi was just 8 years old, she was defiled by her uncle. MCP stepped in, placed Naomi in a safe house and provided trauma counseling, crisis intervention and legal advocacy. Eventually, with Makindu staff supporting her through all facets of the trial, Naomi received justice and her uncle was found guilty and given a life sentence. Soon after, Naomi moved back in with Grandmother Zena. Naomi did not shrink away from this brutal experience but faced it head on with determination and confidence. This determination and confidence makes her shine today. At the Safari Welcome Celebrations, she assumes the role of student emcee, leading the rest of the kids in song and dance, reciting poetry louder than any of the others and with that infectious family smile.

Living with HIV has been challenging for Naomi, and at times she has struggled to adhere to her anti-retroviral medications. MCP recently provided additional HIV care education to both Naomi and Grandmother Zena and currently Naomi is doing well. Nutrition is extremely important in maintaining health for an HIV infected person and so Naomi, with her siblings and cousins, come to the Centre daily for food and recreation.

MIISHI was also born HIV+ and has been in the program since she was 5. Miishi has the family’s infectious smile permanently etched on her face. She is outwardly happy and playful, and not at all shy to meet and play with foreigners! She is fairly athletic and can hold her own in playground games. She loves practicing her English with visitors.

OMONDI was also born HIV+ and came into MCP in 2012. Unlike Naomi, Omondi has always adhered well to his anti-retroviral medications. He is currently 10 years old. He is a shy polite boy with that same infectious family smile. Omondi loves to help in the kitchen at the Centre, but at playtime will be found playing soccer on the Centre playground. He is also helpful at home.

SOFIA is the youngest of her siblings at age 7, though not the youngest grandchild. Miraculously, she was not born with HIV and thrives in both her home and school environment. She is a playful child, and like Naomi, not at all shy. With her adorable personality and infectious family smile, she captures the heart of everyone who meets her. She is helpful with chores at home and also at the Centre.

Grandmother Zena’s grandkids come to the Centre daily for breakfast, giving her time to sell her fruits. On Saturdays, they come to the Centre to eat, bathe, launder their school uniforms, and play with the other children.

As I left her house at the end of our visit, Grandmother Zena grasped both my hands in hers, looked deep into my
eyes with obvious gratitude, flashed the family smile, and bid me goodbye “Ahyay, Ahyay.” My heart filled with pride and joy at this, as I realized just how deeply our donors are affecting the lives of so many needy children and so many grandmothers. With that, I was forever changed.

Thank you so very much for supporting this incredibly successful and deserving organization. You truly are making a HUGE DIFFERENCE in so many lives!

In recognition for her tireless efforts and exceptional impact on the poor and disadvantaged children of Makindu, World of Children honored Winnie and awarded Makindu Children’s Program $90,000 to be used over the next 3 years. This award has allowed us to expand full services to an additional 80 desperately needy children. With these additional children, Makindu Children’s Program now fully supports 521 children and positively impacts their households and the siblings, cousins and others who live with them. Congratulations Winnie, on this very well deserved recognition!

TEEN PENPAL PROGRAM INITIATED

By Katy Werwath

After having the life changing experience of going on the 2016 Proper Walk and meeting the children at the Makindu Children’s Centre, I knew that I wanted to continue working with Makindu and get others at my school involved as well. As a result, a few months ago I decided to start a pen pal project between my school in Richmond, Virginia and Makindu Children’s Centre. Last week, about 20 members of my school’s UNICEF club, which aims to help children worldwide, wrote letters to the students at Makindu, introducing ourselves and asking questions to our pen pals. In future letters, we hope to discuss teen issues and facilitate cultural exchanges, so that we can learn more about life in Kenya and vice versa. My club is extremely excited about this project and can’t wait to hear back from our pen pals!
THANK YOU TO OUR 2017 DONORS!

We want to make sure we get it right. If we have inadvertently omitted your name or have an incorrect detail please contact us at HelpTheKids@makindu.org

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THANK YOU FOR GIVING HOPE TO THE KIDS OF MAKINDU!!!
2017 in NUMBERS

- 521 children received full support with daily nutrition, education, healthcare, shelter, advocacy and psycho-social support.
- 1,500 additional children received ancilliary services in the form of bulk food baskets, school supplies and psycho-social support.
- 834 holiday food baskets were delivered, bringing much joy to the holiday season.
- 631 primary school students received brand new school uniforms.
- 250 menstruating girls received sanitary napkins, allowing them to stay in school.
- 62 children and 12 guardians received medical attention for illness and injury.
- 1,477 children were dewormed quarterly.
- Seven households received much needed repair and renovation.
- 120 goats were delivered to households, providing unlimited milk for 858 children.
- And much, much more...

SAFARIS BRING ADVENTURE AND JOY TO ALL

By John Morley

We had a wonderful time. The trip had a well-planned schedule but did not feel hurried or scripted. We had two knowledgeable leaders, one of whom also served as the trip photographer. We also had our local bus driver, Paul. There were three days of activities with the children and the Centre. Oh, the Centre, what an amazing place that is. You can understand why Winnie won that recognition. Completely managed by the community, you could easily sense the pride they had in the place, and we were made most welcome as a part of that community. More on the Centre later.

Our travel group, somewhat a product of self selection; those who would take a fundraising adventure vacation, gelled very quickly. (Adventure For A Cause!) There was enough diversity to keep things interesting though. The first rule of Proper Walks/Safaris, NO Whining! keeps the general air of positiveness. We did more than our share of laughing, singing and dancing.

We experienced two driving safaris through National parks, one with some of the children and staff. You can get close to the animals from the bus, they were quite used to vehicles. This is how most visitors to Kenya see it. We, however, were fortunate enough to have the juxtaposition of the camel safari. While the large animals (including lions,) mostly kept their distance in the conservancy where we hiked; (and you want them to!,) when you’re walking through the brush and the Savannah, you’re seeing birds, insects and “kills”, experiencing the weather, (Ha) and getting to know camels, and the tribesmen who will guide you. These camel safaris are a throwback adventure, to a time before roads, where walking was the only way to see...
the wildlife. With the support of 22 camels, we walked a little over 30 miles in four days. Not a Proper Walk, but a Proper Safari! And since it was a Proper Safari, the guides and our hosts took care of everything. I think they would call it “Glamping” in the States. We were spoiled. The hotels were also nice, the food was great and we felt very safe the entire time. I told several people I considered flying through European airports to be the most dangerous part.

About the Centre. I have a background in alternative socio/economic models and this is a very impressive one. I did not fully understand what a “day resource center” was until after our visit. What has evolved is a community where the children are supported at three different levels. They have their “guardians,” usually a relative, where they live as a member of that family. Then they have the staff, administrators and teachers, as well as a counselor, at the Centre. And finally, they have each other. In my thank you note to my donors, I described it as a “club” for orphans. I said this because I think the Centre imbues a sense of belonging that no other arrangement could capture. It would not surprise me if other kids in the community (ones with their natural parents,) were envious!

Lastly, it was the efficacy or efficiency of the model that impressed me. The lives of over five hundred children are substantially and uniquely changed for the better, for so very little money in the scheme of things. And the money flows through to the community in a multiplier effect, the Centre helps support the town!

So, as you all know, we have to keep this going. Participating in a Proper Safari or Proper Walk is a great and fun way to contribute. I am sure we will go back for another.

2018 MARKS 20th ANNIVERSARY

It’s been 20 years since Winnie Barron found herself in Makindu, surrounded by hundreds of street orphans, horrified at AIDS’ devastation of the community, and inspired by an unlikely trio of good Samaritans determined to feed the innocent child orphans of the AIDS pandemic in Makindu, Kenya.

Initially, many Makindu residents questioned Winnie’s intentions, wondering if hers would be another ill-conceived project that would raise expectations and then disappear. The problems facing the orphans were greater than a lack of food or education. “What are you going to do with the children after you have educated them?” they asked. Without prospects for work, “they will become educated thieves.”

Winnie and her supporters reconsidered their approach and decided the Program would succeed by going one step at a time, following the suggestions of the community. Instead of maintaining an orphanage, where children sleep in an institutional building without cultural, family or tribal traditions and celebrations, the children are placed in guardian households, typically grandparents, the poorest in the area who are receiving no other aid. During the day, the children come to the Centre, a simple concrete building, to receive food, bathe and wash their clothes. They receive periodic medical checkups, have their fees paid at local public schools, and receive job training. The children are also taught nutrition, HIV/AIDS awareness and learn agriculture at the Project’s shamba, or garden, where they grow high protein crops for food and to help defray expenses.

By operating in this way and teaching the children to support themselves, the Program serves and educates the larger community as well. As a result local community support for the Program soared and remains integral to our operations today.

CELEBRATE 20 YEARS AND SUPPORT OUR 2018 EVENTS
May 5: Amazing Race
May 8: ReJEWEL
May 29-June 13: Safari & Moore
August 9-20: Proper Safari
Sept. 29: Annual Dinner & Auction
Oct 16-31: Safari & Moore

*check our Events page on makidu.org for updates and details.
Help give these kids HOPE!

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Thank you D. Pennell Brooks for many of these great photos.