



The Giraffe Project Spring 2017 Newsletter

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From here to here: new Form 1 students at GEC



Welcome to our Spring newsletter!

I do hope that you enjoy our Spring newsletter. It is a little late this year due to our earlier-than-usual trip to Kenya. We travelled in March to avoid the Kenyan elections being held this August - elections in 2007 ended in riots in the slums causing damage and deaths, including parents of two of the students now at the GEC secondary school. Our Kenyan staff say that tensions are already increasing and some families have moved back to their tribal villages to wait and see what happens. We really hope and pray that these elections pass peacefully and that they herald a better life for all Kenyans.

Although our team was small, we still managed to get a lot of work done –see Jürgen’s report below. One of my treasured memories will be hearing the sigh of relief in the classroom when I told the 36 new students in Form 1 students that, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, they all had a sponsor and their future at GEC was secure. These are extremely vulnerable children, interviewed after all other secondary schools had already started so they had no chance of a secondary education other than through Giraffe. Students such as David, who worked after his primary school day to buy painkillers for his sick mother and Natasha –see story below.



Taking videos for sponsors at GEC and Green Pastures

Thanks to you these students are now in school, some wearing shoes for the first time and all properly fed and cared for - as well as an education and a way out of their hard lives. As Lilian from our Kenyan office says, “We so appreciate you coming, especially the GEC Form Ones, you did not just bring joy and excitement but you sparked a new light in their lives.” **We are making a difference!**

Jackie Newbold Sponsorship coordinator



Giraffe Project Spring trip 2017 to Nairobi (Read full report on our website)

We were only a small team this year; Jackie, two trustees and four sponsors and, of course, our wonderful office team - Liz, Lilian and Sam – joined and aided us throughout our stay. Thanks especially to our sponsors we organized the handout of the many gifts along with suitcases of supplies and photographed or videoed all students. Jackie and Liz carried out intensive counselling sessions with GEC students and recent graduates, reviewing performance and discussing career opportunities. Jürgen and Jackie also conducted information sessions for parents at Green Pastures and Tumaini primary schools explaining our focus on GEC for secondary school sponsorship and promoting the school’s progress.



Enjoying their sponsors’ letters

One key area of development to fulfill the Giraffe vision is post-secondary education: be it vocational, college or even university. We visited a school which combined academics with vocational training, discussed delivering training to GEC students with a career counselling organization and met with the Education Officer of Machakos County (the location of GEC) to learn her views on the development of the Kenyan job market. One principle of Giraffe is true partnership. John and Jürgen joined a meeting with the Tumaini Board to discuss the status and direction of this school where we sponsor almost 70 students. Similarly, a GEC Board meeting attended by John, Jackie, Liz and Jürgen addressed the status of GEC and discussed priorities for future investments. (cont.)

A most significant event was the completion of the handover process of GEC from The Giraffe Project to The Elimu Trust, a local charity established by our long term trusted partners. This new partnership will improve the sustainability of the school, following the model used in 2012 when a similar partnership with the Tumaini Trust was formed. After finishing the legal proceedings we celebrated the symbolic handover of the keys with staff and students. Of course, Giraffe Project remains deeply involved in this partnership with 100% of students at GEC being Giraffe funded and Giraffe continues substantial fundraising for school needs.

As always, we come away from Nairobi with images of still pressing needs, but at the same time the deep gratitude expressed by our students and staff, their wonderful smiles and unbounded optimism, which will carry us through the coming months.

Jürgen Koenemann

Feedback from Vicky on our trip

My son William and I joined Jackie and the Trustees on their trip to Kenya this March. What a trip! It was our first time in Kenya and we found Kenyans a very friendly and welcoming people who do not seem to have the same level of stress that we do.

We had lovely encounters with the pupils and with their very committed teachers. It is an eye-opener to see how the schools manage to educate the children on often very limited premises and with limited school material. What struck us most was the very positive attitude towards life and what it brings.

Introducing a new trustee: Jürgen Koenemann

John: Welcome to the Board of Giraffe Trustees, Jürgen Koenemann: tell us a little about yourself!

Jürgen: I am a 56 year old German, working as an executive in the telecommunications industry. I live near Bonn, Germany together with my wife, Gay, whom I met when I studied in the U.S. 31 years ago. We have two adult children.

John: How did you learn about The Giraffe Project?

Jürgen: We were introduced to Giraffe when a couple from Brussels brought the Giraffe message with them to the American Protestant Church (APC) in Bonn. Giraffe founders Denise and Richard Baines came and told their story. We signed up as sponsors.

John: There are many worthy causes. Why Giraffe?

Jürgen: I believe that investing in education for the poorest of the poor is the best, most sustainable way to help as partners. Giraffe is a small organization. You see exactly where your contributions and efforts are going: the individual lives that are impacted.

John: What made you join the Board?

Jürgen: I went to Kenya in 2012 as part of an APC youth/adult mission trip and came back wanting to do more. I have been very fortunate. It was time to step up and do something more. More hands and minds were clearly needed, so I felt very honoured when I was invited to join the board.

John: What is your focus as a trustee going to be?

Jürgen: I hope I can bring my experience as a consultant and manager to bear and aid in the sustainable overall development of Giraffe Project as an organization.

Report from GEC Journalist Club

We are very grateful to the Journalist Club for their excellent report about activities at GEC – for the full report please see our website.

This first term has been short with a lot of activities allowing students to interact with those from other schools. A group from GEC paid a visit to Kenyatta University during



A celebration cake bought by a generous sponsor. There was a photo of the new Form 1 on the top which caused great excitement among the students! Life at GEC is not all about work!



Congratulations to Christabel and Dennis, our top secondary students – both looking forward to starting their University careers in September.



Juergen with Liz and Lillian

'Thank you so much for all of the gifts you have been sending me, they have been a source of inspiration for me, just knowing that someone, somewhere cares and believes in my abilities means a lot to me' – written in a student's letter to their sponsor



Kennedy (left) graduated from Mount Kenya university last year with a BSc(Ed) and is now working in a government school earning a good salary and helping his family. Hannington (right) is now an accountant and looking forward to his first job – all thanks to the generosity of their sponsors!

Listening to him gives me so much more than I could have bought with the money I gave for him. Comment from a sponsor after seeing her former student talk about his successes in life in a video.



Natasha Niyotwagira



Please support our Brussels 20k team - our biggest fundraiser of the year! Go to our Giraffe Brussels 20k 'Just Giving' page to donate!
<https://www.justgiving.com/companyteams/GPBrussels20K2017>

careers week which is organized yearly by the institution. They were taught about different career choices and entry requirements into university. The journalism club had an opportunity to visit the media. We visited KU TV & KU radio which are part of Kenyatta university. Members met some well known presenters and were able to learn much from them and even participated in the radio show! Our football team has won against their opponents due to the great training they have been receiving from their coach. A small group were blessed with a great trip to a special school called Rongai Agricultural and Technical school. Despite the long travel, it was a success. We were welcomed by the school principal, Brother James Thiongo and the school farm manager. The highlight of the visit was seeing students rearing livestock - pigs, cattle, rabbits, goats, sheep, chickens as well as intensive small scale production of kale, pumpkins, carrots and egg plants. The GEC agricultural students are glad and positive about being trained on how to carry out farm activities. 'We are now able to put the theory into practice on the small plots allocated to us by our agriculture teacher. We use good farm management practices like irrigation to ensure our crops grow and produce well. We have just planted our seedlings and we expect good yields. We believe that the skills we are learning are going to be beneficial to our future lives,' says Isaac, one of the agricultural students. Finally, many thanks to the school for organizing the Academic Day. We got an opportunity to get advice from individual teachers and our parents or guardians encouraging us to work harder and smarter so that we attain our future goals.

Abogasti, Benson, Doreen, Isaac, Kelvin, Form 4 and 2 students

From one Giraffe graduate to another: Idabel Chege interviews Natasha

Idabel, our Giraffe reporter, interviews one of our new Form One students. Everybody has a story, and true enough every child sponsored by the Project also has his or her own. Natasha Niyotwagira from Rwanda is no exception - together with her parents she was forced in 2008 to move to Kenya due to the effects of genocide leaving her two sisters and a brother back in Rwanda - at the time it was impossible and expensive to travel with four children to a foreign land especially when they didn't know how anything would turn out. They settle in Kariobangi South slum and her father finds work at a local workshop as a blacksmith. Her mother has no skills, having being born in a poor family and never went to school, and thus is unable to find work. Friends help them put Natasha through primary school with an excellent score of 409/500 marks in her KCPE. Last year she was admitted to St. Mary Girls Igoji, a very prestigious school, but it doesn't take long before the money runs out and she is forced out of school - her future seems dim and almost unreachable. The same year, her father, the breadwinner, is diagnosed with blood cancer and towards the end of August he passes on. Natasha and her mother are devastated. They have no means to make ends meet and this forces them to sell all they have to raise enough money to go back home to Rwanda. Moving back is not easy because the part of the family that was left in Rwanda feel abandoned and hurt and are not happy to see them. Natasha's future looked bleak so she was delighted when she heard there were places at our secondary school, GEC. 'How did you feel when you found out you were going to attend GEC?', I ask. "I felt...I felt so glad because I thought everything was lost and I felt happy. At the very sight of the school I was so determined to pass my interview, I knew I had to come to that school, that was why I was here, that is why I had come back." As Henrik Ibsen says, 'A thousand words won't leave so deep an impression as one deed.' Actions are indeed better than words - a single person's action can have so much impact in a young girl's or boy's life. When they think it is over, a person like you changes all that. I will therefore sign off with what Natasha has to say, "So far, you are the best thing that has happened because now I have a clear view of my future and still have my dream of becoming a pilot. Thank you."

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