

Kenyan Kids Update – March 2024



This trip has been quite eventful! The six weeks I spent in Kenya have flown by so quickly. Usually, during my first week here, I take the time to luxuriate in the fact that I have so much time to spend. Then, just like that, it's suddenly the last week, and I'm cramming in everything, knowing that my next trip won't be for another six months or so.

With so much happening, I'm finding it hard to decide which details to share with you. I want to be honest and not just highlight the positive aspects, as some of the things we experience here can be quite difficult.

Upon our arrival in Nairobi, we faced significant challenges with a group of volunteers who had come to help us renovate our farm. Despite having a strict Volunteer Code of Conduct in place and conducting necessary background checks, this group of volunteers were dishonest about their motives and had even lied about their flight dates to avoid interacting with me.

Those who know us, understand we are dedicated to providing a secure and nurturing environment for our girls' growth and development. Ensuring their safety and well-being is our utmost priority. Sadly, as events unfurled, we had no choice but to involve the police to prevent this group from returning to our site and it soon became very clear that we were being targeted with malicious intent.

As I go back over how things turned out, it still puzzles me why some people think it's acceptable to behave inappropriately while in foreign countries, but not in their home countries. Equally, I've learned that it's crucial to understand that not everyone shares the same values and motivations as we do. It's been a steep learning curve for all concerned.

However, once things settled down, we resumed our normal schedule, ensuring each of our 16 girls was okay and either settled back in their boarding schools or happily attending day school.



Arc en Ciel's Primary Grade 1 opened at the beginning of the year. Currently, we have 45 students enrolled, across four classes, and both the students and teachers are happy! Struggling to break even, we were very grateful to receive a contribution from Kenyan Kids in Norway that will cover our teacher's salaries for the upcoming school year. I love that every morning, I wake up to the sound of children shouting out their numbers and the letters of the alphabet.

However, we still have an important mission to fulfill - to boost the attendance of children. During the last year, it has come to our notice that many of them come to school without having breakfast, which leaves them hungry and unable to concentrate. Cindy, visiting with me, has come up with a brilliant idea and we now offer a porridge breakfast to these hungry little learners. This will not only fill their tummies but also ensure that they can focus better in class.

Fabian, our little boy who suffers from cerebral palsy, also attends Arc en Ciel school and despite his speech impediment, he takes his exams like the other children and confidently recites his numbers and colours.

However, since Fabian is now approaching 11 years old, we have been discussing not only the progress and timelines of Familia girls but also Fabian's.

One of the major concerns for him is his need for constant care and what the future may hold, particularly when the girls have left home or moved on.

Our goal was to bring Fabian's family closer to him, especially since his mother has two younger children now so we invited her to come to see Fabian and discuss a way forward for the future. During her visit, we noticed a significant improvement in Fabian's emotional state, and the bond between mother, son, and siblings grew stronger. To make this happen more often, we suggested to Fabian's mother that she move closer to us where we could offer her work and help with housing.



However, once she returned to her village, our plan for Fabian to spend more time with his biological family was thwarted by the father-in-law and other male relatives, who refused to allow his mother to leave the village.

It was a Sunday morning when Fabian's grandmother arrived at our gate, visibly upset. She explained that she had been instructed not to return to the village without him. The male relatives were adamant about his immediate return.

Of course, we had obtained legal guardianship of Fabian, but we knew that it would be a difficult fight to keep him. Despite our strong emotional attachment to Fabian and the sad reality that in Kenya, the severe disability of a person is often totally disregarded, culturally, it is the senior male, who holds the position of head of the family, and who makes all decisions rarely considering the mother's wishes, as in this case.

Fabian's absence has left a huge void in our lives, particularly at the girls' house where his presence, joy, and laughter are sorely missed. We have many questions about how he will adapt to life back in the village but we trust that being with his own family, where he can reconnect with his roots, and rediscover his own culture, is now the right decision for him.



On a much happier note, on this trip, we welcomed another two volunteers. Hannah from York and Margo from Cardiff. Their hard work and dedication have resulted in some incredible achievements over the last four weeks.

They have built a fantastic parade ground at our little school, where children can now raise the Kenyan flag and sing the national anthem. Margo's expertise in agriculture has helped us grow tomatoes, while her planting of trees has provided a much-needed windbreaker between the school and the lake.

Hannah has been working closely with the teachers, assisting them with their schedules and helping every day in the nursery school.

With days to go before the end of their trip, the girls visited Sheila's village. There, they took on the daunting task of performing a jigger's intervention; washing, and disinfecting the villagers' feet, trimming their toenails, and applying essential oil to eliminate live worms that thrive under the skin. However, their mission didn't stop there. Taking time out at the weekend, they also took the opportunity to educate local schoolgirls about menstrual health and even distributed 25 sets of reusable pads to those in need.

It's amazing to see how much these two volunteers have accomplished in such a short time. Their contributions have been invaluable to our team, and we're incredibly grateful for their commitment and hard work

Once again, it was wonderful to have my sister with me on this trip. Despite the challenges we faced, she never lost her energy or enthusiasm for engaging with the girls and teaching them valuable life skills. She was a true inspiration to both the girls and to me. Her tireless efforts and unwavering dedication to our cause prove that age is merely a number when it comes to volunteering and making a difference in the world. I feel grateful to have had her by my side throughout this trip!

As I conclude this newsletter, I want to thank you for your continued support of our work. We couldn't do any of it without



your help and if you are interested in supporting us further, we have several areas where your support would make a significant difference. You can choose to donate to our school, which helps us provide early childhood education within our local community. Alternatively, you can support our farm, which provides fresh produce for us and teaches the girls the importance of sustainable agriculture. Finally, you can contribute to the upkeep of Familia.

Your generosity and support continue to make a profound impact on the lives of both Familia girls, our Arc-en-Ciel schoolchildren, plus many others in the local community.

To contribute, please contact me at Julie@Kenyankids.org. You can also visit our website and follow the link to our donate page kenyankids.org

Thank you, as ever for your kind consideration and support.

Julie, Small, Sheila, and Cindy

