

# PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## CHILDREN OF GOD RELIEF INSTITUTE - NYUMBANI: THE CHALLENGE OF COVID - 19

BY MARY OWENS IBVM

On 13th March, 2020, to our great shock, we heard that COVID-19 had arrived in Kenya. As we were trying to cope with what this meant for our children in the Nyumbani programs, we heard on Monday, 17th March that all schools would be closed. With 98 in residence in Nyumbani Home and 904 in Nyumbani Village, we were faced with coming up with a plan on how to keep our children occupied and help them keep up their spirits. Thank God, our Centre for Curriculum Development developed on-line classes and our staff were gradually able to help the children develop creative activities in both programs. Thank God, the one child in Nyumbani Home, who tested positive for COVID-19, has recovered.

What was of great concern was the situation of the 14,181 children in our community-based program, Lea Toto, who reside in the resource-poor communities surrounding the city of Nairobi, most living in one-bedroom huts and living, on or below the poverty line. They had no means of participating in on-line classes. However, through



Mary Owens - Director Nyumbani

telecommunication, we kept contact with the children and their caregivers and have managed to continue providing the 3493 children living with HIV with their antiretroviral medicine, as well as keeping all the children healthy. Sadly, two tested positive for COVID-19, but both have fully recovered.

As the economy started to collapse, the caregivers lost jobs or their business collapsed. Families of 5 - 6, were in lock down in their homes with no means of support. With effect from May, 2020, we realized that we would need to provide food support to an increasing number of households. At the start, we received food donations from some large businesses and banks. We soon realized that we would have to solicit donations.

Somehow, my past Loreto Limuru students heard me talk about this need and they began to raise money for these needy families.



Food distribution Lea Toto Mukuru

Then others responded to my appeal in Newsletters and we were able to provide food support to more and more families. By December, we were serving 1,874 families with 10,241 members.

Our Nyumbani spirit from the beginning has been that 'God will provide', and I have seen this happen once again over the past 10 months. Each time I appeal for more funds, donations continue to come. God continues to provide.

## MINISTRY IN THE LOCKDOWN

BY MARYAGNES IDIONG IBVM

In the life of every human being, there is a set of basic needs: security, need for genuine affection, to be respected and to have a fulfilled life. For the victims of modern slavery, these needs have been violated by their traumatic experience of exploitation.

In Caritas Bakhita House in London, we offer emergency support for victims of human trafficking, providing them with the safety and support they need to begin the process of recovery and rehabilitation.

In partnership with other agencies, we support victims of this heinous crime in their brokenness and suffering. We accompany them as they try to rebuild trust, confidence in themselves, employability skills and independence for a more purposeful life and with dignity.

Many of us play UNO cards at some point in life for pleasure, but in Bakhita House, playing cards with our guests is more than a game but a therapy.



Maryagnes Idiong

More than ever, more stringent action is needed at this time of the Covid-19 pandemic to help in their continued recovery and rehabilitation when, due to the lockdown, most services are shut down or moved to the internet platform. Besides English lessons, baking and sewing, our guests share good times playing UNO cards, which only require recognition of colours numbers and laughter.

"Laughter has always been the best medicine, and if we can help our guests laugh again, we can allow them a vision of what is possible – a life that includes freedom, laughter, and friendship."

# THE MAGIS

BY LEONIDA KWAMBOKA ORIKI IBVM

When COVID-19 struck the dominant feeling was fear. Fear of getting sick and dying. The economy shut down and everyone was scared. Organizations, the government, churches were all shut including schools and jobs. People, especially the poor, became poorer from losing livelihoods and each tomorrow was more dire.

The children staying idle in the slums were a big worry for us. Words like drugs, criminal gangs, abuse, pregnancy came up every day and caused anxiety. The reality was all gloom.

In the slums, houses are too small, spaces are limited, sanitation is poor, and food is hard to come by. How would children survive at home, especially after the Government closed the learning institutions indefinitely?

Do we shut our organization, Women for Women in Africa (WFWIA), and go home as well just like every other organization is doing? Or do we open our gates and face the wrath of the Government and COVID-19? How do we minister to these families and children from the slums in these unpredictable and dark times?

One week after schools closed, cases of hunger, violence, abuse and conflicts sometimes spiraled out of control and we found ourselves in the midst of it all. We had to do something. Hungry children began to knock at WFWIA's gate! After two weeks, hundreds of kids were daily knocking on our gate with the intention of getting food, water and safety.

Parents too had had enough of lockdown as well and they began to follow their children. A community of poor mothers and children began



Leonida with Kevina

to form outside the organization's gate. All they needed was food and water to drink. COVID-19 was already hurting the families.

What do you do for a poor five-year-old child who asks at your gate for something to eat? And to a poor mother whose skin is pale and dry from hunger and thirst? What would Jesus do? In Matthew 15:32 Jesus says to his disciples "I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way."

The possibility of getting COVID-19 was real, the possibility of dying of hunger was very real. The people said dying of hunger was more painful than COVID-19. This is where God wanted us to be- with the poor and suffering. Our GC2014 call 4 says "Go where the need is greatest." This was the moment to live this call.

We opened our gates started feeding the children and giving food humpers to the families.



Leonida with children from WFWIA

Then children brought their books, and we began to help them with their assignments, we set up classes through Zoom, used WhatsApp to get assignments from teachers for the children, printed out assignments for them. Suddenly, we were teachers and counsellors to parents and children.

Teenagers were fighting with their parents, taking drugs and getting married. It was too much. We hired a Counsellor. Young girls decided enough was enough with poverty, they opted for early marriage to escape poverty. Then again, we were suddenly protecting female children from abuse and early marriages. We asked police and local chiefs to help us save the teenagers.

As time went by, we found ourselves being arbitrators. Many of the parents faced evictions from their houses. Landlords wanted money and the families had no money for rent. The fights between them would land at our Centre. We found ourselves doing more for the marginalized poor living in the slums of Kibera, more for Christ and for the greater glory of God.

We are grateful to our heroes who came forth and gave donations to enable us care for these families.