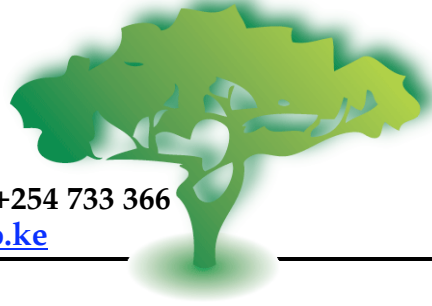


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MASHAKA CHILDREN'S CENTER, KENYA

OASIS AFRICA – AN INTRODUCTION

Oasis Africa – Center for Professional Psychology & Trauma (www.oasisafrica.co.ke) is a registered psychosocial support organization providing psychological and mental health services in Kenya and Africa. Founded by Dr. Gladys K. Mwiti, PhD Clinical Psychologist and Dr. Gershon K. Mwiti, Leadership Consultant, the organization has a 20-year track record of service provision with a high percentage of its work being in community trauma, for example, the recent Garissa University College terrorist attack; holistic care of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and professional support for staff working for humanitarian organizations in difficult spots in Africa, for example, DR Congo, Sothern Sudan, Somalia, and so on.

HISTORY OF MASHAKA CHILDRENS CENTER

In our commitment to community outreach, in October 2007, Oasis Africa opened an Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) project: The Mashaka Children's Center in Meru District. Mashaka, is a rural slum area within Meru, about four hundred kilometers from Nairobi. Most of the children in Mashaka live with child labor, early prostitution and teenage pregnancy, child abandonment, and HIV/AIDS. Some of the children in our project are orphans who were abandoned as newborn babies, rescued and taken care of by nuns in Catholic shelter and turned back into the community in young childhood. The cycle of abuse and neglect continues.

THE CENTER'S SETTING AND LOCATION

Mashaka Children's Center is located in Mashaka slums are made up of a population of more than 2,000 families squeezed on a plot that measures 2 miles radius. Mashaka, Kiswahili for "troubles or problems," is a swampy slum area that has been forgotten by development agencies and the government. Majority of the residents are squatters and slum dwellers with nowhere to go. We therefore choose to assist them. No other organization is offering support in the area and majority of the slums residents are affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, poverty, alcoholism and child neglect.

AFRICAN WISDOM: "If you cannot hold a child in your arms, hold it in your heart." ETHIOPIAN PROVERB

THE MASHAKA CHILDREN'S CENTER

Started with 120 children in 2007, the school currently supports 200 children from Kindergarten to Grade 8. In 2010, we also started a mothers/grandmas income generation project for the children's parents/caregivers. Oasis Africa Foundation provides rent for a dilapidated building where the school is located, pays staff salaries, purchases school learning materials, and feeds the children at least one meal a day. This is the only meal some children have for the day. The school is the only learning institution in the whole slum.

Need for Permanent Building ho house School and Vocational Training Center: Our current hope is to purchase some land adjoining the slum to construct a complete community center housing the school, a vocational training program for young people and the caregivers' income generation project. We also plan to start other community projects so as to enhance investment in capacity building for the caregivers, children and teachers at the Mashaka Center. At all times, trauma healing, counseling and training in life skills are composite parts of this program.

SERVICE PROVISIONS AT MASHAKA CHILDREN'S CENTER

1. Education Empowerment

The center has eight grade levels from Kindergarten to Class 8, ages 4-14 years.

2. Feeding Program

Due to the poverty levels at the Mashaka community where the residents survive on less than \$1 a day, most families don't know what it feels like to have regular meals. The children survive on one meal a day, the lunch we serve at school. Often, at school closure for holidays, many children weep wondering what they'll eat over school holidays! In addressing this need and also with the aim of motivating pupils to have total concentration in class, Oasis Africa provides porridge for the children at break time and lunch. This has reduced the absenteeism levels of the pupils where for a while they forget about their troubles at home.

3. Psychosocial Support both for Children and Caregivers

We offer the following psychosocial support to the center

a. Caregiver Training for Parents and Grandmas. Topics covered:

- Living Positively with AIDS
- Parenting skills
- Raising kids with terminal illnesses
- Income generation

b. Children and Caregivers,

- Motivational Talk and Life Skills training

c. Teachers

- Basic Counseling skills
- Skills for Early Childhood Education

4. Quilting Cottage

This was established to empower the women in the Mashaka community in income generation. Most families are under the care of single parents (mothers or grandmothers) who have heavy responsibilities on their shoulders. At the cottage, the women make quilts

that are sold when we can find a market. The little income generated is re-invested back to the project while the rest is shared among the women depending on the contribution made to the project by each of them. Currently, this project has stopped since the 24 quilting mothers have to look for casual work to feed their children. To continue quilting, we need to pay them \$2 per person per day that we cannot raise at the moment.

5. What Challenges do we face at Mashaka Center?

- a. **Land to build a permanent school.** We have located a 3-acre piece of land at \$20,000. If we purchased now, we can commence building. Some Church teams are ready to assist with construction. Grade 8 kids are in their final year making need for vocational school urgent.
- b. **Rent for Current Facility:** We currently owe \$800 rent dues.
- c. **Teachers' Support.** Our monthly running expenses total \$1,300. Of this, parents can raise a small fraction of the same.
- d. **Nutritional Additives.** We need to add fruit and vegetable to the children's lunch. Caregivers bring maize and beans, two lbs of each per month that the Cook boils for the children's lunch. We cannot afford to give them milk.
- e. **Medical Clinic.** We need to set up a medical clinic that will serve the whole community. Sanitation around the center is very poor leading to constant disease outbreaks in the area. So far, Oasis Africa has been unable to provide medical support to the center and the community.
- f. **Learning and Play Materials:** Lack of enough learning materials for the school, such as Text books, exercise books, and play equipment.
- g. **Women's Income Generation Project:** Seed money would help us jumpstart this project. Once it has taken off, we cannot connect it to microfinance facilities because the women will have income to pay back loans.
- h. **Support for Oasis Africa Administration:** Oasis Africa staff support the project's needs for administration, communication, accounting and so on.

For more information, please, visit the following link on You Tube for a short slide show on Mashaka Children's Center. Monica Munger of Oakland, CA put the video together. She just retired as a lecturer in a community college in Oakland, CA and dearly loves Mashaka kids who she has visited twice and taught at the school for two months.

The You Tube link for Mashaka Children's Centre slide show is:

(<http://www.youtube.com/user/MoniRae1?feature=mhum>)

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