



Dignity through empowerment



612 Textbooks 2

On March 31, Dignitas distributed 612 textbooks to five partner schools on behalf of donors.

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Country Director Steve Kariithi shares how Mathare understands education as the key to life.

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Dignitas Board Member Janet Lee Kwon reflects on her passion for children around the world.

Harnessing community assets amplifies Dignitas Project's impact and presence in Mathare

Dignitas Project's new partnerships—including one with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)—significantly increase our ability to improve children's lives.

It is amazing what can happen when new opportunities to collaborate with like-minded colleagues arise. Since our community entry to Mathare in May 2008, we've been keen to seek out organizations that work to address social, economic, and educational needs to share our approach and lessons learned to maximize our collective impact.

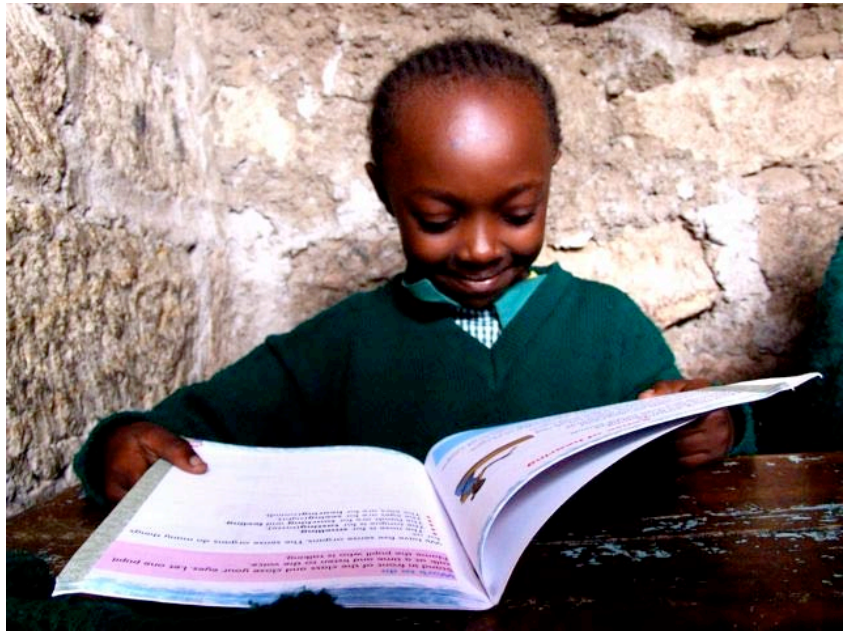
Recently, we cemented a working relationship with MSF—more commonly known as Doctors Without Borders—to help address the health of our students,

parents, and teachers. A team from MSF has agreed to take part in an upcoming 2-day professional development seminar to help our teachers know what clinical resources are in the community and facilitate an honest discussion about HIV/TB, sexual/gender-based violence, and hygiene/sanitation. MSF has also agreed to launch a new program with our help to provide primary healthcare services (including mass de-worming), source and distribute sanitary napkins to girls, and screen/treat families affected by HIV/TB in our

partner schools starting in May.

One of my greatest hopes for our schools is that they become places of learning, safety, and innovation. I believe that schools, together with churches, can serve as community anchors—in touch with its needs and thoughtful in its approaches for human empowerment. I am filled with anticipation and excitement for what is to come in this next season! Thank you for your continued partnership!!

-Tiffany | March 30, 2009
Nairobi, Kenya



As their teachers carried in boxes and piles of new textbooks, students murmured with excitement when they realized the books were purchased especially for them. For some schools, Dignitas' first wave of textbook provisions multiplied their textbooks on hand five-fold. "We are so very grateful to our friends who have supported us through Dignitas Project. We have never spent this amount of money buying textbooks, teacher guides, and maps for our school. It is such a blessing and we want to convey our deepest gratitude, truly," said Naioth Education Centre's Headteacher, Dan. Help us meet 100% of our five schools' needs! Donate online at www.causes.com/dignitasproject.org or send your tax-deductible contribution by mail.





Photo credit: Kevin Ouma

On the Ground: Steve Kariithi in Kenya



As often as we can, we spend time interacting with teachers we work with through *Teachers For Mathare*. We make an attempt to see them not just in our Saturday learning sessions, but also in their classrooms.

I was recently walking with Moses at one of the schools we work with, Mercy Care Centre. Entering one of the lower primary classes, 20 six-year-olds stood to greet me with a song to welcome me. One line in particular stood out for me: “Education is the key to life.”

Standing there, I felt grateful that this truth has dawned on Mathare. Surely, it is slowly transforming the whole community. While talking with Charles, a young man raised in Mathare, he expressed how education has

become central to the positive change in the community. One might easily miss this truth in the midst of the poverty, disease, and crime—things that have long defined Mathare. But look closer: young people are graduating high school in a place where a primary education was once considered good enough. Mothers who cannot read and write recently approached me to ask if I could organize classes for them. Njeri, a friend of mine who also works in the community, told me how many adults who never got a chance to go to school now want to get an education.

There’s more: I was told about a young man from Mathare who is very close to obtaining his law degree. The community around him is excited that they will have someone to advocate for justice. A young woman from Mathare who graduated from university late last year is now working in the media to highlight different

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Mrs. Patricia Willis and Dignitas Project's Executive Director Tiffany Cheng in March 2008.

California kindergarten teacher shares love of reading with Kenyan children

I first met Mrs. Patricia Willis when I was a four-and-a-half-year-old kindergartener. On my first day of school, Mrs. Willis pinned a nametag she had drawn on a red apple-shaped piece of construction paper to my first-day-of-school-outfit. As soon as I realized my mom had left my side, the idea of being abandoned forever with this stranger was more than I could imagine. I began to cry and Mrs. Willis, unfazed, led me by my hand to the classroom door to point out my mom, who was smiling and waving from the other end of the schoolyard. "Don't worry, your mom hasn't left you and I know you are going to have fun here," she said. The dual reassurance, as well as the sense that Mrs. Willis was a kindred spirit, was enough to bring the tears to an end. Though, my apple nametag had been destroyed in the flood of tears.

When I think about the reasons for my passion for children's

education, my teachers—Mrs. Willis being one among the most influential—often come to mind. They remind me of what is possible when there are adults in schools committed to encouraging the very best in a child.

Mrs. Willis continues to teach me lessons. Late last year, in the midst of her battle with leukemia, she sorted through her collection of children's books and selected 100 books that she believed would resonate with children in Mathare as a donation to our organization because "I hope children in Kenya will love these books as much as I have loved them. I still tell stories to young children and I feel that this gift is the best way for me to share this love of reading." The books have since found their way into local schools and community centers—each with a dedication from Mrs. Willis to the children in Mathare. Her generosity and care for children, even in the midst of struggle, left me once again in tears.

I am so happy Mrs. Willis has made a strong recovery and regained much of her health. In a recent email, she wrote, "What Dignitas is doing sounds so wonderful. If my health was like it was twenty years ago, I would love to be more involved and visit the children in Kenya."

-Tiffany | March 19, 2009



Mercy Care Education Centre's Headteacher Lillian Omondi pictured with a few of Mrs. Willis' gifts.

Help rewrite the future! Contribute to the movement to ensure children's right to quality education.

Visit www.dignitasproject.org or join us at www.causes.com/dignitasproject.

Spotlight: Lucy Wambua

Dignitas Project Kenya is proud to welcome a new team member!

Born and raised in Mathare, Lucy Wambua continues to call it home. Prior to joining Dignitas in January, she worked for several years as an early childhood development teacher in Mathare.

“Since I’ve been a teacher, I know the difficulties they face. I really wanted to be a part of an effort to motivate teachers in Mathare because they are the ones that are there for the children. With the little resources they have in schools, they manage to help children reach their best and pursue secondary schooling.”

As program assistant, Lucy coordinates various aspects of Dignitas Project’s teacher development program, *Teachers For Mathare*, and spends the majority of her time in our five partner schools helping teachers implement what they are learning. She brings with her a passion for children, particularly girls’ education and mentorship.



Lucy Wambua,
Dignitas Project Kenya's
Program Assistant



Dignitas Project's USA Board of Directors: (clockwise, from upper left) Matthew Geppert, Bobby Lee, Kooper Frame, Janet Lee Kwon (with daughter Leah), Tiffany Cheng, and Jay Trinidad

Guiding Voices

Janet Lee Kwon—board member, educator, and mother—reflects on her passion for children globally.

In the summer of 2007, I had the privilege of visiting New Life Home Trust, a home for abandoned and orphaned babies based in Nairobi. As I held, fed, and played with the babies, my heart both warmed and ached at the sight of their pudgy bellies and silly smiles. I tried to imagine what their futures might look like, but I couldn't. Two years later, I have a child of my own, and I remember the babies who were the same age as my daughter is now. Only in becoming a parent have I come to realize the experiences those babies may never have.

This new perspective has transformed my sense of urgency and responsibility for children wherever they may be. All children deserve the chance to learn and grow, and Dignitas works to facilitate that opportunity. With a background in international education and non-profit work, I hope to share the lessons I have learned as we adapt and grow as an organization. My other goal is to care for Dignitas' small, but amazingly effective staff in any way possible. Education and the healthy development of children have always been and will always be my passions. I am so grateful that through Dignitas, I can participate in strengthening and providing the building blocks necessary for children to thrive.

-Janet | March 21, 2009



Reflecting on her involvement in *Teachers For Mathare*, Teacher Grace Kariuki expressed, "When we get together, it's clear no one wants to miss out on a session. I feel encouraged by the opportunity that we have to learn together since we're coming from different schools with experiences that help us grow. I've really enjoyed being a part of this group." Pictured above with several of her nursery class students, Grace and the 22 other teachers will come together April 6-7 for a two-day professional development session to close the first school term. Highlights include training from Dignitas health partners and interactive discussions focused on using instructional tools to support educational quality.

On the Ground: Steve Kariithi in Kenya

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issues via a local radio program focused on informal settlements.

People in Mathare have realized the truth and power of what those children at Mercy Care proclaim: "Education is the key to life." Men

and women have discovered that education is a solution to many of their challenges and I am glad that Dignitas Project is working to be a part of that change.

-Steve | March 25, 2009



Dignitas Project

Dignity through empowerment

Dignitas Project is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to improving education outcomes for impoverished children through the empowerment of community and school leaders, parents, and youth. We are proud to partner with supporters from around the world who invest their time, faith, and finances in our work.

We invite you to follow our work at <http://blog.dignitasproject.org>.

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