

# Dignitas Project

*Dignity through empowerment*

Issue 4 | September/October 2009

## Save the Date!

We will be hosting two events featuring guest of honor Steve Kariithi, Country Director.

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## Our Impact

In just 3 months, student scores in our schools have doubled! See our impact and read on for results.

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## Fall University Tour

Dignitas Project will be speaking at Harvard, Tufts, and Columbia in late October.

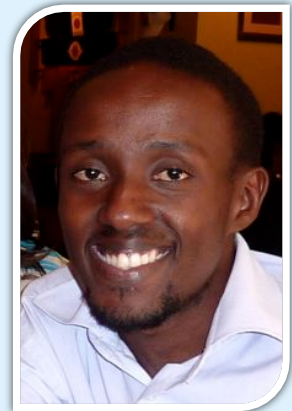
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## Collaboration with schools begins to bear great fruit.

Executive Director Tiffany Cheng reflects on her recent trip to Kenya, and finds much to celebrate in Dignitas Project's efforts to improve education and expand opportunity.

Our role as an organization that empowers individuals and families in a process to overcome poverty is always at the forefront of our decisions on the ground. That's why developing teachers has remained the central focus of our education improvement efforts. Since January, we've partnered with five schools and recruited 22 teachers to be a part of *Teachers For Mathare*, a program that aims to build skills, leadership, and capacity in teachers working in schools that serve more than 2,000 children. During my time in Kenya, I spent time meeting with every teacher to discuss their achievements and areas we want to improve together. Teacher Benjamin Anyanga showed me student marks on recently completed exams and flipped to a page in his student handbook that showed marks from April. I could hardly contain my excitement. Scores for some of his students had nearly doubled in just three months! Smiling with pride, Benjamin said, "The *Teachers For Mathare* program has taught me how a teacher is to behave and I am now able to teach very well. What Dignitas is doing is not only benefitting our learners but also the slum as a whole."

In addition to such positive interactions with our teachers, I spent two days working with our principals to discuss promising approaches involving families and teachers that help children learn and grow and how they could apply these to their school plans. The best part was knowing that our time together was a direct result of principals lobbying our staff for development workshops, as we had yet to work specifically with *(continued on page 2)*



## Voices from the Ground: Steve Kariithi, Country Director

September ushers in the final term in the school year in Kenya. From the beginning of the year, we have been working closely with five schools: training teachers, equipping classrooms with textbooks and offering other support. We have worked to leverage knowledge, skills and other resources from

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## SAVE THE DATE and JOIN US!

November 6, 2009 | Los Altos Garden House | 6:30-8:30pm  
 November 14, 2009 | Oakland Hills Tennis Club | 4:30-6:30pm

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 A fundraiser benefitting Dignitas Project  
 With guest of honor Steve Kariithi, Kenya Country Director

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 The events will include hors d'oeuvres, wine, live music, silent auction, and short presentation.

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 To RSVP or for event volunteer opportunities, please email [info@dignitasproject.org](mailto:info@dignitasproject.org)

### Hosted by Dignitas Project Board of Directors

Bobby Lee, Tiffany Cheng, Kooper Frame, Matt Geppert, Monica Higgins, Janet Lee Kwon, Wendy Robison, Tim Sesler, & Helen Westmoreland

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principals. We will continue working closely with our partner schools and appreciate the countless hours teachers and principals put in to run schools with minimal government support.

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**“What Dignitas is doing is not only benefitting our learners but also the slum as a whole.”**

**-Benjamin Anyanga, Teacher**

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My time in Kenya also allowed me to be a part of another important milestone. Dignitas Project now has an office of its own in the community! For the past 15 months, we have rented a small office from another community-based organization. We now have space for our staff of two on the ground, all our office equipment, as well as a teacher resource center that will house a number of maps, books, and other equipment. We are excited that we can give back to the greater community in this particular way.

Since returning from Kenya, I have been thinking a

great deal about the lessons we are learning from our pilot program and efforts to achieve greater equity in Mathare. While resources and infrastructure present incredible challenges, the greatest need and possibility for wide-scale impact is in developing human talent. In the coming months, we'll be evaluating potential opportunities to expand our reach based on the promising approaches we have taken.

The third and final term of the school year is upon us in Kenya and we are committed to making it count.

*-Tiffany Cheng*



*Executive Director Tiffany Cheng, right, with Mercy Care Centre headteacher Lillian Omondi at a student games day in August.*

# Teachers For Mathare Program Shows Impact on Student Achievement and Teacher Development

We've begun collecting student performance data from our teachers and are thrilled to see that double-digits gains in exam scores. On average, student scores have risen 30 points and 100% of our students have crossed the important "passing" threshold of 250 marks.

In schools where 80 children are crammed into the space of a small dining room and teachers strive to impart lessons to children struggling against the effects of poverty, children are learning and growing. They are enthusiastic about school and education - singing songs about the importance of education, engaging in classroom activities with bounding energy, and full of hope.

For now, hear from our teachers and learn what they have to say about being a part of Teachers For Mathare:

"I now know the methods of improving performance in my class and can counsel children in difficult circumstances and parents about how to be role models in the community." -Teacher Nancy Wachiye, Mercy Care Education Centre

"We have received a very large number of textbooks and seen a number of teachers able to handle greater responsibilities at the school level." - Headteacher, Mercy Care Education Centre



"Bravo Dignitas Project. You have changed the lives of children and teachers in Mathare." -Teacher Grace Wanjiku, Naioth Education Centre

"The sessions have opened my eyes. As a teacher, it has helped me understand my pupils, my colleagues and prepare my class very well." -Teacher Francis Shiro, Valley View Academy

"The training has made me improve in my classroom as a teacher and helped me to be aware of how I can help my community. Some of my friends have asked me for the materials we used even though they are in teacher colleges." -Teacher Susan Aoko, Valley View Academy

"I have learned how to lesson plan and use teaching aids - both have helped strengthen my interactions with pupils. I different people and am now more confident than before." - Teacher Virginia Nyambura, Naioth Education Centre



Above: In August, Dignitas Project organized a teacher retreat for the Teachers For Mathare program. Teachers and staff all journeyed to Thika's Fourteen Falls Park for a day of team-building exercises and recreation away from Mathare.

Above right: Teachers For Mathare member Christine Ondiso with her students at Naioth Education Center.

# Teacher development sessions shift to classroom-based instructional coaching

Since January, we have been working with 22 teachers in five schools. In development sessions, we focused on topics such as classroom management, education psychology, and lesson planning. All of these sessions have been conducted outside of our partner schools in a community space close to our office.

For the final school term, we have enlisted the expertise and support of Ann Waihura, Dignitas Project's Instructional Coach. She has been working diligently with our teachers since April and developed a wonderful rapport with each one. Starting in September, Ann will juggle her full-time teaching duties at a local high school in the neighboring community and her work with our teachers. Ann will observe every teacher individually at least twice, providing feedback before and after the class lesson is conducted. This will help Dignitas Project and our partner schools create systems within each school to support ongoing peer-learning opportunities as we would like to see teachers intentionally provide feedback to one another. Our goal is to continue building skills and developing each teacher but doing so with the recognition that schools must be supported if they are to adopt such accountability and learning practices.



At the end of November when the school year comes to a close, we expect to present certificates of achievement to the 22 teachers who have been a part of our year-long pilot program. As much as we are looking forward to this, we know we still have a great deal of work to accomplish and are grateful that Ann, who recently completed her masters in School Leadership at the Pan-African Christian University, has chosen to be a part of our development efforts.

## Reflections: Ann Waihura, Dignitas Project's Instructional Coach



St. Michael's Education Centre is in the valley surrounded by slum housing in Mathare. Classes are small, crowded and have very basic facilities. I walk into Valley View and see a nursery class of eighty pupils. Children can hardly move around. The teacher I've come to observe can barely give individualized attention to her students as there is no space to move around in the classroom. However, the boys and girls respond in English to the teacher, write in their books while standing up or on their laps and using whatever space there is. At Naioth, I walk through small rooms and see many pupils. Teachers are well-organized and have prepared charts using bags that once stored grain. Students show an eagerness to learn. Mercy Care is clean but even its compound is crowded with many pupils in the classes.

As I reflect on the four schools I have visited, I'm reminded of different environments, teachers, and facilities. For me, there were some very marked differences. But looking at the pupils, I thought there were so many similarities. Though they wore different colored uniforms, they are eager to learn, maybe unaware that their fellow pupils in neighboring schools are better or worse-endowed with resources. Each pupil knows that theirs is the best school can be. Songs are sang, questions are asked and responded to with similar innocence and enthusiasm.

Students are able to read and write and learning is taking place despite other things that could be happening around them. That is exciting. Last week, I visited a teacher who is working with 80 children squeezed into a tiny classroom. Ultimately, there are not enough schools. The class of 80 should really be 3 classes of 20-25 children per class. You see the conditions and wish they could be better for the pupils - and hope that it can keep improving so that the learning environment is more conducive. The teachers in the schools are also doing the best they can with the resources they have and creating an environment where pupils can learn to read and write. This is very encouraging for me because ultimately, the students are learning! *-Ann Waihura*

## Fall University Tour

This fall, Dignitas Project will be visiting several universities to discuss lessons learned and challenges of education development in impoverished communities:

### Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Date: October 26, 2009  
Student Group Event

### Harvard University

Graduate School of Education  
Date: October 27, 2009  
Course: Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Learning

### Tufts University

Date: October 27, 2009  
Course: Education for Peace and Development

### Columbia University

Teachers College  
Date: October 29, 2009  
Course: Education and Development of Nations

In addition, Dignitas Project will also be speaking in the following places:

### Pittsburgh, PA

November 1-2, 2009

### Washington, DC

November 3, 2009

### Oakland, California

Holy Names High School  
Course: Women & Spirituality  
November 9, 2009

### Los Angeles Area, CA

November 7, 2009

For more information about the engagements above or general questions, please contact us at [info@dignitasproject.org](mailto:info@dignitasproject.org).

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within and outside Mathare. We have been in more than a 100 meetings with students, government officials, teachers, school heads, Dignitas staff and board and with people from other organizations working around the issue of education. We have researched and thought about different issues affecting Mathare. We have spent hours talking with parents and community leaders.

As I reflect upon this, my question is does it make a difference?

Recently I was at the Ministry of Education and one of the officials told me that they were still using our findings based on research that we conducted in 2008 in Mathare. The research was based on capturing and expressing community voices on their challenges and hopes, which many times is rarely heard and factored in policy decisions. One year later, this work is still being shared across organizations and used to influence decisions. This means that different interventions outside Mathare and Dignitas have the potential to be more context-relevant.

A few days ago, one of the school principals shared with me that for the first time, they are receiving textbook support that is making a significant difference in their schools. I also know of a teacher who used to have to borrow books to teach his class from students from a different school because his school did not have any books. Teachers are improving their skills, which makes a difference in how they teach children following our teacher development sessions.

So yes, the work has been worth it. And as we enter into the last term of the year, I am excited about plans we have as we work more closely with the teachers in their classrooms. We will continue to support schools with books and other resources because we want to improve lives in Mathare.

*-Steve Kariithi*

**Join our movement!**

**Your tax-deductible investment in our work will help improve education for children in Kenya and support our efforts to change lives.**

**Donate online: <http://www.dignitasproject.org>**



# Inspired by Mathare's Teachers to Press Onwards: Lucy Wambua, Project Assistant



Working at Dignitas Project has really given me great insight to the Mathare community, especially the five partner schools. It has been quite a good time spent with the teachers in the program, Teachers For Mathare, and seeing the great impact we have had through the Saturday sessions.

As I pay schools visit, I get a chance to see the community from many angles. I see children playing in Mathare but they are of school-going age and not in school. I often ask myself why there are more community-based schools and yet so many children not in school. Does it mean parents don't have the ability to pay?

There is this one teacher who stands out to me. She is a form two (high school) dropout who is ready to learn and open to new ideas. She prepares the schemes of work and lesson plans, ensures that her pupils are ready to learn and sets out to achieve the set objectives of the day. She works hard so that pupils achieve the highest marks possible and tries to provide the best teaching and learning materials during her lessons. She considers her most significant relationship to be when she teaches boys and girls seated together. She is very ambitious in that she would like to complete her studies and aspires to do more in her life.

Our teachers want to see their pupils excelling in life. As I arrive at our partner schools, I'm always touched by the teachers' commitment and dedication to their work. It makes me recall this quote: "Teaching is a calling. If you are a good teacher, you are vulnerable when you teach. You bring things that you care about and enjoy to your class. You speak with honesty and openness. You are not afraid to admit when you are wrong. You laugh and you cry. You are human. What is this calling to teach, if not the growing of humans? Educated, caring humans full of self-worth, wonder, imagination, creativity and belief they can make a difference in this world."

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*Dignitas Project is non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to improving education quality and expanding opportunity for children and families living in impoverished communities. Our work is funded entirely by individuals and businesses that have partnered with us to develop indigenous leaders who will change lives and their nation's future.*



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