

St Peter's Parish Youth Group
c/o Kate Harvey



25 June 2015

Dear St Peter's Parish Youth Group,

Thank you so much for your continued support of Emma Wambui Ngugi & John Maina Wangari through the Grassroots Child Sponsorship programme in Theta, Kenya. The children are always thrilled when we visit and so grateful for your support.

This year our annual visit to Kenya to meet all the sponsored children was in early June. I am always amazed how quickly the urban sprawl advances. What was previously an expanse of waste land is now filling in with shops and stalls, people trying to sell their little stock to make a living. Theta is changing (see * below). The river still acts as a divide, stopping all proper transport getting from the main road to that half of the town. Life over on the side where Good Neighbours and El Shaddai Primary School are based is definitely much more ramshackle and visibly struggling.

There is a bridge we use to cross the river (see ** below). It has been patched together with spare pieces of wood and visibly moves as we step on the planks. Cars certainly cannot use it but the motorbike taxi riders go across carefully. Everyone knows that it will be submerged and probably get washed away next time the rains come. We park on the far side and walk.



From the bridge we have to walk about a mile to reach El Shaddai Primary School; weaving between houses and stalls, along dusty uneven ground which, in the rainy season, becomes sloshy mud. There are no road signs or road names. Remembering the way or even knowing where you are presents an interesting mental challenge. You definitely feel you are far away from normal civilisation. **It always strikes me as amazing that even in these apparently forgotten, hidden places God has his people reaching out with his love and trying to bring practical help to people in desperate need.** As God says in the Bible, that even if a mother could “forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” (Isaiah 49:15)

Kenya state run schools provide a good education but there are not enough spaces to accommodate all the children. **Good Neighbours Church started El Shaddai Primary School to make it possible for the children in this neglected community to have a good education.** The next nearest primary school is a long walk away, has very poor facilities, during the rainy season the classrooms are submerged in up to 6 inches of water and charges fees that are hard for Theta families to afford. It has been proved that over time education can break the cycle of poverty. The further a child is able to advance in education the greater the chance of them breaking out of the cycle of poverty. Although El Shaddai is a non-government school the cost to the family for each child is the same. The team try to allow all the children from the community to come to school but many families default on the payment of school fees. This puts an enormous strain on finances and resources. Most households do not have a regular income and work when possible, often earning little more than £3.80 for a full day's work. So they pay school fees when they can. Feeding

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themselves and their children is a higher priority but, even so, many of the children come to school hungry. So sponsorship, which covers the school fees, is seen as a gift from God.

This year my daughter and some other teenagers came to Kenya on the annual trip. The difference in the physical growth of our kids next to the Kenyan children of the same age in Theta was striking. Long term intermittent malnutrition leaves its mark.



Children eating enough to feed their brains and successful education are intrinsically linked. All Grassroots sponsored children in Theta receive a bowl of porridge each morning. It has become clear that for some this is often the only meal they receive. **So we have set up an emergency fund – 25p per lunch per child per day.** This makes it possible for the school to provide lunch for those who are clearly in need of some extra food. (For me that would be almost everyone but the locals have to prioritise with the limited budget). The truth is that, if these children were in the UK, they would all qualify for free school dinners. During our interview with the children of one of the families it became clear they had not eaten for two days.

Good Neighbours Church also provides porridge on a Sunday after church. Children can have this even if they do not come to the service. To be able to respond to needs like this is vital. At the moment Grassroots does not have the financial resources to help the church provide this. If we did receive donations designated for this 100% we be used for this porridge and other emergency food provision via the church. If you would like to help in this area please drop me a line.

El Shaddai is a primary school. To go on to secondary school the children in class 8 need to pass national examinations. **We have been thrilled to see a number of the Grassroots sponsored children pass these exams and win places at state secondary schools.** If you sponsor one of these children then your sponsorship follows them. Sadly the sponsorship will not cover all the costs of secondary school – which starts at about £16 per month, depending on the school to which they get allocated by the system. But your sponsorship does make a difference. It will mean their family can buy them a school uniform, books and the other materials. This really helps. If your sponsored child is attending secondary school and you would like to give them a little more than you already do then this is also possible. At the moment we do not have an official secondary education sponsorship scheme in Kenya (for various reasons that are to do with cost varying quite a bit) but we now have this option of sponsors giving more if they feel they can.

A highlight of every trip to Theta is spending time praying with the teachers in the school. They have a very tough job, working with few resources and in small classrooms. We are thrilled that we have had the same teachers in the school for some time now. Their commitment is much appreciated. The school constantly needs to develop, both in terms of the education offered and the buildings. The education authority has asked that we replace some of the iron roofing sheets as they are now old and rusty. The area for the nursery also needs to be enlarged.

On the last day of the team's visit **we had a day out the Nairobi elephant sanctuary and were able to take years 8 and 1 along as well.** What a wonderful place! The children were all so



excited. Getting into a minibus was a big adventure in itself. They loved the elephant sanctuary and seeing elephants for the first time left them either talking continuously or completely silent in wonder. It was great to spend extended time with the children. The year 8 teacher has told me that he now has a problem: ever since that day, whenever he sets an essay for the children to write, whatever subject he asks them to write about, the children somehow weave into their writing a story about going to an elephant sanctuary.

There is always a big welcome from the children and the church in Theta. They really love it when visitors arrive. **If you would like to be one of the visitors next summer why not join us on a trip.** Our expected dates are: 26th May to 3rd June 2017 and coincide with many UK education authorities' half term holidays. Those who are part of the team work hard. We will be interviewing all the children on the sponsorship scheme, getting involved with school/church life and also visiting others projects – including Watu wa Maana Street Children's Centre. Drop me a line if you would like to start the application process or find out more.



There's so much more we would love to tell you about Theta. **If you have a group where one of us could visit and do a presentation please do ask.** We would love to come and get more people praying or supporting in other ways. Thank you for all you are doing and do let us know if you have questions or suggestions of how more support could be stirred up.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharon'.

Sharon & Hugo Anson. (Grassroots Directors)

* Theta is the name of the small, poor town just North of Nairobi where Grassroots has worked for a number of years in partnership with George Kiba. He and his wife Grace decided to live in the town with their children because they felt called by God to make a difference there. They started both a school (El Shaddai Primary School) and a church (Good Neighbours Church). Over the last year the church leaders from across the town have been meeting and decided to rename the town Juda as Theta had a bad reputation and they thought renaming it might help to change that. Many people now use both names for the town. For clarity in this letter we will call the town Theta.

** Grassroots is also working with the community to see a safer bridge built between the two halves of the village. This should help people from Theta travel to the town of Ruiru for work and so ease the level of poverty. This project is being spearheaded by the "Buda Buda Boys" – a group of motorcycle taxi drivers who are based in Theta.