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Dear Friends of the Port Reitz School,

QUITE SIMPLY AN AMAZING YEAR….

So many things have happened this past year with the highlight of course being the 50th jubilee of the school. Besides a great party, we were also able to appreciate the new dormitories, a prosthesis centre at the APDK, a Wheelchair Repair Shop and many other beautiful projects. Needless to say, this was only possible due to your continued support. This year, once again, was overwhelming and heart-warming. We can't mention everybody or each organisation individually, but we want to thank you all for the support the children and staff of the Port Reitz School received. We also want to thank you on behalf of all those children who had finished school and were able to continue on to secondary school or vocational training and even university! The more education these vulnerable children get the better their future will be.

Dormitories

The PRS is coping with a chronic shortage of beds. Since the vocational classrooms were renovated in 2014, the need has increased even more. Therefore, we are very grateful that with the help of Kiwanis Club Laren, the Wild Geese, Search Engine Easy, the Greenbank School, Fam. De Jong & Friends and last but not least Margaret Beetham, the founder of the school in 1965, we were able to transform the old chicken-house into new dormitories with its own kitchen, dining hall and 2 sanitary blocks. The students in vocational training are, of course, older than the other students at the PRS and will benefit from the separate accommodation.

October 24, during the celebration of the Jubilee the new dormitories were handed over to the PRS.

We know that their lives can be very difficult and we know that all our joint efforts make a massive difference to them, children and staff alike. However, it was only after reading Mercy's email to one of our main sponsors that we really became fully aware of the impact of your help. Here is Mercy's email…..

My name is Mercy Mwandeje and I'm the principal of the Port Reitz School (PRS) in Mombasa, Kenya. The Board of the Foundation Friends of the PRS (Alexandra, Asava and Wendy) asked me to write to you, explaining what impact your help has had and still has on the Port Reitz School. In my enthusiasm I directly said yes. As Wendy can tell you, I'm an easy talker so this should be simple for me; however, to be honest now I'm speechless.

Some things in life are easy to describe, but the effect of your help on the lives of our children is far beyond words. You have affected not only the lives of our children and entire staff, but also the lives of the most desperate of the whole community surrounding the PRS. I don't even know where to start. Well let me start with what the school is all about.

Education

Education is the most precious gift anyone can receive in live. Although in Kenya school is mandatory till the age of 18, it doesn't mean that all children actually have a chance to go to school. Especially those children with disabilities have very little chances. As PRS we take in as many children as possible, because ***DISABILITY does not mean INABILITY****. Hence due to polio when I was just a child I'm in a wheelchair myself as well as several of our teachers. They are like me, former students of the PRS. And look, despite our impairments, what we achieved just because we got the chance to go to school. Unfortunately, not everybody is of that opinion and as a result we get too few teachers appointed to our school, leaving us with a big shortage of teachers. Due to the lack of teachers our children were preforming not as good as they could in there KCPE exams and only a few could make it to secondary school. Today we were able, with the financial help, to employ 3 additional teachers; the grades have gone up spectacularly. So well that quite a number of our students got accepted in secondary school. Guarantying them a brighter future not only for themselves, but their entire family.*

Mobility

Besides education, freedom of movement is essential, especially for the physical disabled. As a school, on a daily basis we have to struggle to feed all the children and staff, preferable three times a day. Therefore, we could not afford to spend any money on medical appliances like wheelchairs, callipers, crutches, etc. Leaving a vast majority of our children and staff, including myself with reduced and even no mobility. You cannot imagine how many tears were shed when we all received the medical aids we needed. Children and staff now walking with callipers instead of crawling, kids with spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, paralysation, polio, etc. having adapted wheelchairs.

Amputees having crutches and compression therapy to prepare their limbs for a prosthesis. A therapy only possible through financial help, so we have now a full-time physiotherapist. Actually at this very moment that I'm writing this email the first prostheses are being made.

Kahindi Karisa amputated through knee is already walking with a fully functional knee and by the end of the month the other amputated children will be walking as well. Some of them are waiting already for more than 8 years. It's a miracle.

Note from the Foundation:
This year we were very lucky that Dirk Rösch (second from the right, back row) and Steffen Lörks (first left back row), orthopaedic technicians at Mönks & Scheer Germany, travelled to Kenya with us to start up a prostheses centre at the APDK (Association for the Physical Disabled Kenya) which is situated just across the street from the PRS. They taught their Kenyan equals new, more efficient techniques. Many thanks go to a donor who made it possible to send a container. This enabled all the needed equipment for the fabrication of prostheses to be sent. Several manufacturers in Germany donated many parts such as knee-joints, adaptors, feet, etc. and Runners World, Nijmegen for all the trainers.

Dirk Rösch who leads this project will make sure that on a regular basis orthopaedic technicians will go to Kenya to continue teaching. The goal is that the APDK will develop into 'a centre of excellence' where prostheses makers from across Kenya can be trained in new techniques. Therefore, more children and adults can be helped.

Diapers

A large number of our children are due to their handicaps incontinent. In good times we were able to provide them with 3 diapers a week. This is far from enough, leaving these children embarrassed and ashamed. Till a point that they often tried to hide themselves. Embarrassed each time that the teacher had to stop teaching in order to clean the floor and bringing them to the house-mothers to be washed and changed. Ashamed for the smell and the stains, because their cloth would be changed; however, they had to be seated again in a soaked wheelchair. This was so inhuman.

It was of course also a big inconvenience for the teacher's every time they had to interrupt their teaching. Not to forget all the extra cloth and bedding that had to be washed taking along an enormous extra workload for the house-mother and fathers. A Dutch foundation is now providing us with 4 diapers per child per day, you see them blossom. It is such a tremendous joy to see how they came out of their social isolation and participating in all kinds of activities without being ashamed, that I often after school just watch them on the playground playing.

House-mothers/fathers

The school would not exist without them. They have by far physically the hardest job. We have around 60 children in the lower dormitories. These children have either multiple impairments or are heavily mentally disabled and need a lot of attention. In the upper dormitories we have around 125 students who are either physically or mild mentally handicapped. Before the Foundation came to our help we only had 2 house-mothers during day time in the lower dormitories and 1 in the upper dormitories and 2 during night time for both upper and lower. Besides that, they also had to take the children to the hospital when needed, which unfortunately happens quite often with these vulnerable children. In fact, an impossible task, nonetheless due to their devotion of helping these children they stayed on and did what they could. Ever since you came in we have now for the upper dormitories an extra house-mother and 2 house-fathers who take care of the heavy tasks like the laundry, lifting the adult children, carrying the water and food, etc.

And in addition to them we now also have 1 house-mother who is actually more like a combination of a house-mother and counsellor who takes the children to their doctors' appointments and hospital visits. She is also a great listener and counsellor. The children really open up to her. Don't forget that far most of our children are traumatised in one way or the other.

Her presence has without doubt already safe one boy's life. Our Muzungu Ngwadu suffers from Hydrocephalus and a couple of month ago he had an accident and fell badly on his head. Without hesitation she directly contacted Asava and got funds, to take him all the way to Kijabe, 700km away from Mombasa and the only place in the whole of Kenya were he could get the brain surgery he needed. Her quick reaction got him in Kijabe just on time and he survived. He is even already back in school. Still weak, still heaving head-aches, but getting stronger every day. According the surgeon, he will fully recover.

Wheelchair repair shop

And last but not least, "the wheelchair repair shop", at this moment being installed on the school's compound. This really means a lot to us. First of all, it will increase the life-spend of our wheelchair which bring us freedom. Second, in addition they will also be able to repair and adjust crutches and walkers.

The wheelchair repair shop will also give us the opportunity to have a partnership with the school for the deaf of Piet. Something we are really looking forward to. Together you stand stronger than alone.

Note from the Foundation:

We purchased the container as it is only a little more than to rent it for the journey and in January 2016 it will be transformed into a wheelchair repair shop and storage unit for spare parts.

We also used the container to transport school furniture which was donated by De Reiger primary school, The Netherlands. Over 900 kg of bedsheets and towels were donated by Blanchisserie de la Côte Emeraude, France. Many more donations of clothes, sewing machines, furniture etc. were made by individuals from all over Europe.

Thanks also here to Harrison Wood 14 (left) and Hugo Petit 12 from France (below) who were our muscle in Europe!! The boys tirelessly helped collect, among many other donations, the wonderful linens from France and fantastic desks from Holland and helped load the container in Rotterdam.

Without their help this task would have been a much more demanding one…and much less fun!

We are very proud that all the children helped, each to their own capabilities, to unload this enormous 40 ft. HC container.

School furniture

Everything you are doing is so overwhelming that I totally forgot to mention the enormous impact the new school furniture has on the well-being of our students.

The U-frames of the tables is the solution for our children that are in a wheelchair or have callipers.

It's the first time in the school that they can be properly and comfortable sitting at their desks. It is so beautiful, durable and easy to clean at the same time. Splendid!

I know that "Thank you" is the appropriate thing to say; however, our gratitude cannot be caught in those words. Nonetheless "thank you" is the closest to express our gratitude. Therefore, on behalf of all the children and staff, thank you very, very much for your support and I sincerely hope to welcome you all at the PRS, so you can see with your own eyes the changes your help brought.

With warmest regards,
Mercy

50th Jubilee

The PRS was founded in 1965 by Margaret Beetham. Unfortunately, due to Margaret not being in good health she was unable to join the festivities at the school. However, on October 24 Linzi and Harrison Wood made sure that a beautiful bouquet and a wonderful cake were delivered to Margaret for her to share with her family and friends. On behalf of all the former students we want to thank Linzi and Harrison once more for this beautiful gesture.

The celebrations were over 3 days starting on October 23rd with the outreach program. This is where the children went out into the community to 'give back' and to show yet again how capable they are of helping others. We were deeply touched to see all the children of the PRS, themselves in need of so much, going out to help the needy at the hospital and the APDK and having a wonderful time in the process.

It was great that not only the children from the PRS went out to help but also Agnès Petit our representative in France and Linzi, Perry & Harrison Wood our representatives from the North of England joined the party.

Their presence was an enormous inspiration for the children.

October 24 was the big party, beginning with the handing over of the new dormitories, followed by the unveiling of a bust of Margaret Beetham by Dorca James and Harrison Wood.

Dorca (seated in the wheelchair) was in 1965 the first student at the PRS and has been for many years the school's secretary. Harrison became, in 2010 at the age of 9, our youngest UK ambassador. The bust was sculptured and donated by Hennie van Rooijen, a Dutch artist.

The rest of the day we enjoyed lovely performances from the students with singing, dancing, poems, etc. It once more made us realize how much talent these beautiful kids have. It was absolutely amazing.

All these activities made them hungry and they were served pilau a Kenyan dish with rice, vegetables and goat meat, followed by an enormous birthday cake presented by the Voyager Beach Resort.

Christmas Hampers

With the many donations for the container and financial support from our sponsors, especially those from Volendam, The Netherlands, we were able to give all the children and staff a bag of goodies. Everybody received a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, bedsheet, towel, cloth and a toy. In addition, the learner's received pens, pencils, pencil sharpener, etc., for the mentally challenged, a soft toy and for staff some body lotion, shampoo, etc.

A big thanks for the volunteers Harrison, Linzi, Perry, Agnès, Violet, Mama Asava and Amanda who tireless filled all the bags.
The faces of the children were priceless. You can find all the photos on the Facebook site of the foundation.

Project 'Water'

Despite all the progress we made over the last few years, still several things need to be improved at the PRS. The most urgent of these is having enough clean and fresh water. Whilst replacing the roofs we fixed gutters for the rain water harvesting programme. Fixing guttering enabled us to take a big step forward with regard to the water supply. Sufficient (fresh) water in Kenya is in general a huge problem, especially at the PRS. In the last couple of years many bore-holes have been drilled in the surrounding area of the school, leaving the school's bore-hole with insufficient water and the salt level extremely high. This has resulted in there being too little water not only for drinking and cooking, but also for the toilets and the showers. The new rain water harvesting system could supply enough water even during the dry seasons meaning that toilets can also be flushed in order to minimize diseases like diphtheria; however, there are not enough 10,000 litre water tanks yet. The school also needs to purify the rain water used for drinking and cooking.

This year we want to try and raise enough for a purification system. The total costs of the system including the construction of a plant room and electricity is £ 10,657 (€ 14,500).

We already managed to place and connect 8 water tanks, but the PRS still requires at least 9 more to meet their needs. Each tank including construction costs £ 790 (€ 1,075). Any contribution toward this would be so appreciated.

Secretly we hope to have realised this project before the end of 2016. Should anyone wish to make an extra donation please specify "Project Water".

Thank you!

We want to dedicate our final thanks to the heartbeat of our foundation, the growing number of sponsors for the children. Currently around 63 children are sponsored at the school. There are just over 300 child places at the school and many are taken up by children that have grown up at the school and are permanently there. Many children are socially disadvantaged and although not disabled are a hugely important part of the school in that they bring 'normal' integration from which all the children benefit. There are also a growing number of sponsors who sponsor a 'child's place' at the school who are vital for supporting those children who although can come and go, nevertheless are always granted a place. For any child who leaves the school, unfortunately some due to their illness or maybe due to being part of a nomadic tribe or relatives moving away there is always a child ready to take their place from the waiting list and the school is always full.

Thank you so much for being a friend of the Port Reitz School and the Foundation!

May we wish you and your families a Happy and Healthy New Year,
Alexandra, Asava, Wendy, Harrison, Linzi, Perry, Margaret, David, Hugo and Agnès