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Mary's orphanage project; Mary's story.

by [Brittany Joyce](#) on Sunday, 28 August 2011 at 16:45

- In July I travelled to Kenya for 5 weeks, I spent the first week on safari and exploring Nairobi with my mum & the next 3 weeks in a town called Kisumu, staying at a local orphanage, with 22 children and working in local schools and hospitals. Little did I know these people would become a beautiful second family with whom I would stay connected to for the rest of my life.
- I got to know them all, hearing their stories I became inspired by their strength and courage, these people who have lost everything, or who have never had anything to start with.
- Mary is an inspiration, and has become my personal hero; in 1998 Mary and her husband found they had contracted the HIV virus. Because of the stigma and discrimination they received, they decided to start an organisation to support and educate local men, women and children with HIV. At this place they created, people come together to learn their strengths and weaknesses, to share their experiences and help each other.
- Mary, as coordinator, realised the high death rate and as a result the abandonment of children who lost their parents to HIV, or whose parents are too ill and/or too poor to care for them so she started a feeding program and, with support from locals, supplied one meal a day for these homeless children and families.
- Mary and her husband decided they could do more and decided to open their home and hearts and care for some of the orphaned children, despite already having 3 of her own children. During the building of the orphanage, 7 years ago, Mary's husband passed away but Mary continued their work and now lives in her small home with 22 children, whose lives have been affected by HIV.
- Mary sacrifices everything for these children to provide them with a loving home and ensure they receive an education as well as continuing her work in the community for with people living with HIV
- While I was staying there I got to experience the hard work that Mary and her small staff give to these children, I saw and felt the beautiful family atmosphere created by these incredible people who have nothing, no possessions, and not even good health. I had some of the most meaningful moments in Kisumu, crouched on the floor with the kids, playing with new dolls and cars I had bought with me, and hearing them say 'we love you, and you love us, don't you?'
- During the last 2 weeks of my stay I witnessed an astounding injustice and callousness by some visitors who turned out to be Mary's major funders. These people (from America) visited with promises of improving things and providing new clothes, new mattresses, and shoes among other things.
- They arrived and without consultation, fired two of the women Mary had hired. They women were hired to cook, clean and help look after the children, for a very small wage, because they were hardworking and also because they have also been affected by HIV in some way and need money to support their families, and to re-build their lives.
- One of the women has twins, a boy and a girl, and a disabled daughter who all lived at the orphanage. The 'visitors' told these children they shouldn't be at the orphanage because they

have darkness inside of them; this darkness is why the little girl is disabled. The other woman was the sole earner for her family as her husband is ill with HIV.

- Staff and I were even confronted, but what upset us most was the mental abuse they inflicted on the children. They promised to bring the children new clothes and toys, but when the children asked about them they said ‘oh, I don’t think I want to give them to you’. They would say things, in front of the children, like: “look at these kids eating like monkeys, its disgusting”- when it is African culture to eat your meal with your fingers.
- In Kenya it is common for children to have shaved heads as it is cheaper and easier to care for. One little girl, Esther, whose mother is very ill with HIV and unable to care for her, had her hair braided by her mother earlier in the year, and Mary kept this as it was important to both Esther and her mum who she visits regularly. One day, the ‘visitors’ just took it upon themselves to shave her hair off. I came home that day to a distraught little girl who kept saying she wasn’t beautiful anymore!
- Mary had to hire new workers, as she was unable to care for all the children alone as well as continue her work at the clinic. This was very difficult as word had got around about the ‘visitors’ and the trouble they were causing, and Mary had to go out of town to hire two new women. Even the new staff were questioned about their lives and also they tried to scare them by asking how to get the sheriff to come and visit to scope out if Mary is doing things properly.
- Then they tried to bully Mary telling her that she is not allowed to have visitors, like myself. They also tried to bully her into telling them what she did with the money I had given her to stay there! None of their business, I say. They told her I was not to be trusted; I would steal things and use Mary. Seriously? What for? Mary and these children have nothing!
- I asked Mary why she put up with it and she said that is just what happens otherwise the money stops. I thought they donated a huge amount for them to believe they had the right to behave this way, I was shocked to find out these women donated only \$300. Per month!
- After talking to my parents and friends, Jacinta and Antipas, in Goulburn, who head the Suluhisho Trust, I have now become the main funder of this orphanage, with their support.
- ‘Suluhisho Trust’ is a Kenyan based non- governmental organisation which works with Safari Moja Kenya that Jacinta and Antipas run to help people living in poverty in this area and also to encourage people to volunteer their time/services etc. Please visit their sites and see what they are all about as they are supporting this project.
- <http://www.facebook.com/SafariMojaKenya?ref=ts>
- <http://www.safarimojakenya.com/>
- <http://suluhisho.org/>
- Mary was able to tell the former funders to please take their money elsewhere as she no longer had need for it, and didn’t need the stress they were creating. She has rehired the sacked workers and before I left Kisumu, I bought food to last a few weeks and new outfits for all the kids,
- To provide for Mary and the 22 kids I only need to raise \$500 a month which will provide food, clothing, education and medications and a small amount for wages to Mary’s staff which in turn helps their community. Any money in excess of this amount would be used to supply clean mattresses, blankets etc.
- In these past few weeks I have seen that there are people like Mary who give their all, when

they have nothing, to improve the lives of others, all I am asking for is a few dollars a month from people like me who would like to make a better life for these kids. At the moment all donations are NOT tax deductible but we are working on it!

- Please let us know if you are interested in helping and we will send you the account details.

