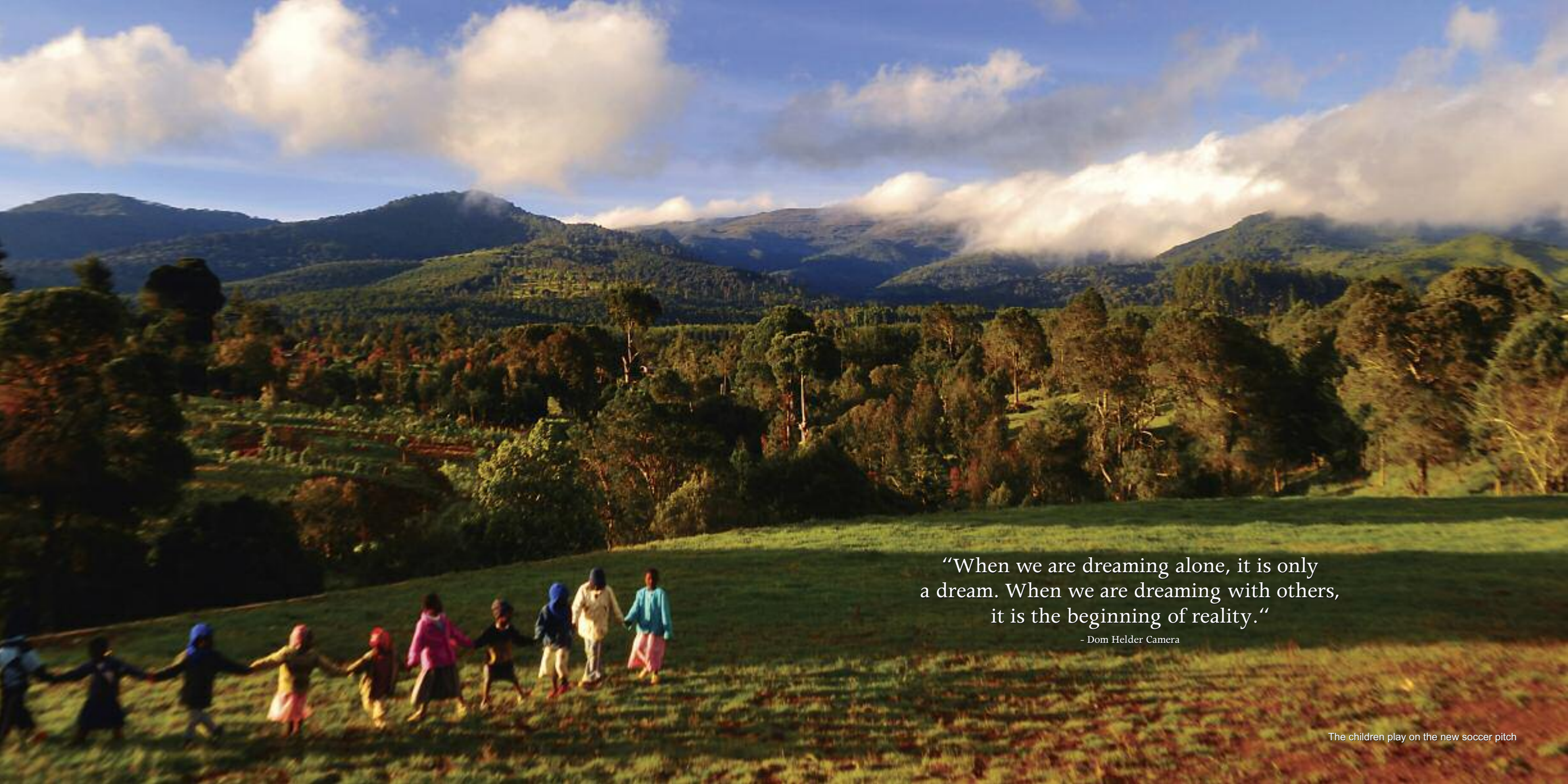




 Flying
Kites



“When we are dreaming alone, it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality.”

- Dom Helder Camera



Excellence

A VIRTUE, A RIGHT AND A NECESSITY

Flying Kites cares for homeless, orphaned, and abused children in Kenya in an extraordinary way.

The children who come to live at our Center, Flying Kites Kinangop, will experience the highest quality childcare, have access to excellent medical services, and receive a first-class education.

Is it extraordinary to propose that homeless, orphaned, and abused Kenyan children have the right to the best services available? We believe children deserve this level of care and we will do everything in our power to provide it.

Our efforts will focus on delivering this type of exemplary treatment rather than providing care at a more simple subsistent level.

Housing every single homeless and orphaned child in Kenya is impossible. Therefore, we must radically rethink the approach we

are going to take. Do we provide orphaned children with merely adequate care - enough food to survive, limited education, rows of bunks beds and bowls of rice? Can we expect children raised in these conditions to be in a position to take on the challenges facing their country, to compete on a world stage? In order to have a significant impact on the crisis facing vulnerable children in Africa we must resist the temptation to water down our care for short-term results.

We are dedicated to developing a model of childcare that will be extended and replicated, one that will change the way we think about options for disadvantaged children. We must change the way we practice development; as a result, the children themselves will finally be able to change their world.

What would you want for the children

in your life?

FOREWORD

Years ago, I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a classic text in which Paulo Freire discusses the transformative aspects of education. In part, for Freire, education can only be a tool for liberation when teachers become students, and conversely, students become teachers. Freire's insights grew to be more meaningful to me when a handful of my students and their friends established Flying Kites and started building a children's home outside of Nairobi. Indeed, their work in Kenya with vulnerable children in conjunction with Kenyan business leaders and educators forces me to ask: What have I learned from my students as a result of their commitment to ameliorate conditions of human suffering?

Before reflecting on this question, it is critical to state at the outset that my anthropological training has made me suspicious of development programs and charities - programs and policies that act as band-aids that fail to attend to larger social and economic structures that determine the conditions of poverty. In particular, and closer to the subject at hand, are the conditions that many Kenyan orphaned children face.

Not surprisingly, there are strong similarities between the anti-development sentiment circulating among anthropologists and Freire's position on traditional education. The historical record tells us that development programs fail because they do not address the causes of poverty and that they usually follow a top-down approach, never really meeting the needs of the people. Similarly, Freire argues that the traditional approach to education fails when

teachers maintain a position of authority, filling their students' heads with "knowledge," and reinforcing, rather than changing, the social order. For many, development programs, charities, and traditional approaches to education lack liberatory power because they fail to challenge oppressive economic and ideological structures.

How is Flying Kites different? Will Flying Kites change the larger political systems that create dire poverty? To be honest, I cannot say for sure. However, I do know one thing for certain: for Freire, and other great social thinkers who are committed to social justice, change occurs with praxis, or the application of knowledge. According to Freire, praxis is not simply action; rather, it is the combination of critical reflection about action "upon the world in order to transform it." To borrow from Freire, this is what makes us more fully human. To me, this is what makes Flying Kites remarkable.

For the founders of Flying Kites, critical reflection, in part, includes understanding the challenges that Kenyan orphaned children face within a broader context and then, responding to those challenges. However, Flying Kites takes this one step further through its commitment to a 'preferential option for the poor', namely, the most vulnerable children in Kenya, those who are orphaned, utterly alone, or abandoned.

So what does this mean for the founders of Flying Kites, and how will they serve the orphaned children in their care? This organization wants the best for its children. Any parent or grandparent can relate to

what I mean. As parents and caregivers, we strive to give our own children the highest quality education, the most nutritious food, the safest housing, and access to the best teachers and doctors. Flying Kites is committed to do the same. Some readers might object, asking, "Who defines what constitutes the most nutritious food? Who gets to say what the best and safest housing is?" This is what Freire has in mind when he refers to critical reflection. Flying Kites is committed to the ongoing processes of dialogue and community building in order to work together with international development specialists, village leaders, health care providers, and most importantly, the children themselves, to determine what exactly is "the best" that they can offer the children.

Allow me to return to my opening question, namely, what have I learned from my students and their friends, the founders of Flying Kites? In my role as teacher-student, I have learned that my life and my own children's lives are connected to the lives of people living in dire poverty, and that I share a certain responsibility for the suffering that exists in this world.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has." *Margaret Mead*



Debra A. Curtis, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology
and Anthropology
Salve Regina University,
Newport, RI

opposite page
top Benson, age four
middle Isaac & Thomas, age five
bottom Peter, age nine





1 Exemplary Care

3 Childcare Forum

2 Community Strengthening

OUR MODEL

Flying Kites is a non-profit organization (501c3) concerned with helping vulnerable children in less economically developed countries. Currently, we are building a home for abused, orphaned, and homeless children in the highlands of Kenya.

As an organization providing for children from such desperate circumstances, we define ourselves by the high quality of care we deliver.

As an organization that recognizes the larger structural inequalities creating these desperate circumstances, we engage the local and global communities.

1 Exemplary Care

- Get the basics right:** water, space, food, and clean air
- Set the scene:** the built environment
- Build a home:** family scale care
- Plan for the future:** choice of education system

2 Community Strengthening

- Family Support**
Material grants to help orphaned children remain in existing family structures.
- Farming Support**
Training, financing, and supporting local farmers.

3 Childcare Forum

- Communication of key principles
- Dissemination of ideas
- Cooperation between agencies large and small



1. EXEMPLARY CARE

Preferential Care We believe that in order for our children to have a chance to impact this world significantly, the care provided to them must be exemplary.

Get the basics right: this vision of providing high quality care for children demands a strong foundation. It was the lack of this foundation at institutions in Nairobi that drove us to seek land outside the city. Our site in the Aberdares Mountains provides abundant fresh water, plentiful and nutritious food, clean and fresh air, and the space for the children to play.

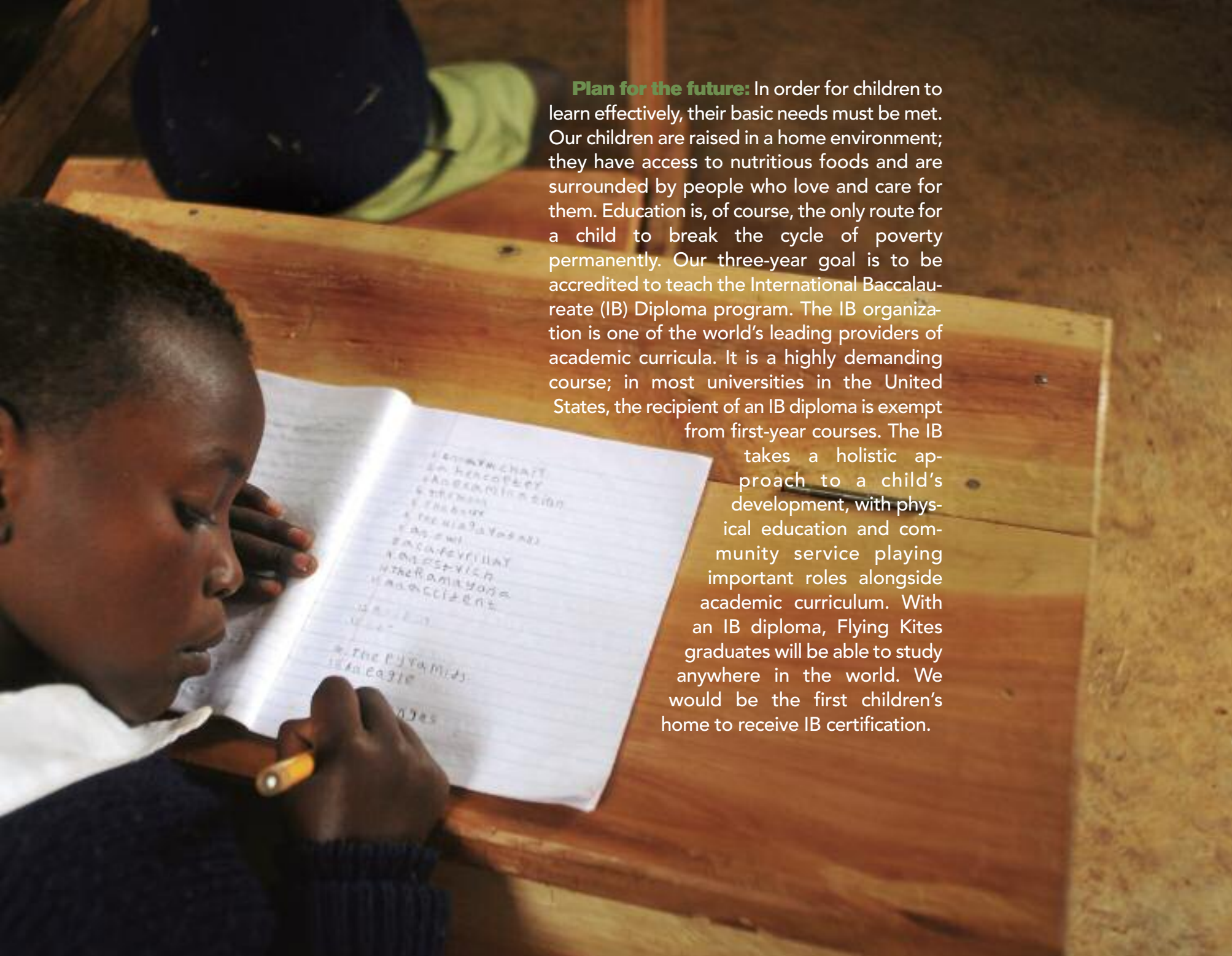
Set the Scene: Flying Kites is inspirational. This is reflected both in the beautiful site we have chosen and the infrastructure being built. The poor have as much right to - and as much need of - physical beauty as anyone else. While remaining both functional and flexible, our buildings emphasize our refusal to compromise and demonstrate our innovative approach to childcare. Mindful of the transformative promise of space and the built environment, we have recruited a team of Kenyan architects to design a building that will 'set the stage' for the Flying Kites venture.

left Moses, seven; Elias, three; and Alex, five
right "Auntie" Joyce and Macharia, age three

Build a home: Central to the design of our first site is the 'Family House'. Individual buildings will play an important role in allowing the children to explore their cultural traditions and celebrate their country's heritage. At full operating capacity, we aim to have 150 children living in ten houses. We are aware of the consequences of institutionalization in orphanages. By living in small family houses, rather than conventional dormitories, the children will be raised in a setting that is as close to a family home environment as we can realistically provide. Children raised in Flying Kites Kinangop will know what it means to be Kenyan. Each building will house no more than fourteen children who will be cared for by an 'aunt' or an 'uncle.' Carefully chosen and intensively trained, these staff members give the children the same love, protection, and guidance as a traditional family.



By living in small family houses, rather than conventional dormitories, the children will be raised in a setting that is as close to a family life as we can realistically provide.



Plan for the future: In order for children to learn effectively, their basic needs must be met. Our children are raised in a home environment; they have access to nutritious foods and are surrounded by people who love and care for them. Education is, of course, the only route for a child to break the cycle of poverty permanently. Our three-year goal is to be accredited to teach the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program. The IB organization is one of the world's leading providers of academic curricula. It is a highly demanding course; in most universities in the United States, the recipient of an IB diploma is exempt from first-year courses. The IB takes a holistic approach to a child's development, with physical education and community service playing important roles alongside academic curriculum. With an IB diploma, Flying Kites graduates will be able to study anywhere in the world. We would be the first children's home to receive IB certification.

2. CHILDCARE FORUM: **DISSEMINATION & COOPERATION**

We work in a sector that would benefit immensely from the sharing of ideas. There appears to be a lack of systematic wide-scale communication and cooperation among national and international childcare providers. We are working to change this. In order to establish our model of childcare, we will hold an annual Childcare Forum to facilitate communication and networking between providers and identify areas where immediate and effective action can be taken.

The first conference "*Education: Overcoming Inertia*" will be held in June 2009 at Flying Kites Kinangop. It will bring together local care-providers, decision-makers at larger agencies, members of the local community, academicians, and politicians. This conference will focus on how common obstacles - often relatively minor on their own - undermine educational efforts in children's homes.



left Martha completes her school work, while at right she enjoys a carefree laugh

3. COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

Family Support: A 2007 census showed that 12% of households in Kenya were caring for orphaned children in addition to their own children. The average number of orphaned children per household stands at 1.9. However, children who do not have relatives to take them in often have no other option but to live on the streets. Homeless, these “street children” forage in the city’s garbage dumps for food, begging or stealing to survive.

The children who come to live at Flying Kites Kinangop have no other options available to them. Removing a child from an existing family should always be a last resort. It is almost

always preferable to keep the child in a familiar structure, even when the household is not headed by the child’s parents.

When parents die in Kenya, it is often a grandparent or an aunt/uncle who take on the responsibility to care for orphaned children. This can put an overwhelming burden on what is often an already precarious financial situation. Many guardians submit applications to our Center because they can no longer afford to care for additional children. However, small grants (normally between \$9 and \$14 per month) can be sufficient to reduce this pressure and allow children to remain with their family.

Farming Support: Farming in Kinangop covers a wide range of practices with an equally broad spectrum of technical sophistication. Larger farms grow produce to be sold in local, regional, and international markets. Most households have small subsistence farms, with only a minimal excess sold locally. Innovative products and techniques drastically increase yields; however, access to knowledge and supply in the community, especially among the smallholders, is limited. We propose a three point program to improve access to farming innovations and technology.

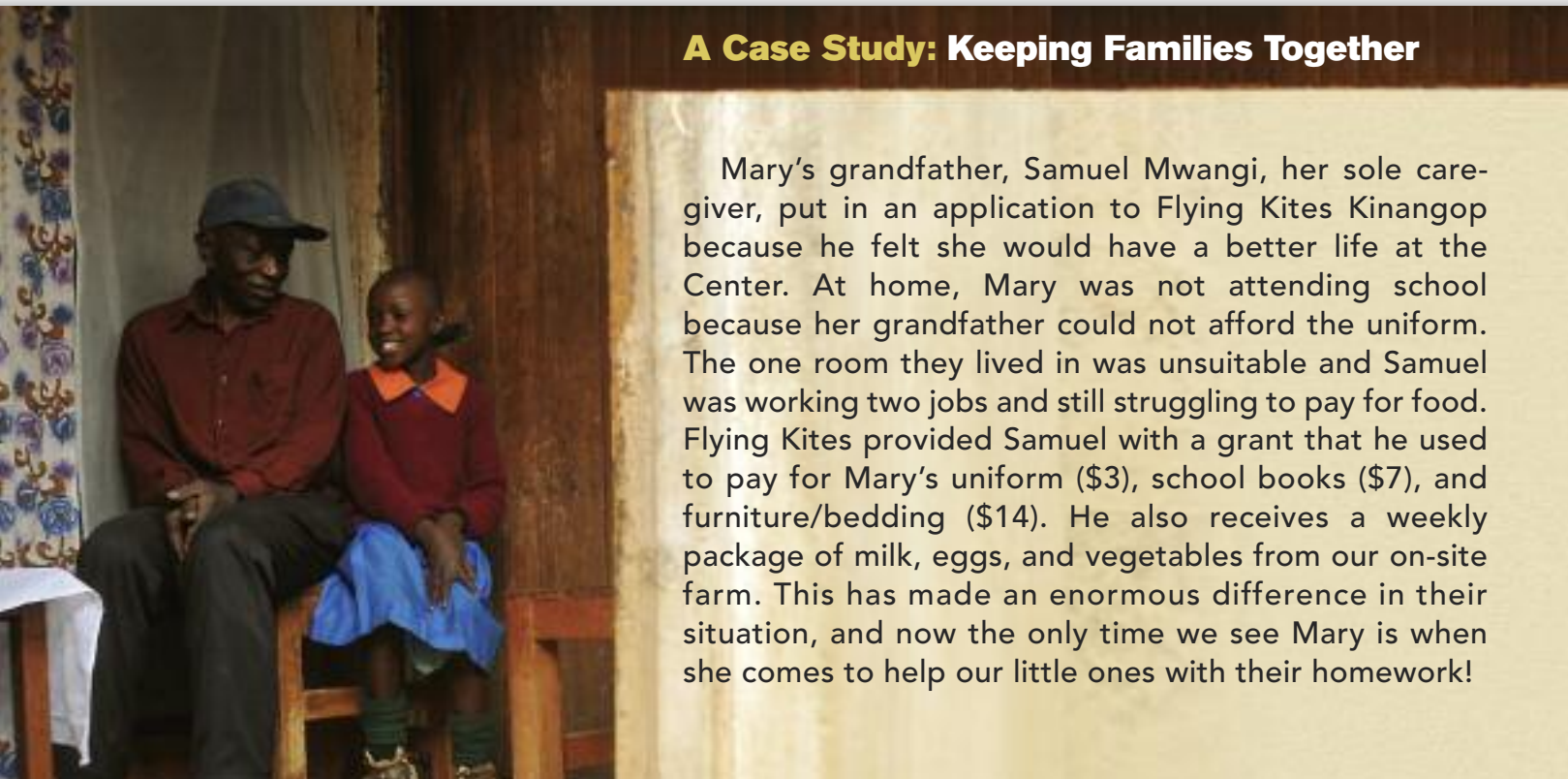
Training: We are fortunate to have the regional Farmers’ Training Center (FTC) as our neighbor. Beginning in January 2009, we will co-host a biannual workshop for local farmers. The focus will be on determining appropriate crop mix, increasing yields, and strengthening negotiating positions.

Model Farm: Flying Kites Kinangop leases 30 acres of farmland which is open to students from FTC, and showcases crops and products to the local community, with clear “before” and “after” examples to illustrate results.

Support and Finance: We will design a protocol to provide ongoing support and advice to local farmers by FTC professionals, staff and visiting experts. Our initial Farmers’ conference will also allow us to assess the scope of a micro-finance scheme in Kinangop.

A Case Study: Keeping Families Together

Mary’s grandfather, Samuel Mwangi, her sole caregiver, put in an application to Flying Kites Kinangop because he felt she would have a better life at the Center. At home, Mary was not attending school because her grandfather could not afford the uniform. The one room they lived in was unsuitable and Samuel was working two jobs and still struggling to pay for food. Flying Kites provided Samuel with a grant that he used to pay for Mary’s uniform (\$3), school books (\$7), and furniture/bedding (\$14). He also receives a weekly package of milk, eggs, and vegetables from our on-site farm. This has made an enormous difference in their situation, and now the only time we see Mary is when she comes to help our little ones with their homework!



left Mary and Samuel Mwangi
right Isaac, age five and Artie the Donkey



“We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors:
we borrow it from our children”

- Kenyan Proverb

Five-year-old **Alex** has had a lot to cope with in the past three months. In his own words, overheard by Joyce, our matron: "They put my mother in the ground. They covered her with dirt, because she died. There were lots of people all around, and then I came here." Alex's devoted mother was a single parent when she died. Friends and church members who attended the funeral realized nobody from her extended family was able to care for Alex only when the memorial service had ended. "The child, still standing there, did not know who he was supposed to leave with, in which direction to walk," wrote a concerned church member. An appeal was filed with us, and later that evening, Alex became one of the first to be welcomed through our doors. Despite his outgoing personality, Alex has behavioral issues that require individual attention. Like many of the other children, Alex has never been to school, and he is having some difficulty adjusting to a classroom environment. Alex is benefiting from one-to-one counseling, a safe, predictable daily routine, and lots of outside games and sports.

Miriam is always looking for an adventure. She is seven years old, currently the third oldest child at the Center, and has wasted no time in setting an example of fearless determination to her younger friends. Her ability to overcome challenges was shaped at an early age, when, as a three-month-old baby, she suffered a stroke that left her face and arm partially paralyzed. Miriam's physical disabilities have yet to hinder her love of dancing, hiking, climbing and other daring nature expeditions. The rest of us are busy just trying to keep up with Miriam!

Martha achieved the highest primary level test scores in the entire district of Kinangop last term. Two months ago, she could barely look at, let alone speak to, her teacher. After the death of her grandmother, Martha was left alone to care for her severely mentally handicapped mother. When this dangerous situation was brought to the local authorities' attention, they referred Martha to us. She has adjusted to life at the Center quickly and is now the top performer in Math, English and Kiswahili. Martha enjoys regular visits with her grandfather, John, and they attend church services together with her village neighbors.

Benson, who is four, and his older brother were abandoned in 2006. Locked in an apartment, the boys were discovered by concerned neighbors who broke in to find them alone. Benson's brother had died from the neglect. Benson was taken by Kamau, his eighty-four year old neighbor, to the hospital for treatment. When it was time for Benson to be released, there was no one but Kamau to take him in. Kamau cared for Benson to the best of his ability for well over a year, but when Benson came to the Center early in October, he was severely malnourished and suffering from poor health. Benson is HIV positive. A few months later Benson is making huge strides; he has gained weight thanks to the ARV medication he is taking, he is attending the local preschool and he is learning to ride a bike. In order to remain healthy, Benson needs a great deal of care and attention, a nutritious and balanced diet, and he needs to follow a strict schedule of medication.



meet the children



Moses and his younger sister **Rahab** are victims of domestic violence. Their grandmother contacted local authorities to report that her daughter was mentally disturbed and abusing her children. Moses was removed from his mother's home after suffering severe burns and other injuries. He was brought to our home following an investigation by the District Chief that resulted in his mother's permanent loss of custody. Moses has blossomed in the care of Phoebe, one of our full-time aunts. He likes to spend evenings in the kitchen helping her prepare dinner, and he enjoys playing quietly with the rabbits and feeding Nelson, the dog, after school. Rahab followed Moses several days later becoming a part of the Flying Kites family after her grandmother, who lives in abject poverty, became ill and unable to care for her. During her first few weeks at the Center, Rahab refused to leave her brother's side, but after a lot of attention from the aunts, she has joined the other children at nursery school and is slowly beginning to peek out from behind her big brother's shadow.

Statistics and Shoelaces



Moses, age seven

Many people, upon learning that we work with abused, orphaned and homeless children, ask me, "How do you cope? Isn't it heartbreaking?" I always think back to my first visit to Kenya, and an afternoon I spent with a little boy named Brian, an orphaned child living in a makeshift children's home in the slums of Nairobi. Oftentimes, when I felt overwhelmed, I would slip into a small storage room on the second level and hide. It was a dark and depressing room, with crumbling cement walls and no windows. I would sit amongst bags of rice and flour - the only ingredients of the children's daily meal - and try not to think about how many mice, at any given moment, were witnessing my mini-breakdowns. On this particular occasion, three-year-old Brian followed me in. He crawled onto my lap and wrapped his spindly arms around my neck. Although this space offered a moment's respite from the noise and chaos that accompanies three hundred hungry and ill children left alone in a tiny building, I could not escape the realities of this place.

As a nineteen-year-old student who essentially traveled to Kenya for classroom bragging rights, there was no question in my mind that every part of me was forever changed; that was for certain. The only uncertainty was: why it mattered. I had been changed by my encounters with poverty, yes, but not in a profound way that enlightened or empowered. The transformation had dwarfed me. I now knew what it felt like to look into the face of a hungry baby. I now knew what it meant to return home and realize the amount I spend on a haircut could feed him for a year. I was changed, but had changed for the baby? Is it enough to simply tuck this experience into a box entitled "Reasons to be

More Grateful" and move on with my life? The sentiment "What can I do? I am only one person," is not an excuse - it is a real and paralyzing affliction - and that afternoon in the storeroom with Brian, it was utter misery. Here was this trusting child, alone in the world, looking up at me with his searching eyes, and I felt myself wanting to look away, because outside in the hallway there were hundreds more children just like him, over 34 million in sub-Saharan Africa. So many children, needing so many things - food, shelter, clothing, education, medical attention, a shoelace.

Brian was interrupting my plummet into the mind-boggling statistics and pulling out the shoelace of my sneaker. The look in his eyes that I had been so desperately trying to avoid was simply asking for me to be present in the moment, to put down my own feelings of helplessness, and pick up the other end of the shoelace for a game of cat's cradle. I couldn't fix the inconceivable crisis facing orphaned children, but I could sit up, and play cat's cradle with a little boy who doesn't get to choose whether or not to be affected by the disaster.

I think of that very ordinary afternoon often when I am asking people for help. Yes, I find the conditions of his life heartbreaking, so how can we be brave, and not look away? What is it going to take for us not to be overwhelmed? Let Brian untie your shoelace.

Allow yourself to be challenged by his potential. We all have something to offer children like Brian - whether you know how to teach a class, treat an illness, read a book, sing a song, write a grant, plant a potato, make a donation or build a house, you can be a part of something that changes life for *him*. - Leila de Bruyne



“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning,
but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”

- Maria Robinson



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