



# TANZANIAN CHILDREN'S FUND

## 2016 Spring Newsletter

### Lifting Lives Building Futures Lasting Change



#### Did you see us on 60 Minutes??

If not, you can watch our segment here:

[www.tanzanianchildrens.org/videos/](http://www.tanzanianchildrens.org/videos/)

Be sure to also check out our new video, "Lifting Lives" on the same page!



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## Teenage Years: the New Frontier

By India Howell, Founder and Executive Director

In some ways, it seems like it was only yesterday that I was welcoming kids like Jackie and Lucy to the Children's Village and into their new family.

I admit that when I look at them today at ages 18 and 20, I still see those cherubic faces full of mischief. Back then, being a parent meant getting Lucy to *wear* the towel rather than drag it on the floor on her way to the bath, and convincing Jackie that swinging from the rafters was *not* an acceptable naptime activity. I had no idea just how easy I had it! Today, with 46 teenagers in our family (yes, you read that right), parenting looks very different.

As I imagine many parents are doing right now, we are working to help our teens identify their interests and strengths before choosing a course of study that will guide their professional futures. Career counseling - it's not for the faint of heart! For some of our teens, their next step is obvious. For others, their initial plans were not what one would call realistic, but I somehow managed to find my patience. Probably because it was during those moments that I heard my father laughing from heaven: let's just say that at 18 years old, I was not terribly realistic either! At the end of the day, we succeeded in plotting a course to success for each of them, even if it was sometimes a compromise between their aspirations and their aptitudes.



*Our Form 4 graduates, ready to launch*

Another parenting challenge that has taken a few years off of our lives is keeping our recent Form 4 grads occupied during their seven month school break. All 13 of them are home at once, and as we all know, teenagers with time on their hands can be a dangerous combination! To keep them busy, we have them doing a variety of activities, from attending computer school to learning how to drive using *my* car. Despite these diversions, I'm not sure that we're going to be able to avoid trouble. Just the other day, I overheard one of the boys telling a volunteer that "Mom says we need a learner's permit so it won't matter if we hit anything." Holy smokes, this is the stuff that makes you yearn for the toddler years!

*Continued on the next page...*

## Teenager Years (cont.)

So it won't come as a surprise that one of our top priorities for this year is refining, improving—and in some cases—revamping our approach to parenting during the “teenage years.” Our first initiative is hiring a new social worker, who will focus exclusively on our teens. This person will be the lead for mentoring, career counseling and developing age-appropriate activities for them when they are not in school. If you know of a brave soul who is ready to take on this adventure, please let us know!



*Neema, Husna, Ester, Lucy, and India*

In closing, I must say that despite the challenges of this new age group, it is exciting to be getting ever closer to seeing the result of all of our efforts, as more and more kids speed toward the end of their education and into their first real jobs. And I'm filled with an enormous sense of pride and hope as I watch them growing into thoughtful and mature young adults, who are well on their way to becoming productive citizens of Tanzania.

Many thanks to all of you who have stood by our kids since they were toddlers. With your continued support I know that each of them will achieve their very best.

*India*



*Nada, Elia, Joshua, and Neema*

## RVCV Students are Top 4 in the Ward!

In mid-April, Standard 7 students across Tanzania took the mock regional exam. Out of the three primary schools in the ward, **Gyetighi took first place, with RVCV kids Nada Simon, Elia John, Joshua Emanueli, and Neema Safari finishing as the top 4 performers!**

It has also been gratifying to see students who struggled last year make huge improvements in their learning – **way to go Musa!**

## New Kid on the Block

***TCF's new Education Director, Timothy Kerr, chats with secondary student Alex Ingi, about his transition to higher learning.***

“In secondary school, I have to study hard because it's no longer just A-B-C,” said Alex, who this year made the move from Standard 7 at Gyetighi Primary School to Form 1 at Oldeani Secondary. “Luckily, I love to study.”

I asked Alex if he's always loved school, and he simply laughs. “Well, when I was younger, I was *so* bad. I never listened to the teacher and was always doing my own thing.” Now, Alex is a School Prefect, and his responsibilities include supervising student activities, helping teachers ensure that students are following the school rules, and being a role model. “It's not hard,” he says, “I just have to know when to joke and when to be serious.”

In response to what advice he would give this year's Standard 7 class, Alex said “be prepared to study hard. You need to create a schedule that includes time to play and time to study.” Having witnessed the two sides of Alex—a focused student who takes his Prefect role seriously—and the Alex who plays soccer and is always up to crazy antics at RVCV, I'd say he's got the balance just right.



*Tim and Alex*

## A Day in the Life of an RVCV Social Worker

*Can you imagine being a house father for 21 teenage boys, handling disciplinary issues for two local schools, managing RVCV's Kids Living with Relatives program, and helping serve as a support system for all of the children at RVCV?*

This is just a small part of an average day for Arael Lesikar, a social worker who has been part of the Rift Valley Children's Village family for over ten years. TCF's Sponsorship and Communications Coordinator, Ali Carey, sat down with Arael to find out how he does it.

**Ali:** Let's start from the beginning. With so much on your plate, how do you begin your day?

*Arael:* Well, first I tackle one of my toughest jobs: waking up all the boys of Eagle's Nest, where I am a house father. As you can imagine, waking up any teenage boy can be quite difficult, so getting all 21 of them out of bed and ready for school on time can be a real challenge!

**Ali:** Besides your role as house father, in what other ways do you work with the children in our community?

*Arael:* I support teachers at both Gyetighi Primary and Oldeani Secondary School with students that are having disciplinary issues, and help them learn to communicate better. And I work with students one-on-one to see if there are any deeper issues at hand, and how we can address them. I also act as a point of contact between RVCV and our Kids Living with Relatives families. In addition to doing monthly home visits, I regularly communicate any concerns, medical issues, and schedule changes with the child's relatives, so we can continue to work as a team to support the child.

**Ali:** You have been working at RVCV for over 10 years. That's a long time! What keeps you going?

*Arael:* I love the work that I do. Yes, it provides me with an income, but this job is also a part of me, and the kids here have become a part of my life. I couldn't imagine working in a place where I didn't see them every day. Not only do I need to connect with the kids to do my job, but it is something I enjoy doing. I love getting to know each individual child, their personalities, all of it.

**Ali:** To close, what do you find to be the most rewarding, and the most challenging parts of your job?

*Arael:* The most challenging part of my job is advising the Form 4 students about what they should or could be doing next. This is not an issue we have had to deal with before, but it is one that we will continue to experience as more of our kids grow older. It is a new challenge, but it is also a rewarding one. Being able to see and help these kids that I have known since they were very young take their first steps into adulthood is exciting and rewarding.



*Ismail and Arael*

*“These are good boys in the process of becoming great men.... It's not always easy to transition into adulthood in Tanzania, but the boys are doing their best.*

*I am so appreciative that I get to help see them through this phase of their lives. ”*



*Esau & Raif with their big brothers Haji & Jacob*

## The Spirit of Community

By Jody Drake, TCF Board Chair

It takes a village to prepare for the holidays at RVCV, and I had the good fortune of witnessing this firsthand last December during a visit. It was both heartwarming and thrilling to be in the midst of all of the action alongside India and the children, staff, volunteers and community members who joined together to celebrate with us. The week before Christmas, the entire village comes to life with anticipation and activities. Thanks to the logistical genius of India and Grace (our Microfinance Director), what could have been total chaos was instead a joyful flurry of preparations, with everyone pitching in to help.

Creating family traditions is serious business at RVCV, so there were stockings to prepare, small gift bags to assemble, and lots of treats to bake and decorate. A particularly cherished ritual at RVCV is the Christmas Day talent show. Volunteers are busy all week helping the children practice their songs and dances, and it is great fun to watch everyone prepare so seriously for their performances, all of which are delivered with a great amount of enthusiasm.

However, it is during the outdoor Christmas Day feast, with everyone joined together under a beautiful bright-blue Rift Valley sky, that one truly gets a sense for how this community has become a place of hope and joy. There are smiles and laughter everywhere, adults are cooking over fires, children are helping prepare the vegetables and playing games, and everyone is experiencing a moment of satisfaction, knowing that all will be sleeping with full hearts tonight.



Christmas Morning at RVCV

Because of the support, commitment, patience and love of so many, this corner of the world will continue to feel a little more like Christmas every day. Thank you for making this possible.

## Volunteering at RVCV: *Instead of asking ‘Why?’ why not ask ‘When?’*

*“I don’t know how to describe the emotional and spiritual attachment that I have to RVCV. I have been there six times, and every time I visit, the genuine smiles and hugs from the children balance me and remind me of all that is good in this world. This is an exceptional place with exceptionally special people.”* –Debby Rechler



Debby with Dicki, Flavian, and Elvis

Each year, 50 or more people just like you make the journey to the Rift Valley Children’s Village, for what always turns out to be a life-changing experience. For many, the experience is so rewarding that they end up returning again and again.

As a volunteer at the Rift Valley Children’s Village, you wake at dawn to excited voices scattered around your house and fall asleep at night to the last sounds of laughter fading into the silence of the house. You work hard and play until you’re exhausted. But even on the most challenging days, you are rewarded with smiles on children’s faces, bear hugs, movie-time snuggles and the magic that is the Rift Valley Children’s Village.

This year, volunteers are especially needed in **from September - December in 2016, and from January -April in 2017**. Volunteers must be 21 years or older and commit to a minimum of three weeks. For more information, contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Kristina Lisica, at [volunteer@tanzanianchildrensfund.org](mailto:volunteer@tanzanianchildrensfund.org)

## Inside the Infirmary with Nurse Gretchen

School physicals are an important (and fun) part of my nursing responsibilities. This year at Gyetighi Primary school, I started the physical exams with the younger children in “Awali,” which is the Tanzanian equivalent of kindergarten. During the physical, each child receives a head to toe exam, including dental, vision, and neurological screenings.

Since I know it can be scary when a strange person comes at you with a thermometer and stethoscope, I gathered the whole class together and showed them how the instruments were used by demonstrating on a brave volunteer. Individually, most students were still shy, but by having them imitate me roaring like a lion or stick their tongues out as far as they could go, I was able to examine everyone’s teeth and throats. By the time we were hopping on one leg, the giggles could not be suppressed. This whole charade was done with the goal of reducing their fears and helping them start to connect this slightly silly person with someone who can care for them when they are ill.



*Nurse Gretchen provides Neema with some TLC*

Despite the fun we had in the exam room, I was shocked by the number of children who were experiencing stunted growth (a sign of long-term malnutrition) in the lower grades. Over 60% of the youngest students I saw were at or below the 30th percentile according to the World Health Organization’s standards for weight and height for age. Since malnutrition can also affect intellectual development, it poses a serious threat to their educational opportunities and future life choices. On a positive note, once I started examining students who have been attending Gyetighi for more than one year, I began to see marked improvements in the growth rates. At the risk of making an incorrect correlation, these improvements may stem from the lunch and vitamin programs that TCF provides at Gyetighi, which guarantees that each student receives a certain nutritional intake each day.



*Gabi practicing her bedside manner*

Meaningful, lasting solutions, do not happen overnight. By providing education, disease prevention, and care for chronic illnesses, TCF is helping to provide a foundation that will allow this generation of Tanzanian children to positively transform their district, country, and if we are lucky, the world.

## Sponsorship Spotlight: Growing Friendships

As more of our children begin to enter their teen and young adult years, the need for sponsors grows increasingly important. For those looking to make that special connection, **two of our teens are looking to make one with you as they take their next steps toward adulthood!**

Eric Daniel and Haji Abdallah have both recently graduated Form 4 (the Tanzanian equivalent of high school) and are headed to college in July. Haji will be training to fulfill his dream of being a park ranger, responsible for protecting and caring for the Tanzanian wildlife. Eric will be studying tourism, specifically pursuing the skills needed for a career as a safari guide. To watch both boys follow their passions has been an incredible joy, and we welcome you to experience this rewarding journey with us.

For further information on becoming a sponsor, please email our Sponsorship and Communications Coordinator, Ali Carey, at [sponsor@tanzanianchildrensfund.org](mailto:sponsor@tanzanianchildrensfund.org). Asante sana!



*Eric Daniel*

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Tanzanian Children's Fund  
9 Waterhouse Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

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### Make Your Birthday Meaningful!

As our kids grow, so does the need for basic supplies such as clothes, shoes, toys, books and bedding. This is why this year we're sending a fully stocked shipping container full of donated supplies over to Tanzania – a \$20,000+ project.

Through our TCF Birthday Campaign: Container for Our Kids, we are confident we can raise the money to ship and fill the container. To learn how you can participate, visit [www.tanzanianchildrensfund.org/container-for-our-kids/](http://www.tanzanianchildrensfund.org/container-for-our-kids/).

### Asante to all of our volunteers in Tanzania May 2015 - May 2016. We couldn't do it without you!

**Volunteers:** Peggy & Carter Bacon, Sophie Bellenis, Marilyn Boehm, Tamara Braun, Bob Brooks, Ashby Brown, Debbie Burnard, Ashley Cappel, Ali Carey, Isabel Casselman, CeCe Cheng, Lisa & Maeve Cleary, Peg Commons, Danielle Damais, Lise DeBlois, Eleanor Doar, Jennie & Helen Driesen, Yvonne Feinstein, Rachel Goor, Jack Greene, Alexander Guyette, Julie Harrison, Will Harrison, Kirsten Heinemann, Alyssa & Taylor Huntington, Janine Ilsley, Libby & Rachel Jacobson, Victoria Leeds, Gary Lippman, Dale Mallett, Bridget McNamara, Charles & Laetitia Oppenheim, John Platt, Hunter Post, Tina Raymond, Debby Rechler, Emilia Rinaldini, Perry & Clavey Robertson, John & Brenda Rodriguez, Sally & Sue Scott, Carla Sinatra, Vera Szombathelyi, Susan Weaver, Elissa Zirinsky

**Visitors:** Armitage Family, Robin & Kris Best, Jill Bishop, Stephanie Brennan, Michael Butler, Larry & Jerry Cappel, Mary DeBlois, Polly Donald, Jody Drake, Angela & Bill Fowler, Rochelle Gosling, Johanna Huppman, Richard Knocker, David & Brooke Laughlin, Anki Leeds, John & Cara Lisica, Lara & David Manning, Meaney Family, James & Chris Mellon, Richie Mendoza, Scott & Caroline Muller, Mike Popovitch, Katie Remy, Michelle Russell, Miki Russell, Gail & Kerry Schmunk, Helmut Schreyer, Irene Schreyer -Glanz, Muhammad Siregar & Surianum Budiman, Susan St John, Len Szymbosky, Marion Taylor, Ashley Watson, Josh & Marion Whetzel, Susan Whitcher, Mary Wolf, and the 60 Minutes Crew: Chris Everson, Magalie Laguerre-Wilkinson, Massimo Mariani, Harry Radcliffe, & Bill Whitaker

### TCF Board of Directors

Jody Drake, *Chair*  
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### Need a Virtual Hug?

Visit our Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Flickr pages for updates on life at the Children's Village and some of the most adorable photos you'll ever see!

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