



Karatina Special School—Final Report

for the Special Need Children Center Foundation

Fremont, CA

September 25, 2003



Introduction

In May, 2023, TGUP visited the Karatina Special School in Karatina, Kenya. The purpose was to assess the school and its staff for their suitability to work with the Special Need Children Center Foundation (SNCCF) in Fremont, CA. SNCCF wished to make a major contribution to the well-being and educational development of special needs children.

The TGUP lead in the query was Brenda Birrell, a member of TGUP's three-person management board. TGUP assessed that the School and its staff were exceptional in their compassion and professional skills focused on special needs children. As a result, TGUP and SNCCF undertook a major development project at the school. Ms. Birrell's role became lead executive overseeing the project.

Work on the Project began in July 2023 and involved rehabilitation of many elements of the physical facilities of the School. These included repair of structural elements of the school, updating curricular offerings, and the introduction of new elements to the school's infrastructure. The work was carried out by TGUP's long-time Kenyan partner, Kiini Sustainable Initiative, under Ms. Birrell's supervision. The work is now complete.

This report documents the accomplishments of the TGUP team in meeting the Project goals, on time, at standard, and within budget. It is written following Ms. Birrell's September 18 – 19 in-person inspection of the facility and all of the improvements. It has been TGUP's great honor to be able to work with SNCCF to improve the lives and the educational opportunities of Kenyan Special Needs children.

Overview of the School and the Need



Karatina Special School in Karatina, Nyeri District, Kenya is a boarding school tending to the needs of “mentally handicapped” individuals. It has 120 students, 13 teaching staff, and 15 support staff. The school addresses students' life and vocational needs, emphasizing training for productive roles in society following students' matriculation. It admits students from 9 to 25 years of age.

Facilities include classrooms, offices, boys' and girls' dormitories, kitchen, dining hall, vocational workshops, gardens, play areas, maintenance, and stock yards. The facilities are 40+ years old, made of cinder blocks, and generally in solid condition. However, a lack of regular maintenance had produced decay in many of the parts of the facilities. Unchecked, it would result in continued degradation and, ultimately, catastrophic failure.

The most egregious of the deficiencies were: holes in the roof of the girls' dormitory; failure of drainage in areas around the boys' dormitory; severe deterioration in kitchen countertops; a lack of drying areas for laundry; and a lack of privacy for girl students.

Additionally, the school needed: a new sewing machine for vocational classes; renewal of bead stock, also for vocational classes; 2 new commercial washing machines for doing daily student laundry; repainting of the entire school; a new swing set to replace a decrepit and unusable old one; and 120 new fruit trees to supplement the school's agricultural vocational program and provide fruit for the students.

New Roof on Girls' Dormitory

The roof on the girls' dormitory was made of 40-year-old asbestos tile. It was failing in several places, resulting in rain entering the room. The room is 31 by 95 feet. The old roof was removed, and the framing reinforced to better support a new roof. A new roof, made of galvanized-coated sheet metal, was installed over the full extent of the room. The new roof is expected to last at least 30 years.



New Commercial Washing Machines

Daily laundry needs for the school's 120 students are enormous, with staff having to wash all bed linens, clothes, kitchen linens, and other pieces by hand. This was both overwhelming physically, and potentially hazardous, as many students soil their linens nightly. We purchased and installed two Samsung industrial-grade washing machines. Each is capable of handling 21 Kg of laundry per wash cycle, with dozens of wash cycles available per day. This will free up scores of staff hours per week, improving the school's ability to care for the more pressing educational and social needs of the children.



Kitchen Counter and Drying Lines for Clothes

Several countertops used for food preparation, both indoors and outdoors, had become severely decrepit. These were defaced, and the facia replaced, producing new-looking surfaces that are both appealing by looks and more useful in practice. This can be seen in the photo of the kitchen, below, with the new countertops in use.



Similarly, there was a pressing need for drying facilities for the daily profusion of laundry created by servicing 120 live-in students. But there were none. Instead, nearby bushes were pressed into service as drying racks. In response, we installed six steel clothes lines which now bear the full burden of a day's washing. These can be seen in the photo to the right, below. The bushes are thankful.



Sewing Machine

Vocational training fields offered by the school include: rug making; bead work; furniture and toy making; wood working; animal husbandry; kitchen crafts; and agriculture. The school wanted to add sewing. We purchased a commercial-grade, foot powered sewing machine which is already being used making linens, dresses, baby clothes, and more.



Bead Stock Replacement

Beading is one of the primary vocational courses offered to the students. They make a variety of beaded products, such as purses, necklaces, bracelets, and banners, which are sold in local markets to supplement the income of the school. The challenge was that these beads are not locally available and, if available, a packet of beads is costly at minimum of KSH 2,000. We purchased a large quantity of a wide variety of beads to be able to create the colorful products that are the most popular.



The students made two special banners, thanking TGUP and SNCCF for their help rehabilitating the School. "Asante Sana" means "Thank You Very Much" in Swahili.



Water Catchment Systems

There was a need to put up gutters to reduce the amount of rain running off into areas where it could not be easily drained during the rainy season. The stored water can then be useful during dry seasons. We purchased two tanks of 5,000 liters each and installed them on custom made concrete pedestals which were connected to the guttering on the new sheet metal roofs.



The below picture shows Brenda and the School's Principal in the conjunction of three of the Project's sub-projects: the new roof; new gutters, and new drainage.



Fencing to Ensure Girls' Privacy

The passage from the girls' bathing facility to their dormitory was open. The boys would peep at the girls as they went from one to the other. The girls felt vulnerable and embarrassed. We erected a 6' high closed fence across the entire passage, giving the girls a better sense of privacy, and safety.



Painting Most Buildings

The school had not been painted in 20 years. It looked shabby, and gave a depressing feeling not at all in keeping with the upbeat mood fostered by the staff. This applied to all outside surfaces including fascia boards. It affected both looks and durability. This also applied to many inside surfaces. We properly prepped and painted all outside surfaces. Common inside rooms were also painted. The transformation is stunning.



Drainage of Boys' Floors

There was a clog from the boy's verandah to where it was supposed to drain beyond the workshop with the result of incessant flooding. We took out the old concrete, in the process removing the clog, re-poured it to make it level, installed iron grates to make drainage visible, and painted the passage. The flooding is completely cured and will be easier to maintain in the future.



Fruit Trees

We planted 120 new fruit trees: mangos, oranges, avocados, paw paw, and tamarillo. The students participated eagerly in this, each "adopting" a specific tree as their own. Brenda is shown here, planting one. The fruit will bolster the food service at the school. Some will be fed to the livestock which are part of the school's vocational program. Excesses will be sold at local markets to supplement the school's operating budget.



New Swing Set

The school had an old swing set, but it was unusable. The children did not have a single recreational facility. We built a 4-seat swing set of 5" iron piping, embedded into massive concrete footings sunk 1.5 feet into the ground. The effect has been electric, almost impossible to overstate. The students queue up for chances to play and help each other by pushing fellow students as they swing.



Budget

All of the above improvements have been completed on time, in budget, and at standard. The Budget as agreed at the outset of the project was thus:

Karatina Special School Project Budget Summary

Roof for girls' dormitory	\$6,146
Commercial washing machines	\$4,452
Counter/drying racks/drying lines	\$1,139
Sewing machines/bead replacement	\$860
Water catchment for dorms	\$3,302
Fencing reinforcement for girls' privacy	\$605
Painting of most buildings	\$5,257
Drainage & boys' floor	\$1,964
Swing set	\$981
Fruit trees	\$879
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Total	\$25,585

Summary

By every measure—students, staff, curricular offerings, physical facilities, morale—the Project can be considered an overwhelming success.



Specifically, the Project:

- Improved the quality of daily life for all of the students
- Improved their access to vocational offerings in areas of their individual interests
- Increased students' capacity to care for themselves, personally and financially
- Improved the morale of all of the staff
- Improved the capacity of the staff to care for the students
- Extended the serviceable life of many critical school infrastructure systems
- Improved the economic efficiencies of operating the school
- Showed the students that they are cared for, safe, and loved

The principal of the school, Stephen Gichuki, commented about the Project and its subtle but deep impact on the students:

“The students knew that all of this work was for them. They don’t know how to say it, but their self-esteem grew, seeing that people cared enough about them to do this kind of thing for them. We cannot say ‘Thank you’ enough.”

A similar thing can be said about the staff. They, too, were given greater dignity, knowing that much of the work benefited them, and intended that by doing so, they could better care for the children, which is their life’s calling. Whether in cooking, or washing, or teaching, or caring for the facilities, everybody’s life has been made better by this Project. Several staff members explicitly thanked SNCCF for how it has improved the school. It shows in the amazing buoyancy of everybody involved.



Finally, The Global Uplift Project thanks the Special Need Children Center Foundation for its vision of a more humane humanity, one that cares for *all* of its members, with love and respect. It especially thanks Zia and Nathan Oboodiyat for the privilege of being able to work on so noble a project. We have been honored to do this work and have been made better for it. Most importantly, the world is a better place because of you.