

Social Orphans

Kenya

Trinity College

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Goals: 1) Networking: Create a social-donor network of supportive families for each girl; 2) Construction: Complete a two-storied structure; 3) Sustainability: Kick start a baking business by providing fixed capital of professional baking machinery

Process: In addition to the grant from the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Projects for Peace, the project received support from Center for Urban and Global Studies, and the President's Office. Additional funding was secured through Trinity student meal donation events, selling handmade postcards, online donations, and t-shirt and bake sales. Overall, \$28,592.62 in funding was available to execute the project.

Our Project for Peace initiated a process of harmony and understanding some thousands of miles away, and at home at Trinity. It also evoked the collective action spirit, and a harmonious push to unite and lead a better life. As evident from the 300+ likes on [Facebook](#), donations on [CrowdRise](#), featured story in [Trinity Tripod](#), write-up on the college [website](#), and general empathy towards the spirit of the project, global issues are something Trinity students care about. We were quite satisfied with the impact of the project even before flying to Kenya.

Phases: Once in Nakuru, the project was executed in two phases of roughly two weeks each.

1.1: The families came first. We knew it would be the most time-consuming aspect of the project. Rather than contacting other organizations and religious bodies where only superficial advertising was possible, we decided to adopt a personalized approach. The promotion campaign involved taking pictures of the girls after interviewing them about their likes and dislikes, childhood, and future plans. The social helplessness of the girls became evident. Without familial ties, the limited number of opportunities for education simply did not seem enough. Our team designed individual profiles for presentation to families. We then targeted families in high-income neighborhoods of the city: Blankets, Area 58, Milimani Apartments, and Milimani. We expected these family members to have the means to travel 30 minutes to the orphanage in Njoro at least once every three months and ultimately donate to the orphanage. Despite the culture barrier and a slight constraint to language, the families we met were very open-minded to our project. After knocking on countless doors, we managed to confirm the commitment of 26 families willing to give their time for the 31 girls.

1.2: During our time in Nakuru, we also met with five construction contractors in order to begin work on the building. After approximately two weeks, we settled on a contractor, Beyond Rift General Merchants Ltd., and to cut costs, we decided to supply the raw materials through a separate hardware contractor. Kiandu Hardwares, a local hardware in Njoro, was the most cost-effective source of materials.

2.1: Though fundraising helped ease the budget constraint, time was still limited and we quickly threw all of our energy and enthusiasm into the second phase. We encountered our biggest challenges and unanticipated difficulties in this phase. The building was left in a miserable state by the previous contractors, including crooked beams, pillars, and door frames, rough walls, and exposed electricity outlets. Finally, the floor was a combination of waste materials and cement. Correcting the mistakes of the previous builder added to the already daunting list of tasks. A lot of work was needed, and 14 days, which seemed a lot at the beginning, had started looking quite less.

The walls were smoothed, plastered, and painted before the tiles were laid. Plumbing and electrical work were simultaneously conducted in the hope of finishing the structure in time. During this process, the specialized bakery was also given shape. Shelves and specific washing basins were installed to help Anne Maina, a professional baker, start the sustainable venture with caretaker Rupa Didi.

Although, we knew that the construction work would take time, we never realized the scale of work. It basically came down to 6 am trips to Kiandu Hardwares in Njoro every morning to buy everything from nails to tiles to professional bakery machines from Nairobi. Our team often acted as the unskilled labor. Tasks included carrying 50 kg bags of cement, sorting through hundreds of boxes of tiles, and clearing trash. Not only did our work help expedite the construction, but it was a privilege and humbling experience to work alongside the local workers for the betterment of the girls. It was also an opportunity to build cross cultural connections, and the workers were often impressed with our hard work, particularly the girls on our team.

However, often, challenges in the workplace slowed us down. One, the chief *fundi* (head laborer,) who was in charge of disseminating the wages given in bulk to him by the contractor, ran away with more than 30,000 shillings (\$344). Though the amount was not large, the workers were not paid. Some left, others slowed their work speed, and the majority staged a small protest outside the orphanage. Two, Kiandu Hardware's head, though sympathetic, often delivered the wrong orders. For example, rather than giving us two types of tiles, he delivered eight types in 200 cartons of 17 tiles each. Our team then took two days to sort the tiles, which delayed the work even further.

2.2: Sustainability was key, so the bakery was dedicated a lot of time. Specialized sinks, electrical sockets, heavy-duty wiring, and non-slip tiles were installed. In terms of professional baking materials, most of the equipment was only available from Nairobi. We went to Nairobi and were successful in identifying the best deal for a professional oven that can cook 48 loafs of bread, and a large batter mixer. From Ukwala superstores, we purchased a large Samsung refridgerator and a six stove baking unit to facilitate the bakery operations.

Yet, the bakery is in its final stages of initiation. Due to the specialized nature of the machines, Didi had to take special permission from the local authorities, which proved to be quite a time-consuming bureaucratic process. Moreover, an external shed was required by the authorities as a safety precaution, for which we did not have funds and time. Didi is still working on collecting funds. Sustainability is critical, and we are committed to get the bakery up and running, so as not to forgo the costs of the bakery equipment. We are currently exploring options to secure additional funds to kick start the business, perhaps through microfinancing. With a planned outhouse bathroom-toilet, kitchen, and interior additions, the building will be habitable by January 1, 2015. At the end of the project, we hosted an inauguration party with local community members and some of the donor families. The celebration was undeniably the capstone to our hard work. The smiles on the girls' faces, their laughter, their singing and dancing performances, tears of joy from team members, and the clapping from the audience members was a buffeting culmination of the project. In the short term, we facilitated the construction, but the celebration made it clear our impact would not be forgotten.

Conclusion: Peace, we now understand, is both tangible and intangible. They are complimentary. The orphanage the girls received was tangible proof of both short and long term peace. Girls could now call a structure their permanent home. They can feel a sense of ownership and some worth in society. They are not fleeting citizens of this world. As a result, there was this peace of mind Didi and the girls felt when we were finishing the project. It was an intangible feeling, but it showed how a life of belonging can bring. The girls can now say – we have a home. We, needless to say, realized that a peaceful life is a dynamic reality. We appreciated our families much more. After working with the *fundis*, we realized the worth of work (beyond monetary) put into making homes for our families. When welcoming others, we now often reflect on the hospitality given to us by others in Kenya. It is this possibility to redefine ourselves and the world around us that has cemented our interest in pursuing careers in peacebuilding and international development.



A few girls from the orphanage with caretaker, Rupa Didi (in orange,) watching Harry Potter.



Girls all excited during the pre-function preparations.

The new orphanage structure during its last stages of construction



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