

“Out of Kiltarlity”

By Fiona Ferguson

Approaching the end of my university career at Edinburgh, I was beginning to wonder what I was destined to do. However on a sunny morning in the Easter holidays (when I should perhaps have been revising) I headed over to Beaufort Castle along with many others in aid of a school in Nairobi. I was sitting listening to what the Balcraig Foundation were involved in out in Kenya and knew I had to get involved. The main thing that was highlighted to me that day was how well organized and sustainable the projects they were running were.

....So four days after I graduated I was on a flight bound for Nairobi!! Being my first trip to Africa everything was very new and in some cases a real culture shock. From my first day at Kenya Children's home (KCH) I felt so welcome and was blown away by how well run it was. The Balcraig Foundation supports a number of projects in Kenya from three schools, an orphanage, skill courses and various second income projects, with all proceeds being fed back into the home.

KCH is an independent home for orphans, abandoned and destitute children. At present there around 180 children, the majority of whom are in full-time education. The children are housed in 9 family units, with each house providing shelter for up to 12-16 children. These children are cared for by a dedicated house mother and an auntie in each unit. The children are of mixed ages and sexes, with all siblings living together, recreating a more family-oriented environment. The Nursery which is a separate unit currently houses 27 abandoned babies under the age of 2.

I spent just over six weeks at KCH where I carried out a variety of jobs, from working in the kitchen, going on bread runs, working in the nursery-changing (re-usable) nappies, taking homework to teaching at Mashimoni Squatters School. Mashimoni Squatters School was set up in September 2007 when the Balcraig Foundation began a programme of reconstruction to transform mud classes into brick built classrooms with desks and blackboards. The school is situated in the middle of Kibera (Africa's second largest slum) and currently has around 450-500 pupils. Many of whom are Aids orphans and live in shacks with grandparents or distant relatives and the school provides a welcome environment where they can play, enhance learning and most importantly be fed. I was also lucky enough to be able to spend some time at the Soila Maasai Girls Rescue Centre. A school, two hours South-West of Nairobi, which provides for the welfare, security and education of Maasai girls who are subsequently rescued from Female Genital Mutilation.

One of the main things that struck me was how amazing the children were, many of whom have been through so much in their short lives yet are still so positive, hard working, kind and generous. What Dr. Ann Gloag and her family have achieved out there is incredible and I feel very fortunate to have been allowed to go out and be part of it. I would encourage anyone interested in getting involved and can say happily that every penny is well spent. I'm already looking forward to my return visit!

For more information about KCH please don't hesitate to ask or alternatively please see the website:- <http://www.kenyachildrenshome.org.uk/index.html>