

# Magongo News

*A bumper update of events in Magongo, Mombasa, Kenya*

Issue No 6

## Editors Introduction

This is a bumper edition of the Magongo News, reporting on our recent visit for the now annual two week 'football extravaganza' in Mombasa. Trustee Jan Ferguson describes her experience with the street boys including 'Freelance Wednesday' papasa which is so loved by all the kids.

We have included two 'success stories' relating to 'street boys' and what can be achieved. Finally a short article about our Partner at Moyo Fredrick (Bokey) Achola.



## *Children without homes belong to all of us.*



**By Jan Ferguson Trustee  
Papasa August 2009**

We travelled in early August to Mombasa to run what now appears to be our annual Football Coaching/Tournament event. We arrived Tuesday morning and by early afternoon we were out at Magongo meeting old and new friends and planning the two week event. Wednesday dawned and as it was Freelance Wednesday we were off early to meet up with the "Street Boys" and share Papasa with them.

Although these Boys have become almost part of my daily life, there is a great distance between us and thinking about them and trying to do what is best to help them is a totally different ball game to being amongst them. I have not met up with them for two years and so it was with great anxiety I travelled to Magongo that morning. We arrived at MOYO HQ where as normal it was a hive of activity.

We all made our way to Bomu School Football ground where all the activities take place. The Street Boys also gather there and by this time my anxiety was mixed with excitement and anticipation.

Rosiki and Mungiki, two locals who help Bokey with the Boys, escorted me across the field to where a few of them had already gathered. We were all a little unsure of each other and then Rosiki explained to them that I was from Glad's House and I was here with Baba (Cliff) who came last year. Recognition dawned on some faces and I was discussed amongst them and the atmosphere warmed a little! When I told them that I was actually Mama Vicky, the whole situation changed again and I was instantly their long lost friend. As the numbers grew with more boys arriving, there was great excitement amongst them all that Mama Vicky was here. The big question though was "Where's Vicky"? We spent the morning chatting and they played football and then it was time for lunch. About 30 Boys came with us to the Kiosk where their weekly Freelance lunch is served.

I was simply amazed. The Staff greeted them with great warmth and the boys filled the place to capacity in a fairly well behaved manner. Jugs of water were put on the tables with just one tumbler but they all shared with very little quarrelling! If the Kiosk Owner is there, they all get fruit juice to drink as well, but this time they were unlucky.

What I did not realise is that every Boy gets to choose his lunch and then he is served by the Staff as any normal customer would be. Bokey stands no nonsense from the Lads and good manners are part of the deal. There was much laughter, no fighting and for a short space of time they had some dignity.

My saddest memory is as we all left the Kiosk to put them all on the Matatu's to go back to the Streets, a dear, shabby, dirty little boy stood outside looking very sorry for himself. He had broken the golden rule and arrived with glue – totally forbidden! If you have glue and it is found you do not eat – harsh but necessary. Although my heart bled for him, I knew he would not do it again and next time he would have a full tummy too.

The next week I met the boys most days as they came out for the football tournament and they were fed with the local children on the Glad's House feeding programme. I got to know quite a few of them very well and wondered why I ever felt anxious about being with them

I found them cheeky, funny, loyal to each other but most of all they just needed someone to care about them. I can't wait to spend time with them again – I now know why our daughter Victoria goes back to see them so often!



Awaiting lunch at the Island Cafe

## 'SUCCESS STORIES'

**Alex Okwiri** is a former street boy and now a qualified carpenter working for Glad's House Woodworks .



Alex was born 1980 in Likoni, Mombasa and was not lucky to grow in a happy family set up. His father married two wives and Alex's mother was the second wife. In his mother he had 3 siblings and 4 other step siblings. His father worked with a transport company and so most of the time he was on road traveling. This left the two women at home struggling with the upkeep of the family. Unlike his step mother, Alex's mother was not employed. So most of the time they would suffer silently.

As time went by, the situation at home became unbearable as most of the time there was a fight between the two women. His father being away could do little and so Alex's mother was forced to go upcountry leaving Alex under the mercy of his step mother.

While his step brothers went to school regularly, Alex was not and if he went then he was not in proper school uniform. Otherwise he was left at home to do the household chores. Sometimes he was denied food after doing nearly everything in the house. He was always asked not to say a word to his father on what went on whilst he was away. Though he tried telling his dad the state of things, all his cries landed on deaf ears. This infuriated him and with the intervention of one neighbor, he started looking for casual jobs to do while the neighbor provided him with meals and a place to sleep sometimes.

However, this didn't go for long. He met an older boy who introduced him to street life. He was around ten by then. They would leave early in the morning and go to a base called Anglo Swiss in Mombasa town and come late at night. There they would sell worn out plastics, scrap materials etc..

Whatever the money they got, he had to give it to the boy and he would be given only 100 shillings in return. He lived in the street always with the difficulty of getting food, shelter, coming out of the abuse of the older boys and so many mischief's which he was undergoing.

After about a year, he was rescued together with other 20 boys by the Lt. Rev. Fr. Arnold Grol and settled at the centre. Though some of his mates went back, he was satisfied with everything that he was offered. He got regular meals, a good place to sleep, an opportunity to play sports and formal education. He saw some rays of hope and agreed to be re-admitted back to school. He learned with lots of psychological difficulties and so it reached a point where he had to drop out. But all was not lost as he got another chance to be taken for a carpentry course including three other boys and he seized the opportunity. This is where his life was transformed and dedicated himself in learning anything new with the support from the centre.

Alex is so grateful to "Bokey" who has played a very important role in his life. He admits that were it not for him then he would still be lost in the street like some of his mates he still meets to date. He has had a rough life and he is so happy with the start of the carpentry workshop by Glad's House.

Alex was married but separated. He has a five year old son. He hopes that the job will eventually be stable so that he can be able to bring back his family.

**Ahmed Gulie (Medi)** is an orphan and a street boy who has lived on the street since the year 2006. He comes from a family of 2 brothers and 1 sister. Medi had no better choice other than running to the streets after his mother's death.

He used to live in Mariakani with his mother and the other siblings. He was in school by that time they were a happy family. When the mother died in the year 2006, life turned around. He had to stay with an aunt who was a drunkard while the younger siblings were taken by a maternal grandmother. According to him, the aunt would leave them without anything to eat and when she came back at night she would start abusing everyone in the house. That is when he had to drop out of school and leave his home as well.

One of his uncles who stayed in Kisauni, the northern part of Mombasa

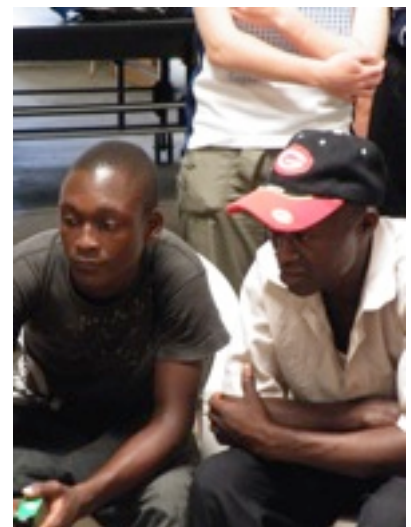
took him. He was married with one child and stayed in a single room. He could not stand sharing a room with his uncle and so he moved out. He didn't know where to start from. It was hard the first times until he met an older boy who also came from Mariakani and showed him how to live on the streets.

On the streets he says there are kings/chiefs. These are the people who own reign in the place. So the first time you join in, they have to interview you and as well find out why you are on the street. Otherwise if you don't have a solid reason they would not welcome you.

On the streets he has had to sniff glue, bhang, cigarettes, drink alcohol and other drugs which are available there. It's not by his choice, its either he is forced or the curiosity. However, all these were harming his health and so in the year 2007 he stopped using them.

Medi regrets having gone to the street life but he says he did not have a better choice. The hard life has taught him to be independent and that is why he has never been to a rescue centre. He knows to read and write simple English. But if he got an opportunity, he would like to learn further.

He is grateful to the Glad's House team which is organizing for his rescue from the street. He would like to have a stable life.



Medi watching himself being interviewed on Soccer AM

**Editors Note.** Four Glad's House volunteers are funding Medi's transition from the street. He will shortly become our first apprentice, working with Glad's House Woodworks.

**Editors Note:** *This article was originally written in 2007 by Curtis Klueg, a Maryknoll lay missionary we have merely added additional more up-to-date information at the end in italics.*

**Fredrick Achola**, 37, is usually just called "Bokey," a slang term for a boxer that street kids tagged him with for his prowess as a pugilist in younger days. He was Kenya's welterweight champion in 1991 and fell one match short of making the 1992 Olympic team. A back injury in 1992 put him out of competitive boxing. He's the founder and driving force behind the Mombasa Olympic Youth program, known by the acronym MOYO, to empower and educate youths through



sports.

Along with his athletic talent, Bokey has a rare and special gift for dealing with disadvantaged youths. His firm and demanding presence commands respect, yet a disarmingly, almost heart-melting, smile and gentle spirit keep youngsters returning to his side for guidance. Anyone who follows Bokey, as I have, as he walks the streets, meeting, greeting and accompanying street children, immediately recognizes this gift. These children, while filled with love and starving for attention, are often rowdy, undisciplined and intimidating. Bokey treats them with a balance of parental discipline and friendship that acknowledges their grit, wisdom and street smarts.

The youths call themselves "survivors." It is an appropriate label, and Bokey affords them the dignity and respect we might give "survivors" of life's other tragedies. I remember once a street boy was dying of tuberculosis, and perhaps AIDS. Without instructing them, Bokey simply suggested the boys form groups to be present at the hospital and later to arrange a funeral. Bokey recognizes their competency and capability, and like any great teacher, he inspires them to do for themselves rather than micromanaging in their lives.

Bokey found his beginnings with a priest from the Netherlands, Father Arnold Grohl, who also had a special place in his heart for street children and prisoners. Recognizing Bokey's aptitude with rough youth, he drew the boxer to his side and taught him all the priest could. Grohl brought Bokey with him from the capital, Nairobi, to Mombasa.

"To me he is a saint, my mentor and my inspiration," says Bokey of Grohl, who died almost a decade ago. "All I do is a result of his spiritual help."

In Mombasa, Bokey met Maryknoll Brother Loren Beaudry and other Maryknollers. After Grohl's death, Bokey continued working among Mombasa's most vulnerable youth through Grandsons of Abraham, a project for street children founded by Maryknoll.

He recalls adventures with Maryknoll lay missionaries on rural social work visits. He tells how Maryknoll Lay Missioner Melissa LePiane saved a 12-year-old girl from being married off by enrolling her into school. Bokey and I made many rural visits together and my most memorable is visiting the family of a prisoner whom they thought was dead. They shouted in astonishment: "He's alive; he's alive!" Last year, Bokey's life changed when he lost his wife, Jacinta, who at age 31 died from AIDS. Bokey says they discovered she was HIV-positive after taking a pre-nuptial blood test. "Because of the love I had for her and the baby (Jacinta's daughter), I decided to marry her despite her medical condition," he says. They had six years of marriage together.

After losing Jacinta, Bokey took another leap of faith. With more than a decade serving alongside Maryknollers, he ventured out on his own. He established MOYO, combining his love for, and belief in, the power of sports, combined with his compassion for vulnerable youth. MOYO strives to instill dignity, confidence and self-esteem in the 300 youths it serves.

The MOYO program operates out of a traditional urban Swahili dwelling of 11 rooms with a hall down the middle. For months, Bokey poured almost his entire monthly income of slightly more than \$100 into starting a pre-school with two local teachers, saving just enough to cover his rent, food and schooling for his teenage daughter. The little income from pre-school fees went back into the MOYO program. Slowly, Bokey has refinished most of the 11 rooms that prior to his undertaking were nothing but stone walls and corrugated roofing with dirt floors. Bokey's charisma and dedication have paid off quickly. MOYO not only has a boys-and-girls boxing team that Bokey coaches, but also boasts boys and girls basketball and soccer teams. Beyond the opportunity for youths to play sports, the MOYO programs have at their heart messages that transcend sport. The first big event was an open-air boxing tournament with a team from Nairobi. In the spirit of good sportsmanship the boxers embraced one another after their bouts, and all along, the thousands of people attending the competition were educated on HIV/AIDS issues.

#### **UPDATE:**

*Since this article was written Bokey and MOYO have become our partners in Mombasa. He has also remarried (Liz Mnengwa) who is also Glad's House part-time Secretary in Kenya and runs our Cyber Cafe.. On 14th December 2008 they had a son Arnold Grohl Achola. They are all now working very hard on our behalf organising and overseeing our 'enterprise schemes'. We have had our Matatu business for some time but have just started two more. Glad's House Bicycles and Glad's House Woodworks. He was also the key negotiator in the purchase of our plot of land in Magongo. As soon as this purchase is finalised, we start planning (and fundraising) to build our refuge.*



**Liz and Arnold (centre) with Merci and daughter Peili - Merci also works in the Cyber Cafe**