

Rich Tarro, Kenya – Fall 2021

Starting a delayed new school year in Kenya

I'm a person who likes having routines in my work and personal life. This has included daily routines, like waking up early to go to the gym first thing in the morning before I start my workday, and annual routines, like taking the last two weeks before Labor Day for vacation every summer. Not that I want every day and every year to be the same, which would be pretty boring, but I do like some degree of regimen. The way that I look at it, what makes a day or a year special are the things that break the normal patterns of life in an unexpected and hopefully pleasant way.

When I arrived in Kenya, my previous lifelong routines ended and I started developing new routines based on my new surroundings and my work on the HOPE Project. Then COVID happened and any level of predictability that I had developed and begun to feel comfortable with got completely messed up.

Like most of the world, things in Kenya are still not back to normal. The 2021 school year, which was supposed to start at the beginning of January, just got underway at the end of July. The Kenyan school year is supposed to coincide with the calendar year, but COVID caused the academic calendar to fall nearly eight months behind. So rather than the end of year activities we normally run this time of year — such as workshops and sports days — we are instead still in the mode of getting our students situated into a new school year. This includes transitioning a number of students from primary school to high school and from high school to college or vocational school.

The HOPE Project typically brings new students into the program at the beginning of a new academic year. Due to the generosity of our donors, we were able to accept 21 new students into HOPE in July and have begun funding their education. The need always exceeds our capabilities, but we are blessed to have the means to support this many new students. Four of the new students are siblings, whose family story I'd like to share with you.

The children's mother, Monica, is 34 years old and grew up in a slum area on the coast of Kenya. Monica and her children live in a small room that she rents for the equivalent of about \$9 per month, which she can barely afford. The house has no water or electricity and the pit latrine overflows during heavy rain, leading to very unsanitary conditions for the family.

Monica's husband, Moris, left her a few years ago when she was pregnant with her youngest child. Grace, the fifth child, is now almost 2 years old. Moris told Monica that he was going to try to find work in western Kenya, where he is from, but he never came back.



With (from left) Javan, Elizabeth, Margaret and Benjamin

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Florah, with Elizabeth

Although the family faced financial hardships even back when Moris was still around, Monica told us that life was much better before he left. Moris earned money doing wiring and electrical installation and Monica worked as a cook. Together, they earned enough money to cover the basics — buy food, pay rent and send their children to school.

Monica lost her job as a cook after she gave birth to Grace. There were complications during child birth and Grace was sick when she was born. Mother and baby had to stay in the hospital for two months after the birth, causing Monica's employer to terminate her employment.

Monica now washes clothes to try to provide for her five children, but she only makes the equivalent of a little over \$16 a month. With close to \$9 per month going toward rent,

this only leaves slightly more than \$7 a month for the family to live on. Monica says that is hard to find enough money to provide even one meal a day to her children. Obviously, this means that paying for school for her kids is completely out of reach.

HOPE is now supporting the educational needs of Monica's four school age children. Benjamin is 13 and in sixth grade. Javan is 11 and in grade five. Margaret is 7 and in second grade and Elizabeth is 5 and in first grade. HOPE is not only paying all the children's school fees, but has also provided them with new uniforms and shoes. We also furnished the children with a full complement of school supplies and books.

Since joining HOPE in July, the four children have been regularly attending the tutorial sessions we run on Saturdays for our students. When they come to tutorials, the children have access to a number of learning resources that we provide for our students and we give them a hot meal for lunch. We have also been providing Monica and her family with food each month. HOPE continues to give out food to 50 needy families to help them put food on the table.



Benjamin (left) and Eugene help Elizabeth try on her new shoes.

Monica is so grateful for the assistance we are providing her and her children. Without HOPE, her children would not be in school right now. Through your generosity, we are making a huge difference in the lives of families like Monica, Benjamin, Javan, Margaret, Elizabeth and Grace. Your continued support makes what we do possible.

Peace, Rich

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