

FIOH–USA: providing education and hope in Kenya

by Debra Durkee, Reporter

Paul Odihambo can count himself among the lucky ones – and he can do so because of the generosity of Future in Our Hands – USA and their selfless supporters.

“His grammar school teachers saw his potential and sponsored him, but only through high school,” says Linda Glaeser, SSJ from FIOH–USA.

So FIOH–USA sponsored him the rest of the way through his college education.

No schooling in Kenya is free, and oftentimes potential students are forced to drop out because of lack of funding. Some students go door to door, asking for donations to put toward their education and their schooling – the only way that they see to break out of the vicious circle of poverty and hunger that so many are trapped in.

When organizations like FIOH–USA and FIOH–Kenya can step forward and help students get that education that they so desperately desire, it can mean the world.

Odihambo is one of those students who knows how much it means to get a helping hand – and he knows how much it means to future generations when they see someone with a background similar to theirs doing well and giving back.

He was raised by his grandmothers, after losing his parents at a very young age. And at a very young age, he was inspiring others with his optimism and selfless nature.

“He’s not just a bright person,” says Glaeser. “He has a heart as big as the world.”

Even before FIOH–USA helped to put him through college he was a volunteer teacher, working to help other students to learn the same subjects he had. Now, he is an assistant principal at the Kanyamedhic Mixed Secondary School in Kenya.

It’s also a volunteer position, one that he has taken on for no other reason than to help others help themselves.

Odihambo is using his position to do everything he can to make sure that growing up is easier for the next generation than it was for him. He’s been instrumental in establishing porridge and lunch programs that are started with a donation from FIOH–USA and continued through the support of those who participate.

He’s also been instrumental in organizing the Stop the Spot campaign, which brings female students much needed sanitary supplies – something that most women in the United States take for granted. In Kenya, it’s a very different story, however – many girls miss up to a week of school each month because they don’t have the necessary supplies.

It costs approximately \$350 each year to put a student through high school or college, and \$150 a year to put them through vocational school. Those who enroll in vocational schools learn trades such as auto repair, truck driving or tailoring.

There are hundreds of applicants each year for the program, each hoping to be one of the next ones chosen to receive a hand with their education. Glaeser stresses that it's not a free ride, however – students sign a contract that they'll not only continue their schooling for the whole year, but that they'll send regular grade reports and letters outlining their progress.

And many take the commitment much more seriously than that.

Many, like Odihambo, return to the villages in which they were raised, and make sure that the donation of a college education goes much further than just themselves. They become teachers and principals, they build wells and schools, they speak on behalf of their friends and families, and they help to find new ways to make what little they might have stretch even farther.

“You would not believe how far \$1 will go there,” says Glaeser.

And looking at individuals like Odihambo, you might be able to allow yourself to think that you just might have an idea.



An education can mean the world to a child. And individuals like Paul Odihambo are making sure that it's not going to waste.