

Saving lives, one drop at a time: Kenya

by Debra Durkee, Reporter

Years after his tragic death, Nevil Ochieng has saved countless lives, and made daily life easier for thousands of families.

Linda Glaeser, SSJ, of Future In Our Hands–USA met Nevil on one of her trips to Kenya. He was a bright young boy and a promising student, one of the many faces in the Ober orphanage.

Schooling in Kenya is not free, so Glaeser and her niece decided to sponsor Nevil through school. After sponsoring him for two years, they returned to Kenya, and were greeted with some tragic news.

Nevil had passed away, dying of an illness that runs rampant through his village – cholera. He was 13 years old.

Clean, safe drinking water is hard to find in many villages in Kenya. Some families are forced to walk up to 8 miles a day, just to find any water at all – and that water is rarely clean enough to drink. Water sources are so few and far between that some of the most valuable sources might be a muddy lake created briefly by the rains, or other equally contaminated sources.

Diseases that are carried in contaminated water sources – such as typhoid and the cholera that killed Nevil – are rampant. And Glaeser knew that she had to do something to help – what was the point of sponsoring children, of getting them an education in hopes that they could better themselves when their lives were so fragile?

So she began to raise money to buy a well for the village. An anonymous donor stepped forward, and the resulting well that was built in the Ober village continues to serve hundreds of families and thousands of people.

The clean drinking water has been a Godsend.

“Since the Ober well has been built,” says Glaeser, “there have been no more cases of cholera, typhoid, or other water–born diseases. So Nevil is still doing his good work in this world.”

That first well was the beginning of Future in Our Hands–USA. With the success of the first well, Glaeser and her niece, co–founder Michele Sprada, knew that they could continue their work. They would raise the money here, and then send it to their contact at Future in Our Hands–Kenya.

Then, people would be put to work changing – and saving – lives.

Now, they have built 17 wells in different villages across Kenya. It's impossible to know how many lives have been saved, but there's no doubt the number is astronomical.

In addition to clean drinking water, many of the villages now use the water to grow their own vegetable gardens where it was impossible to plant seeds before, giving them a new source of both food and income.

And at the Ober orphanage where Nevil once lived, they still remember him – every day that they visit the well, inscribed with his name and the names of the donors that made it possible – the Carmelite nuns of Buffalo.

That well is important for many reasons, not just to each member of each family who depends on it for clean drinking water.

It – and Nevil – is also responsible for all the other good work that FIOH-USA has gone on to do.

“The wells are what started us,” says Glaeser. “The donation of that first well is why we were formed, and Nevil was the reason we needed a well. And now, these people can live.”



Villagers gather around the well in Ober, Kenya – an addition that has saved countless lives.