

Half a World Away

BY DEBRA DURKEE

Sister Linda Glaeser, SSJ is heading off to Kenya again – but this is no pleasure trip.

As one of the founding members of Future in Our Hands – USA, Glaeser finds herself returning to Kenya on a regular basis to see the fruits of the hard work of everyone involved.

She began FIOH-USA with Michele Sprada, an elementary school teacher who had spent a summer teaching in Kenya. She returned knowing what a difference she had made to the students there, and Glaeser decided she needed to see Kenya for herself.

Now, FIOH-USA raises funds for a number of different projects in the villages of Kenya, includ-

ing providing high school and college educations to students, building wells to provide families with clean drinking water, supporting HIV/AIDS education and, of course, lending a helping hand when any emergency arises.

The organization is also providing invaluable aid to Kenya's mothers, daughters and sisters as they strive to make life better for their families.

"They're full of hope, full of energy, and full of ideas," says Glaeser. "There is no 'woe is me'. If you give them just a little, they can make it go so far."

That little bit of aid is often in the form of micro-loans.

There are a number of different women's groups in Kenya, and they're all working on inventive ways to help provide for their families and earn some extra money. Projects range from growing produce to sell at the market to tending tree nurseries, keeping and raising poultry, manufacturing wood burning stoves, opening pharmacies, and preparing nutritional food.

Several of the groups have also started tailoring and embroidery – in fact, that's one of the latest reasons for a request of a micro-loan.

Micro-loans are given for up to \$600, and are provided on a revolving basis for up to three months. As the businesses that are funded by the loans begin to see success, the loans are repaid with interest that will continue to grow the pool of money available to start other business ventures.

Now, FIOH-USA is in the process of reviewing a business plan from one of the groups that details their plans for a sewing school.

Glaeser says that she knew that there was something special about the woman of Kenya from the time of her first visit.

"They have such a sense of community and of helping each other, of truly looking out for each other," she says. "They say that it takes a village to raise a child, and there, they not only believe that, but they live it."



ABOVE: Sister Linda Glaeser, SSJ (right) and Mary Ellen Dye (left) stand with Elizabeth, a college student sponsored by Dye. She wants to become a health worker after graduation.



RIGHT: Jane Atieno is one of the many women who have found new opportunities in life, thanks to a helping hand from FIOH-USA.

She also says that she never ceases to be amazed at what the groups can do with even the smallest bit of help. Many people don't realize that it takes only \$350 to provide a student with a year of high school or one year of a college education – and it's that chance that many are hoping to be able to give to their children.

All FIOH-USA projects are geared toward improving the quality of life for those in Kenya, and Glaeser says that she's honored to be able to visit Kenya and to see the chances that her stateside fundraising has brought about.

She also says that even though she never thought she would be making such a difference for so many people half a world away, she knows it's right.

"When I saw the poverty there, I knew it was so unjust. I needed to help them in any way that I could. One thing unfolded into another, but I never thought I would be co-founding an organization and visiting Kenya. If someone had told me I would be here – I would have thought they were crazy."

For more information on FIOH-USA and their programs, visit www.futureinourhandsusa.org, or their blog at www.fioh-usa.blogspot.com.

To comment online about this article, visit www.wnywoman.com/FIOH.html.