

Our Week In Kitui

Part of our trip to Kenya involved staying and helping in Nyumbani Village in the district of Kitui for a week. The village was set up to facilitate children who have lost their parents through HIV/AIDS and they are looked after by a grandparent figure known as a Susu. To date there are 82 grandparents and over 800 children living in the village and it aims to have full capacity of 1000 children and 100 Susus by 2015. During our time in Kitui, we were required to help with the everyday running of the village and to interact with the children who live there.

On the first morning, we helped with tree planting. Although this work was quite demanding, all of us seemed to enjoy the experience. Between the two groups, we planted over 800 trees, which will be of great benefit to the people of the village in the future. The following day, we helped out with the organisation of food in the village, which involved distributing rice, maize, beans, cooking fat and vegetables to each of the Susus. The food that we distributed was to last the Susus a week. On Wednesday morning, we helped with the distribution of household items such as washing powder and paraffin oil.

On Thursday, we had the opportunity of visiting Lawson High School, which is also situated in the village. It is currently in its second year of operation. Prior to the school opening, students would have to travel long distances to reach another school, or would attend the polytechnic in the village, where carpentry, tailoring and dressmaking are taught. The school is run by Sr. Frances, who is a very dedicated Principal. She was extremely grateful for the donations of pens and sports equipment for the school.

After visiting the school, we helped on the farm by cleaning out the goat pen, which was a challenge for most of us, but was also a new experience for all of us. On our last day, we bought hand woven baskets from the Susus before being collected for our bus journey back to Nairobi.

Every afternoon and evening however, we had the opportunity to play with the children after they had finished school. This was one of the only opportunities we had to interact with the children we met in Kitui as we had at least an hour with them each afternoon. We would play games such as hopscotch and skipping. They really enjoyed participating in the activities we planned for them such as card games and colouring. Their fascination with cameras and photographs intrigued us all as they loved to pose for the camera and to take photos themselves.

On one of the afternoons the Susus performed a dance for us and we also did some Irish dancing for them. We had also prepared some songs which we sang, ably accompanied by Ms O'Leary and a couple of the girls. We had brought tin whistles with us to distribute and these were quickly snatched up by the music enthusiasts, who were taught a few easy tunes.

Every evening we ate our dinner at the guesthouse. This consisted mainly of rice and kidney beans. Afterwards, we would go visit the children again, but in their homes which were arranged in groups of four houses called clusters. We would split into groups and visit clusters that we may have been invited to by the children earlier in the day. We helped the children with homework and study, as well as giving them sweets and presents such as card games.

Overall, our time in Kitui is an experience that won't be forgotten by any of us. We were all inspired by the hard work and determination of the children, grandparents, volunteers and workers as they endeavour to make Nyumbani Village a great experience for those who live there and those who visit.