



St. Nicholas Children's Centre Kemondo (*NCCCK*)
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"Let the children come to me." Mk 10:14

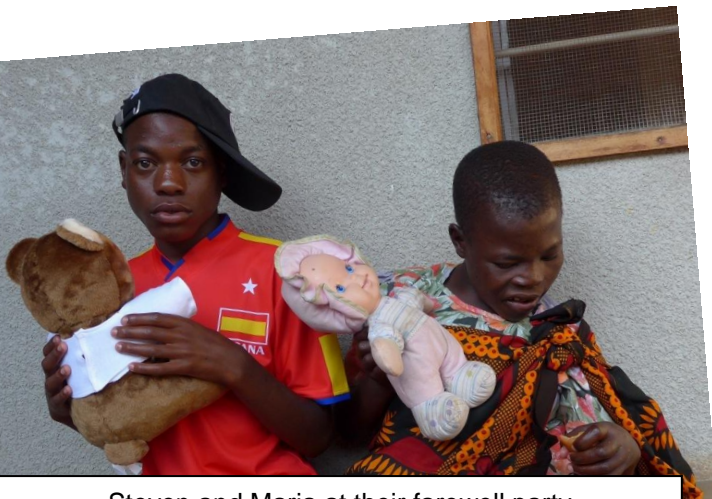
Dear Friends and Supporters of St. Nicholas Children's Center!

The last time I wrote to you was at Easter. Since then, time passed quickly and life at St. Nicholas continues to engage me in both positive and very challenging ways.

Unfortunately, I start this letter by sharing some sad news.

In August 2016 I brought Maria and her brother Steven to another care facility for adult people with disabilities in Musoma, as St. Nicholas is designed and purposed to primarily operate as a children's home. On May 17, 2017 news reached us that Maria died at the young age of 20 years.

Her death hit us all very hard and unexpectedly, especially since I visited Maria in November 2016 and at that time, had a good impression of both her



Steven and Maria at their farewell party in August 2016

and Steven. In April of this year, I visited Maria and Steven again together with our older children and some caregivers. At that time, Maria and Steven did not look well. Both had lost weight and appeared to be neglected. While thinking about taking them back to St. Nicholas, I did not want to make a rash decision, nor did I see their lives in acute danger. I held off for the time being.



Visiting Maria and Steven in Musoma in April 2017

We were informed that she died of gastroenteritis. Maria was buried in Musoma, which is 400 miles away from Kemondo. Due to this great distance (400 miles translate into two travel days) and because the body usually is buried within 24 hours after death, I could not attend the funeral. Instead, we had a Memorial Service



Memorial Service for Maria at St. Nicholas

for Maria at St. Nicholas. Steven returned home to us a few days later. He was emaciated and had many seizures. We are happy to share that he has regained weight and is free of seizures due to taking his medication regularly. Steven is happy to be back with us!



Steven in November 2017

We have learned from this sad experience and will not transfer any of our special needs children turned adults to another institution in the future. Instead, we decided to build another house within the next few years to accommodate adults with disabilities. Since 14-year old Steven is presently our oldest requiring life-long care, the need for construction of another building is not an immediate project, but a mid-term goal.



Annajoyce with her biological siblings and with her brothers and sisters from St. Nicholas at the funeral in September 2017

Additional sad news concerns the grandmother of Annajoyce, who died of a stroke at age of 65. Annajoyce and I had visited her at the hospital the day before. By then, she was already unconscious. The following day, I had to return to the hospital to retrieve the body and take it to the family home. It is customary in Tanzania to bury the person on the property of the family home in between banana trees. All of us from St.

Nicholaus – children and caregivers – attended the funeral. Grieving losses and living through sad experiences are particularly formative for us as a family, next to the more joyful occasion of sharing daily life with school, birthdays and other celebrations.

You may remember that in 2015, we had taken Annajoyce to Germany for medical treatment. At that time, I had a lot of contact with her grandmother Adventina. As her guardian she had to give permission for Annajoyce’s treatment and travel. In 2011, Adventina had taken all five grandchildren into her home after her daughter - the children's mother, had died. Annajoyce moved into St. Nicholas in 2012 because she needed special care due to her disability. The other four children remained with Adventina. It is now devastating for the children to first have lost their mother and now, 6 years later, their grandmother as well.



Annajoyce with her grandmother and four siblings in July 2015 before traveling to Germany

We would love to take in 8-year old Menard, the youngest of Annajoyce’s brothers and await currently permission from the Department of Social Services to do so. Every week I am visiting the Social Service’s office inquiring if I may take Menard. It is a time consuming process as the person in charge at Social Services is mostly traveling to attend different meetings and seminars and can neither be reached in her office nor by phone. Her colleagues are not authorized to make decisions in this regard without her, but have to wait for her return. In the meantime, Menard is living with an aunt. Annajoyce’s other siblings, 16-year old Kaijage and 14-year old Adventina, live by themselves in their grandmother's mud hut. The oldest girl is in vocational training school. We have now decided that Kaijage and Adventina should go to boarding school in January and all three children will be our "guests" during the upcoming school holidays in December.



Magdalena coming home from boarding school!

But we have good news to share as well:

In September Magdalena (14) took her final exams for 7th grade. Those exams are an important milestone in Tanzania, as they mark graduation from primary school. Passing those exams, children qualify for secondary school. Magdalena's school requires the students to be boarders for the final year, to assure studying in an undistracted learning environment. Thus,

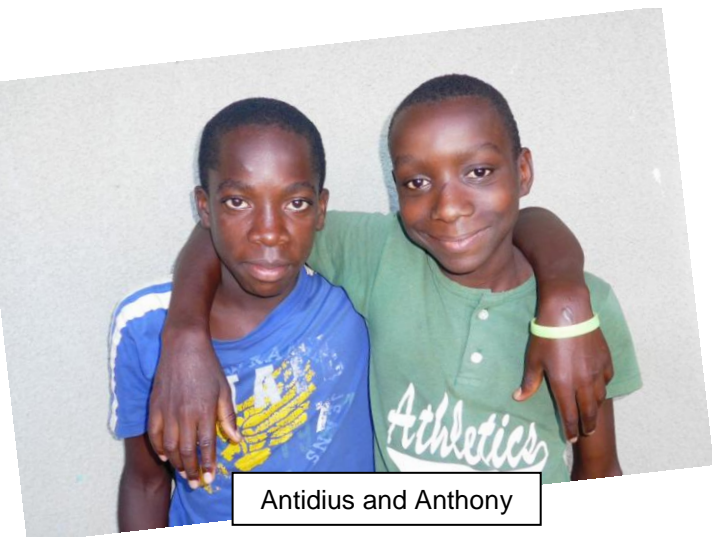
Magdalena stayed there from January until September. We were overjoyed when she returned home to St. Nicholas. Starting January she will attend secondary school (grades 8-11). These past weeks we visited five different schools in question for her. At each school she took an entrance exam – the effort resembles trying to get into college, rather than into 8th grade! We are delighted to share that Magdalena passed all exams and now has a choice in schools. She is our first child to finish primary school. We are very proud of her!

For Asimwe life will change as well. She is our oldest girl turning 18 in January. She has a learning disability. Asimwe and I looked at different vocational training schools in the surrounding area. Some of those schools take youngsters who have not finished primary education. We learned of one school that is teaching farming and animal keeping and of another that is instructing in cooking and sewing. Asimwe liked the second school, which offers a two-year program. She stayed there for two days and did not want to leave. The principal, teachers and students were all very welcoming and friendly.



Asimwe

Anthony and his friend Antidius (both 15) decided to enroll into the farming school, which seems a good fit for the two boys.



Antidius and Anthony

And finally, we managed to find a school for Mtagwaba Paul. Mtagwaba (8) has been with us for a long time. He has cerebral palsy and is not

able to walk. He also is deaf. For many years we have tried to communicate with him

non-verbally. However, many times Mtagwaba is frustrated and feels closed out in a world of hearing people. It was a challenge to enroll him in the School for the Deaf, because the school limits admission to ten new students a year and because Mtagwaba is using a wheel chair. In July he experienced a one-week trial stay at the school and was accepted for the coming school year!



Joseph and Nazalius will also attend boarding school in order to study for their final exams of 7th grade and Hadija will continue attending the school for the blind.



Our big kids who will all go to boarding school in January 2018

Thus, seven kids will leave us for boarding school next year and will only come home to St. Nicholas during school vacations. We will miss them and things will change in our house once they leave – the younger ones will claim to be the big kids!

I have featured stories of the children in order to offer you a glimpse of daily life at St. Nicholas Children's Center in Kemono. We are looking forward to the many events before year-end: Advent, the conclusion of the 2017 school year and five weeks of school break, the feast of St. Nicholas, First Communion of eight of our children, Christmas... My volunteers are of great assistance in planning and celebrating the many birthdays, religious holidays and vacation times.

Many thanks for your continued support and prayers! May God bless you abundantly!

We wish you a blessed Advent Season,

Stefanie Köster, the children and caregivers