

CASE STUDY KENYA

Background

New White House Academy is a Boarding School located in Taita Taveta County, ten kilometers from Voi town along the Mombasa-Nairobi highway. The school serves Nursery to Class 8 students, as well as 21 secondary students in form one only (with an enrollment of 10 girls 11 boys). In this region there are few public schools, and many are overcrowded with inadequate resources and in need of renovations and more teachers. Many families in the area cannot afford to buy school uniforms or school supplies.

New White House Academy provides education for 300 underprivileged and orphaned children and youth from different regions of Kenya and for children in the region with about 35 employees, including trained teachers and auxiliary staff. Anedore Biberstein founded the school in 2008, built in its original location in MacKinnon Road. In 2010, unfortunately she found that funds for the school had been mismanaged. Soon after, the school moved and leased a former Secondary School, and took on the name New White House Academy. In 2015, the land was purchased for the school compound (15 hectares) and belongs to the school. While New White House Academy is registered as a private school, it differs from other private schools. Some of the objectives include:

- giving needy children the opportunity to get a better education and serve as a rescue center for orphans and discriminated children,
- helping children explore their talents through sports, drama, music and gymnastics,
- inculcating positive discipline in learners in a friendly manner,
- helping learners achieve their educational dreams – joining Secondary Schools,
- making significant impact by giving the best service as they endeavor to maximally exploit their potentials.

The school's mission is teaching, training and impacting knowledge and skills so that learners fit in this challenging world, so that they can help themselves and their families afterwards. The school's target in education is helping the less fortunate learners by providing quality education. *Kenyan Children Help Association* sponsors children from poor families so they do not have to pay fees.

Interview with Former Headmaster, Philip Karangu

I spoke with Philip for two hours about New White House Academy, its vision and several inspiring stories that speak about teaching and learning as a major key in preparing children for a demanding world. He explained that the school curriculum has qualities of public school, with attention to fitting into social and public life in Kenya, as well as qualities and subjects of academic schools. The curriculum features music, sports and drama to nurture the whole child. Several questions summed up his vision: "How will these students, many from poverty, fit in the world? How can they eventually change society in the future? How can they make a better Kenya?"

Philip spoke about the value of the diversity in the school, with children coming from different parts of Kenya, with different religious backgrounds. He stressed there is no intent to convert students, but to

respect who they are, instilling community and social values. There are equal numbers of girls and boys. The school is home wherein students learn the responsibility of taking care of each other and the school, particularly older students with the younger children. This responsibility is not imposed, or rule-bound, but encouraged as a community, with teachers asking students, “what do you think?”

A few of Philip’s stories highlighted innovation and problem solving from the students themselves. For example, one story focused on food. Students training in Handball were not satisfied with meals from the kitchen; during training they needed more to eat. Students decided that they could grow vegetables to supplement their daily meals. While the school owns land, the students needed to create a plan with a budget, which included getting water. Not only did the plan work, but also the farm makes some money on the surplus of vegetables. A donkey was donated to the school to help with bringing water and firewood to the school.

Philip bought a few ducks and chickens to control the insects around the schoolyard. Eventually the ducks and chickens laid eggs and multiplied as another source of food. Philip also donated a few goats to eat the grass during the rainy season. The students care for these animals. For the farm, students learned that ashes from their fires and urine from rabbits would keep the insect population down on the crops. A few rabbits turned into many rabbits quickly, and also provide meat for the school kitchen.

During our conversation, Philip spoke about the importance of “open” dialogue among staff and students that address issues that surface in the school’s social environment. Students participate with ideas, choices and voices, learning about benefits and consequences, and what matters to the community. As Headmaster, Philip tried hard not to say “no” to students’ ideas and solutions.

While Headmaster, Philip served as elected Vice Chairman for the Kenya Primary School Head Teachers Association and Kenya Primary Schools Sports Association in Voi Sub-county. His leadership and work in New White House Academy demonstrated a workable vision. Here are a few words I heard him say about this vision: “Students live together as brothers and sisters, disadvantaged and advantaged, in oneness, seeing one another as Kenyans.” The school “doesn't imposes responsibility; we want students to see how they can take responsibility as solutions on their own ... put ideas out there to see what they can do for the betterment of the school.”