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Tanzania Journal Issue 58

Tied Together -By Tim Neet_

This issue of the TZJournal highlights our most recent team journey to Tanzania. In spite of a number of things not going as planned (although it was a really good plan) the team still accomplished a significant number of their goals, from internet deployment, to Skype conferences between Tanzanian and Stateside teacher, to our first video conferencing between sponsors and their children. While all of our teams that journey to Tanzania have specific initiatives to accomplish, it is often the unplanned aspects that God uses to shape and soften our hearts as we yield to His will and purposes.

One of our veterans on the trip was Wendy Williams, a teacher at Perimeter Christian School who has been instrumental in the development of our blossoming pre-school program. Following are some excerpts from one of her trip reports that she sent to her supporters that I thought you might like to see

"We arrived home a week ago... after 24 straight hours of travel (1 hour layover in Dar es Salam, less than an hour between planes in Amsterdam, and 21 hours in the air!) We ran from flight to flight in Amsterdam and made it... but two of our suit-



*cases didn't. Other than the real possibility of not making the flight as we waited through two security lines and the resulting two lost suitcases, it was as quick and easy as it could be. It's just not easy to get from here to there... and back. That's how my heart feels too... it's just not easy to get from here to there and back... physically, spiritually or emotionally. **And yet, despite the time and miles and culture... I'm tied to them... deeply... and it's worth it... every time!***

Each time I go, the bonds get deeper... I know more of their lives, their background, their successes, their openness, their willingness to learn, their faith... their hearts. I see the joy in their faces (children and teachers alike) and it never ceases to amaze me. The faithfulness of the teachers to love, encourage, teach, and change the future

Continued on page 2



Really - Video Conference? by Tim Neet

With all of our high speed internet, FaceTiming and Skyping that we are used to in the States, the concept of a video conference between Atlanta and Tanzania doesn't seem that remote. Recognizing that only a few years back we had no electricity at the PUNCHMI School and zero internet in the entire village the concept of **video conferencing with a sponsor** was unheard of and not even translatable into Swahili.

Although commercial electrical power still has daily scheduled outages, our windmill and battery backup has brought stability of electricity while our new internet tower has enabled connectivity to the world. Quite a leap for a village school in the heart of East Africa.

With the introduction of this technology, a lot of planning, and a good dose of "winging it," our last journey team brought video conferencing to our new Library and Computer Class facility.

As a part of our trial, four sponsor families were able to meet their sponsored child for the first time face to face. Not without problems, the overall experience was a real success with good feedback from both sponsors and children. Just seeing themselves on a computer screen was a new experience for the Tanzanian children—but then actually seeing and talking to their sponsor brought a real sense of excitement and not a little intima-

tion (for the Americans that is) Our first two video conferences were conducted from a Perimeter Conference Room while the next two were Skyped right into the sponsors homes. This is really helpful as 7AM here in Atlanta is 2PM in Tanzania - so calls need to be initiated early in the morning, Atlanta Time. (No pajama's please) We did have some difficulty understanding each others accents, especially when combined with transmission delays and fading caused by a strong afternoon rain-storm. Nonetheless, a little patience, some helpful translators, and a few recognizable songs and bible verses by both Tanzanian and American loosened things up. (Below four Sasser children video con-



ference with Godfrey—their Tanzanian brother)

If you would like to participate in a future video conference with your child, send your request to me as we begin to build out a routine video conference plan. (timneet@att.net)

Tied Together (Continued from pg1)

overwhelms me. The transformation of the lives of the children... and the village itself is awe-some (yes the dash is significant... we too quickly pass over the awe in awesome... in this case it isn't to be missed.) I'm humbled and privileged and blessed to be a small part of this ministry.

This trip my focus was (again) the Preschool which currently includes almost 100 children in 3 classes... and includes the Kindergarten-equivalent class. (Pre-One is the Tanzanian term for what we call Kindergarten. They have two younger classes called, ironically, K1 and K2... and all 3 classes combined are called Preschool.) The short-and-sweet version is that I spent a lot of time in all 3 classrooms. Two offices have been moved into the Library, and that space has been allocated to the Preschool. During our trip last summer, we prepared one office-turned classroom for Teacher Mary and the youngest children (K1.) They've now furnished the room with small tables and chairs and a large rug on the floor. It's beautiful, and Mary's using the space and her time wonderfully! The addition of this classroom has given Teacher Advent and the K2 class their own room! Yes... Advent and Mary had been sharing one very small classroom! This fall, they tore down a wall between a small office and the Pre-One classroom to enlarge it. Previously, the desks consumed the entire available space. Now they have a small reading area in the front of the room, a large woven mat on the floor in the back of the room, and desks in-between... with space to walk between the desks! It's transformative to have this space for the children... and it's making a huge difference! Each Preschool classroom now has an Assistant... the focus of our trip last June, and another huge trans-

formation in the past few months! With the Assistants in place and the new classroom space, this week we continued working on the value and implementation of small groups for interactive learning in the classroom. The children counted with rocks, bottle tops, pony beads, and popsicle sticks; used number-cards and beanbags for hopping, tossing and counting numbers; experienced puzzles – one per child rather than one per group, and 5 children and a teacher built a 48-piece floor puzzle for the first time ever! We read books together for fun and learning, and the children poured over books on their own. We continued talking about and witnessing the importance of letting the children do and learn for themselves – from cutting to counting to building with Duplos to making puzzles to “reading” on their own. We read, laughed, danced, jumped, hopped, built, painted, cut and colored all week long! It was delightful... for all of us... most importantly the children... and the teachers enjoyed it too!

All those things sound so “normal” in our culture... but we have to remember that this is a little village 7 miles off the end of the paved road in Africa... where most homes have neither running water nor electricity. This has been a culture where the focus is survival – until recently, everyone was a subsistence farmer... and most still are... and 20% of children didn't make it to their 5th birthday! All available time, energy and family resources go to providing food and shelter and survival for the family... even school is a luxury. Children don't have “hobbies”... they don't have time! After school, they carry water and collect firewood for the mother (or grandmother in many cases) to cook their dinner of ugali (think

grits pancake) and care for their animals (if their family is wealthy enough to have some.) Few adults in the community outside of the school read and there are no books, games, manipulatives (materials or toys you touch and experience to foster understanding rather than rote memorization.) Until the past 5 or 6 years, only a handful of children had ever graduated from 7th grade! The transformation is amazing... and goes to Pastor Waraieli's vision, the mentoring of Joshua Teacher's College and Perimeter teachers over the past 12 years, the ProjectCHILD sponsors who provide the funding and encouragement to the children, and the amazing openness and faithfulness of the teachers in this little school. As Pastor always says, “Bwana Asifiwe!” which means “to the Lord belongs the Praise” ...and we all reply, “Amen.”

Years ago, I was standing with Godfrey (the Headmaster at PUNCHMI) and Bobby Scott was asking what topics we should focus on the next trip when Godfrey looked at Bobby with all sincerity and said, “Oh, it isn't what you teach when you come, it's that you come!” THESE teachers are the full-time missionaries, and when we come, our presence speaks to their value and the work they do every day! It does matter that we bring ideas and resources; most of all we bring friendship and encouragement... and that matters most. What did I learn from them? Much more than they learned from me, that's for sure! I witnessed the beauty of living simply, loving deeply, and walking humbly. Sounds like Scripture... “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8 May I be ever more like them... ever more like Him. .

Job ADS—Help Wanted

Excel—Report Writer/Designer - This need was filled superbly by Brian Bargmann one of our sponsors from Connecticut. We now have a robust database with considerable report writing capability that helps us keep track of both sponsor and student.

Computer Trainer—Could you help us mentor Tanzanian Teachers on basic computer skills or Office products.

Teachers—pre-school—Grade 7 — Would you be part of a team seeking to mentor our Tanzanian Teachers in modern teaching techniques and approaches.

Community Planner/Developer—Do you have skills that could help our partners and village leaders plan for the community growth that is going to occur with a new Highway.

Contact Jerry Thames at jerry@thamesfam.com

Mail Call

Our next team leave for Tanzania in late May so have your cards, letters and packages to Wendy Williams at Perimeter Christian School no later than May 20. Same package requirements as last time (see the last issue of the TZJournal or on our Project Child Web Site www.projectchildtz.com)