

Njuruta 2014 Team Report

Team: Michael and Signe Carlson; Mike, Kim, and Bailey Brooks; and Cade Gotthardt

Dates: July 12, 2014 – July 23, 2014

Introduction and Summary

The idea that God’s Church does not exist for its own sake has been a fundamental conviction for Chrio Communities since it was first formed in 2008. This conviction is rooted in a theology which says God has sent his people into the world as a witnessing community in word and deed for the sake of the world. One of the places we believe God has sent us to do this is Kenya.

Since its early years, Chrio has had a partnership with a rural, under-resourced, Kenyan community called Njuruta. This partnership is facilitated through a faith-based, non-profit organization called Food for the Hungry¹ and exists for the purpose of empowering the people of Njuruta toward a spiritually healthy and physically self-sustainable future. Chrio’s involvement includes child sponsorships, special fundraising projects, and team mission trips. In July of 2014, Chrio sent Michael and Signe Carlson; Mike, Kim, and Bailey Brooks; and Cade Gotthardt as its fourth mission team to Njuruta. The rest of this document is a report of this trip.

The Way There

The team of six left Phoenix the evening of Saturday, July 12 to arrive in London the following day. After a twenty-one-and-a-half hour layover (where Signe got to see two old friends and former FH-Kenya employees), the team departed, finally arriving in Nairobi the evening of Monday, July 14. Hotel accommodations had been made for the night in Nairobi, where the team was warmly greeted by Zipporah Muhoro, the CDP Manager of FH-Kenya. The next morning, after breakfast at the hotel, Zipporah and the team embarked upon a six hour drive to Meru, which is the site of one of FH-Kenya’s offices and the team’s guesthouse. Upon arrival, the team enjoyed lunch in Meru and were joined by Margaret Makena (Meru office supervisor) and Zachary Kaimenyi (HIV/AIDS Program Manager). After lunch, the team went to the guesthouse to settle and rest before the busy week ahead.

Days in Njuruta

Wednesday, July 16 – After breakfast at the guesthouse, the team joined FH-Kenya staff for morning devotions and a team orientation led by Makena and Zipporah. A representative from the local government was also present and would later accompany the team to Njuruta. It was special for Michael and (especially) Signe to get to see employees whom they knew from previous trips.

¹ For a detailed history see “Njuruta 2011 Team Report” at www.chriocommunities.com/#/where-we-serve.

The road into Njuruta is infamous for its rocky terrain. And though it was a rough ride (as expected), both Michael and Signe noticed improvement from the previous trip – which is evidence that the community has been working hard to level the ground. Upon arrival, our team was brought to a gathering of teachers, community members, and school-children who had prepared a welcoming ceremony. Each grade performed a special song and dance (which was often participatory!), followed by words of greeting and welcome from certain community members, notably a few teachers. Makena translated. While the team had a blast joining the children through dance and song, there were a couple moments of profound sobriety. One occurred shortly after the youngest group of children (perhaps kindergarten) performed a song, during which the team clapped and cheered. Once it was over, the team was shocked to learn (from Makena) that it was about the impact of alcoholism upon their families and how the kids must hide from abusive parents. The next song (sung by young girls only) was about the reality of child-labor. We soon learned that understanding the systemic problems of their community is an integral part of the children's education.

After the greeting, each one of the team members was individually escorted to a classroom where they spent time with the children. After lunch in the community, we spent the rest of the day playing with children and helping gather rocks for the foundation of a new classroom. The materials for this classroom were funded by the Chrio team; so it was meaningful not only to contribute to laying its foundation, but also to observe its progress throughout the week.

After day one in Njuruta, the team returned to the guesthouse tired but filled with gratitude. After dinner and a team debrief followed by worship (Cade brought his guitar!), the team went to bed.

Thursday, July 17 – After breakfast at the guesthouse, the team again joined the FH staff at the Meru office for devotions. The morning in Njuruta began with Bible lessons. Michael, Signe, and Cade taught the younger kids while Mike, Kim, and Bailey taught the older ones. The team then participated in a “community conversation,” which involved a gathering of community members and was led by someone FH had brought it. This person led the group in a conversation that assessed the community's needs and resources. Mike Brooks was then asked, in lieu of everything that had been discussed, to lead the group in developing an action plan. With no preparation time, Mike got up, synthesized the material that had been covered, then helped lead the group toward an action-plan regarding the issue of water in the community. They were very grateful.

After the conversation, the team ate lunch with the community members (rice and chicken/vegetable stew). We then spent the rest of the afternoon helping lay the foundation for the new classroom while also playing with the children. Bailey in particular enjoyed playing with other girls her age. After dinner at the guesthouse, we gathered once again for our daily debrief and worship.

Friday, July 18 – As is the custom, we spent the morning at the FH office, enjoying a daily devotion with the staff then preparing for the day ahead. Our first task upon arrival this day involved teaching Bible lessons once again to the children. During the Bible lesson, one of the local Catholic priests arrived; which led to an impromptu mass in which the team and many of the community members participated. While no team members had much experience with mass, it was safe to say that it was probably one of the more lively and energetic Catholic masses we'll ever experience, full of dancing, shouting, and singing.

After mass, the team helped pass out new uniforms to all of the FH-sponsored children. The children were elated to have new, clean clothing. The rest of the day was spent at a community-wide retirement party for several Njuruta elementary school teachers. The celebration included food, speeches, gift-giving (two of the most prized gifts being a live chicken and a live goat), and choreographed songs and dances – all in honor of these teachers who had served the children of Njuruta for over twenty years. The Chrío team had been warned beforehand that we may be asked to perform something. So when called upon, armed with Cade's guitar, we performed a rendition of *How Deep the Father's Love for Us*. Compared with the rest of the performances, it was considerably low key; however, the guitar was a huge hit. The team was honored to have the opportunity to celebrate with the community, honoring those who had invested so many years into the children of Njuruta.

Once the team returned to the guesthouse after a long day of work, fellowship, and celebration, they enjoyed dinner, followed by another evening debrief and worship. (This may have been the night Mike Brooks fell asleep during prayer... and starts snoring.)

Saturday, July 19 – Since it was the weekend and the FH office was closed, the team went straight to Njuruta where we got to visit our sponsor children. We began by visiting the Carlsons' sponsor child, Antony. Being Signe's fourth time seeing Antony, and Michael's second, it was a very meaningful visit. Sadly, Antony's grandmother was very ill at the time and no longer living with him and his twin brother.

After that visit, the team set off on a hike to visit the family of Cade's sponsor child. It was very special for Cade to get to meet his family's sponsor child and their family. It was particularly significant getting to meet the father of this family who until recently had been an alcoholic and absentee husband and father. This changed once some of the employees at FH became a regular presence in his and his family's life. Now he is present and active in the life of his family, due largely to the presence of FH. Next we visited the Brooks' sponsor child and her family. Kim, Mike, and Bailey were humbled and significantly moved by the whole experience. The family expressed deep gratitude for the Brooks' love and support. It is one thing to write letters and send

payments in support of a child. It is quite another thing to have a cup of tea in their shack and to experience the reality of their living situation.

After a snack at the van, the team had the privilege of visiting one of the community's incoming generating activity (IGA) groups. The Mwendwa IGA group is one of the more successful ones. As has been explained in previous reports, the purpose of these IGA groups is to teach community members to work together to solve systemic, communal problems. The progress that this group is making is remarkable. By pooling their resources the group has been able to afford things like chicken and goats for each member. They have also been able to afford solar panels for each member. This is particularly important for students who need light to study at night. Since there is no electricity in the community, solar panels and solar-powered batteries provide an energy source for lamps at night. As their honored guests, we joined the community for one of their meetings. We ate together as they shared about their progress. They also generously gave us the gift of a rather large box full of eggs, which for them was an incredibly costly gift. The team was humbled and grateful for such hospitality. Michael, as a pastor and representative of the team, was also able to share a little bit about how close we feel to the Njuruta community. He reminded them that though an ocean separates us from them, if we call Jesus Lord, then we are members of the same family and are one in Christ.

As usual, we went back to the guesthouse that evening where we enjoyed dinner and evening debrief and worship. We also had a special birthday celebration for Bailey during dinner. It involved good food, funny hats, and birthday blowers. A good time was had by all!

Sunday, July 20th – After breakfast at the guesthouse, the team (along with Zipporah and Makena) had the honor of worshipping with two of Njuruta's five congregations. Zipporah, Michael, Signe, and Cade went to a Pentacostal service while Makena, Mike, Kim, and Bailey went to a Catholic mass. Both groups thoroughly enjoyed their experience and were grateful to each congregation for their hospitality. As hubs of community and support, the Christian congregations in Njuruta play a vital role in the health and development of the community in the future.

After worship, and due to Bailey's birthday, Makena arranged for a special afternoon lunch and celebration at a Methodist community and conference center. The team enjoyed good food and a relaxing afternoon, while Bailey played soccer with some of the local kids. That night we retired to the guesthouse for dinner, debrief, and worship.

The Way Back

Monday, July 21st – The team departed from Meru early Monday morning. And after a safari tour, we were on our way back to Nairobi, where we spent our final night in Kenya.

Tuesday, July 22nd – After an exciting week, the team departed from Nairobi.

Concluding Remarks

As a whole, the trip was an incredible success. The team was pleased to see progress in the community, including some new classrooms (thanks in part to Chrío) and some significant progress for two IGA groups in particular. The people of Njuruta continue to be filled with hope and faith, and Chrío's partnership with them through FH remains strong.

Through the work of FH, the partnership of Chrío Communities, and most of all the joyful participation of the Njuruta community members themselves, may Njuruta develop, flourish, and continue to become who it is God wants them to be.

In addition to the report above, here is the outline to a presentation given to the Chrío family by team member, Mike Brooks:

Kenya Presentation Outline

- I. Introduction. Chrío Communities has partnered with Food for the Hungry and the town of Njuruta, Kenya. This partnership has been in place for approximately six years and members of Chrío have been to Njuruta three times over the past six years.
 - A. This year Signe (who has the most experience in Africa), Michael, Cade Gotthart, Kim, Bailey and I went to Njuruta. To be frank, the trip was awesome!
 - B. In past trips several issues were identified by the community
 1. Crop Failure and decline in animal productivity/ animal husbandry
 2. WATER!
 3. A traversable roadway
 4. Poverty (little to no income generation)
 - C. Suggestions made to community in 2012
 1. Outline for micro finance groups/ IGAs
 2. Introduction of Hybrid animals (chickens and goats)
 3. Increase of school to meet educational needs of community
- II. Food for the Hungry

- A. Is a NGO which has collaborated with the Kenyan government, the community and Chrio Communities.
- B. FH is unabashedly a Christian organization which takes implements holistic approach when serving a community.

III. Government of Kenya

- A. Recently the Kenyan government moved from being a centralized government to distributing the governmental powers to the forty six counties within Kenya.
- B. Njuruta is located on the outskirts of Meru County and is almost in a different climate than the rest of the towns in Meru County.
- C. When we were there a representative of the county government was in Njuruta twice. The government official appeared to be vested in the community. In fact, as we will see, the government has stepped up in significant ways in order to assist in alleviating the water issue in Njuruta.

IV. Changes Since 2012

1. Two classrooms have been built, one through the assistance of Chrio and one through the assistance of the Catholic Church.
2. Since we can't have Catholics outdoing us, while there another classroom was in the process of being built through the assistance of Chrio.
3. Bricks made by the machine, which was currently being loaned to another community for construction.
4. Five Income Generating Groups (IGAs) formed. 2 Groups doing outstanding, two groups doing well and one group in need of extra work (having issues).
5. The one group which we visited cross bred one hybrid goat with native goats and now each family in the group has five goats. Also cross breeding between native and Hybrid chickens has resulted in numerous chickens in each of the households of IGA members. Micro financing has borne fruit and is functioning well within the group. SOLAR Panel which gives partial power to each of the households of IGA members.
6. We distributed school uniforms to sponsored children who attended Njuruta school.

V. People and the Spirit.

- A. These people are so poor they are poor why, because they cannot afford the P. Yet they every day, all day they walk with Christ.
- B. We visited the child whom Michael and Signe have sponsored since he was an itty bitty. He is a twin and his parents have died. He currently lives with his grandparents and his cousin.
- C. This is a picture of his room/ the shack he shares with his brother. Oh yeah, a cow calf sleeps in the shack with them.

- D. Look what is written outside the door of the shack.
- E. The people are so filled with joy. Their faith is incomprehensible and their lives rotate around God and community.
- F. There are 5 churches in Njuruta. Kim, Bailey and I attended a Catholic mass and you would have thought it was Pentecostal. The people wholeheartedly worshipped and the interesting thing, at least for me, was the Catholic priest's response in that the priests modified the mass in order to incorporate the needs of the people. While this may seem like a common sense thing for us it is novel for priests to deviate from the liturgy of mass. It is evident that all of the clergy in Njuruta care deeply for the community and the people deeply embrace Christ.
- G. The FH workers have become intricate parts of the community. McKenna, pictured here carrying a large rock on her head, and Jeff know all the families in the communities intimately and interact between the members of the community, leaders within the community, government officials and the churches in order to better the community.
- H. Singing, dancing and just being joyful is the norm within the community.
- I. Sharing is also significant. When we were there the community fed us. Every day in Njuruta we had a huge serving of rice, beans, carrots and meat as a part of a community meal. While this may not be significant to many Americans, the fact that 1) they fed us while they were in the grips of just being able to sustain themselves is miraculous and 2) the fact there was meat in the meal is mind blowing. They have to sacrifice greatly in order to provide meat.
- J. Furthermore, we were given probably close to five dozen eggs by various people in the community. To many of these people eggs are their only source of protein and are, not to be dramatic, a life source for these people. Yet, here they are giving us these eggs, these things which, at least to me, were more precious than gold.

VI. God is Working

- A. God is working in this community. I witnessed God using people as His instruments and I believe I witnessed His Spirit dynamically among the people of Njuruta. Thank you all for allowing Signe, Michael, Cade, my family and I the opportunity to witness God's activity in this community.