

Cared for with love

With the support of a group of New Zealand Rotarians, leprosy victims and their families in Tanzania are receiving the care they deserve.

When PDG Stuart Batty and the late John Somerville travelled to Tanzania in 2001, their journey took them to the Upendo Rehabilitation Home for Leprosy Sufferers in Maji ya Chai. The centre was home to 150 men, women and children, including widows of leprosy victims and families where both parents suffered the debilitating, though curable, condition.

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The Rotary Club of Arusha, Tanzania, established the home in 1995, providing accommodation for leprosy sufferers and their families. Prior to this, victims had been forced to scrape together a living on the streets and take up residence on a nearby riverbank. Upendo, which means “cared for with love”, improved their welfare considerably, though improvements were necessary to make facilities and resources accessible.

John and Stuart asked how New Zealand Rotarians could assist the effort. The suggestion of helping the children of Upendo led to the launch of Project CHEF, an acronym for Clothe, House, Educate and Feed. Since then, many children have been assisted by the effort, such as Monica Maiko, who has been supported by the Rotary Club of East Coast Bays, NZ, since she was a baby, with the nickname “Happy”.

Rotary oversaw the transference of Upendo’s management to the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood in 2003, who specialise in the care of the sick. Previously, the sisters would bicycle up the long and dusty road to Upendo each week to tend to the foot and leg sores of those with leprosy. Rotary’s offer to the sisters to take up residence at Upendo was happily accepted.

In the years since, they have greatly improved living conditions and provision of health care services and hygiene education. The sisters, with Rotary’s support, further prepare the children for formal schooling and encourage residents to realise their potential, despite their circumstances.

Thankfully, leprosy rates in the area have declined in the decades since Upendo’s establishment, with the facility instrumental in reducing incidence and spread. Today, Upendo has branched out to care for the poorest of the poor, as well as leprosy sufferers.

Monica is currently attending St Ritaliza Secondary School, a boarding school close to the Kenyan border. Stuart recently returned to Tanzania and was delighted to meet Monica, accompanied by Head Sister Agatha of Upendo.

“New Zealand Rotarians can be proud of their contribution to helping children like Monica on their way to a now bright future,” Stuart said.



Head of Ritaliza Secondary School, Sister Mary Masway, and Sister in Charge Upendo Rehabilitation Home, Sister Maryagatha Massae.