

Local charity celebrates 10 years of service

by Traci Marsing

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Classrooms in Kenya benefit from the efforts of the Opportunity Fund for Developing Countries program that is based in Sugar House.



OFDC's Nia Sherar poses with two young boys. The organization provides uniforms for Kenyan students.

The Opportunity Fund for Developing Countries is a Sugar House-based non-profit 501c3 organization that was founded in 1999 by Executive Director Nia Z. Sherar. The volunteer-powered staff works out of their homes to reduce overhead costs and make the most of financial donations.

During the last decade, OFDC has assisted people in Bolivia, Guatemala, Malawi, Nepal and currently Kenya. Their goal is to provide much needed aid for people in under developed areas and help them to be educated, self-reliant and healthy in a culturally sensitive way.

“We want to increase global consciousness and act locally,” Sherar said.

OFDC’s mission is to empower women, educate children and enhance health for all. Since 1999, they have provided 754 microcredits, small loans to women so they can provide for themselves and their families. They have given over 3,000 scholarships to educate children (one child may receive multiple scholarships to complete their education). Nearly 4,300 women have been trained in basic health, education, bookkeeping and HIV/AIDS awareness. OFDC has also provided 75 water tanks and water wells, 79 latrines, 3,796 mosquito nets and 3,930 malaria treatments for children.

Change is happening slowly, but it is happening.

“To the little girl who does get to go to school it does make a difference,” Sherar said. Even if she returns home after her schooling, she can use that knowledge to find her voice, stay healthy and have an improved quality of life for her and her family. “You can never take that education away,” Sherar said. “There are still people in this world who have to drink water out of a river, who don’t have electricity, only have dirt floors, [and] there a women who don’t know how to write their own name (they use their thumbprint), but slowly it’s changing. Over the past 10 years it’s gotten better. Seat belts are provided in matatus (a taxi-like van) and people actually use them. How did they know about seat belts and safety? Through education. That’s why I say we can find beauty wherever we look; you just have to see it. We can find it.”

OFDC spends the money donated in Kenya, to not only save time and cost of shipping items from the U.S. but to put that money into Kenya’s economy. Sherar said that most items that can be purchased here are available in Kenya. However, she brings expensive stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs and other basic quality medical supplies that are donated by a physician who is on the OFDC Board

because villages are typically stocked with less quality supplies.

OFDC is grateful for their donators who, especially in the current economic climate, want to donate money to where it will do the most good. Through education, change is happening “poli, poli,” (slowly, slowly). Change is vital to saving and improving lives a world away, Sherar asserts.

She is available to give presentations about OFDC and the needs of those they serve. She has given slide-show presentations to students in grade school through graduate school and is happy to provide this community and service groups. Visit <http://www.ofdc.org> to learn more about the Opportunity Fund for Developing Countries.