

Joy Winners Ntherone Empowerment Group, Kenya

Partnered with FUMC, Pearland and Redeemer Church, January 2021 – December 2023

FIRST YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS REPORT - January 2022

Group Income Projects

- Farming project. The group farms pigeon peas and their harvest last season was relatively good. They divided the produce among themselves for yearlong, family consumption.
- Merry-go-round savings fund. Each member makes regular, small contributions to this fund (about .44 usd weekly). The accumulated money is used to purchase household items of choice such as chickens, kitchenware, or plastic chairs.
- Table banking. Group members pooled their money to create this fund so that low interest (10%), short term loans are available for members to access for business expansion or emergencies.



Some members of the Joy Winners Group conduction their table bank.

Group Activities

The group visited two needy families in their community with food during the Christmas season.

Household Income Generating Activities

All 28 heads of household started at least one business after training and receiving grants.

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| 3 salons | 3 grocery kiosks | 4 buy and sell chickens | 1 sells secondhand |
| 3 tailoring shops | 5 convenience shops | 2 sell fried eggs | bedding |
| 1 carpentry workshop | 2 run small restaurants | 3 sell French fries | 3 sell porridge & arrow |
| 3 mechanics | 2 sell milk | | roots |

Zoe Empowers supported 10 participants to attend vocational training as follows: hairdressing (3), carpentry (1), tailoring (3), and mechanics (3).

Households Agricultural Activities

- All households planted crops such as cow peas, maize, green grams, and beans. The harvest last season was good because they got enough rain.
- 26 households have kitchen gardens where they grow different types of vegetables such as amaranth, kale, spinach, and onions.
- All households used their business income to buy chickens. Additionally, Zoe provided funds for five household to purchase small livestock of their choice (with group approval) and 12 households are additionally raising livestock like goats, rabbits, ducks, and pigs.
- 19 households used their business profits to purchase livestock. These include goats, chicken, rabbits, sheep, and pigs. Six families, as selected by their groupmates, received support from Zoe to start keeping livestock.



A pod group from the Joy Group with the farming tool and seeds Zoe provided.

First year report from Kenya on groups which began meeting January 2021

The following is an overview of the trainings and resources distributed to the children in your empowerment group during their first year in the Zoe Empowers Kenya program. This class includes 24 groups encompassing 703 households with 2552 orphaned and vulnerable children.



Training sessions during the first year of Zoe Empowers program are frequent and cover multiple areas of program implementation. Above, heads of household from multiple January 2021 groups attend a training on child rights.

Income Generation

Over 700 heads of household from the Zoe Empowers Kenya groups which began meeting in January 2021 were trained on basic small and medium business operations in March. Immediately after training, each youth submitted their individual business plan to their group peers for review. Once their plan was approved, they received a grant to start their project.

Those who were already skilled at time of recruitment were supported with tools, equipment, and funds to start their trade business immediately. Youths with an interest but who were unskilled were enrolled in apprenticeships or vocational training as soon as possible. By September all had completed training and received resources to start their trade business. During this first year, 240 Zoe participants started a trade business (tailoring, barbering, carpentry, etc.).

The businesses are picking up as the economy recovers from the impact of Covid-19 restrictions. In their second year, the participants will receive more funds to boost their businesses and also for some to start alternative new businesses. These funds are normally channeled through the groups' table banks so that it is paid back into that fund. Over time, the groups will grow their table bank balances and use the money to provide low interest loans to their members and create an emergency fund for challenging times.

Food Security

At recruitment, most families say lack of food is the main challenge they experience, second only to the emotional trauma of losing a parent. Because of this, immediately after group formation the program trains and provides basic inputs so that the families can grow sufficient amounts of food to feed themselves with surplus to sell.

Towards the end of February 2021, the participants learned about modern farming methods and what crops were suited to their region's climate. They were taught about the importance of preparing land early, how to select good quality seeds for drought resistant crops, and proper use of fertilizer and pesticides. Training also covered post-harvest care and animal husbandry. The agricultural trainings were conducted by government extension agriculture officers who are based within the community.

All the households received farming tools (a hoe and a machete each) and planting seeds such as maize, beans, pigeon peas, potatoes, and green grams depending on what was suitable for their region. Each group selected several members to receive small livestock which they could breed and share with the others.

During the first season the rains were not enough and therefore the harvest was not good, but this previous season was better and families harvested enough to eat well. The training on post-harvest care ensures the youth can have food stored to last until the next planting season and also enables them to hold on to their harvest and sell when market prices rise.

Housing

At least 70% of the households had a major challenge with housing. In August 2021, 12 families that did not have any place to call home were supported with funds to construct their houses. The group members provided free labor. Additionally, 16 other families made significant repairs to their homes purchasing locally available materials with the profits from their individual businesses. The participants are encouraged to support each other in improving their housing status and to use local materials which are relatively affordable.



A regional health and hygiene training for youth from the 2021 groups

Health and Hygiene

Towards the end of March, all the youth in this class were trained on basic ways to maintain good health and hygiene in their households. The trainings were conducted by government public health officers who are from the ministry of health and are based at the government hospitals in the local communities. This creates a linkage so that participants know where and how to access medical care if needed. Other trainings covered reproductive health and on specifics for curbing the spread of Covid-19. These actions and inputs greatly reduce cases of illness.

During training they learned the importance proper waste disposal, handwashing, drying dishes under direct sunlight, personal hygiene, and good grooming. Afterwards, all participants agreed they would make improvements to their home environment to ensure better health. In April, the members and their program facilitators made visits to each other's homes to check on their progress. When all tasks were completed, they rewarded with a large tank for storing clean drinking water and blankets to protect themselves from cold.

Child Rights

At recruitment, the children usually have no understanding of child rights or even how to seek protection if they are abused. Within their groups and with program facilitators they share their experiences of exploitation: having property taken from them after their parents' death; being forced to do hard labor and work in environments that expose them to sexual exploitation/harassment; being paid below the minimum wage, with food, or even being denied payment for day labor.

In May, all the participants in this class were trained on child rights and protection by officers from the children's office in their respective administrative units. They are now enlightened and most have become the voice for other youths in their communities. On June 16 they joined other youths in celebrating 'The International Day of the African Child' which seeks to raise awareness on child rights.

Education

During the child rights training, the heads of household learned that education is a child right. They were urged to make sure their siblings attended school frequently and worked hard at their studies.

After a long closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools reopened in January 2021. Zoe Empowers Kenya supported 432 siblings with school uniform; this includes those who were being re-enrolled back to school as well as those who were attending school just before the Covid-19 closure. At the secondary level, 120 siblings who attained an average pass mark were supported with school fees.



Siblings of Favor Nkinyanga Group members model the new school uniform they received from the Zoe Empowers Kenya program

Spiritual Strengthening

Prayer and devotions are a regular part of group meetings as Zoe Empowers helps the children understand that God loves them and wants them to have a good life. To strengthen their faith, the program organized a Zoe prayer day on September 16 that all were invited to attend. The entire day was dedicated to prayer and spiritual nourishment from local priest and pastors that the youth choose to invite. In October, all first-year households received a bible so that they could help their siblings grow spiritually.

Joy Winners Ntherone Group, Kenya

28 households and a total of 103 children



Ann (f) 18

Vincent (m) 8
Dyana (f) 13
Emma (f) 7
Shirleen (f) 3

Nancy (f) 18

Sharon (f) 13
Captain (m) 11
Savline (f) 8
Lewis (m) 5

Bridget (f) 17

Domis (f) 12
Lenah (f) 9
Helen (f) 7
Sosiline (f) 3

Florence (f) 17

Diana (f) 13
Kefas (m) 2
Marisela (f) 9
Saline (f) 6

Juster (f) 16

Kelvin (m) 12

Roney (m) 17

Donah (f) 13
Winlove (f) 8
Erick (m) 4

Nancy (f) 19

Samwel (m) 10
Ernest (m) 2
Amos (m) 17

Bessy (f) 18

Abraham (m) 16
Alyson (m) 13
Denis (m) 10
Brivin (m) 3

Millicent (f) 17

Floreen (f) 13
Queenlezer (f) 5
Justus (m) 2

Esther (f) 17

Yaston (m) 14
Patrick (m) 10
Lorgan (m) 3

Darleen (f) 14

Bessy (f) 10
Weddy (f) 5

Agnes (f) 17

Daniel (m) 16
Risper (f) 9
Stacy (f) 2

Martin (m) 19

Joy (f) 12
Newton (m) 8
Destiny (f) 1

Winfred (f) 16

Naomi (f) 17
Florence (f) 18
Douglas (m) 15

Brendah (f) 17

Jamlick (m) 14
Loise (f) 7
Sheniz (f) 1
Priscah (f) 3

Hyder (f) 15

Peris (f) 5
Defina (f) 2
Fayoni (f) 11

Mercy (f) 16

Kelvin (m) 11
Costiline (m) 4
Zickiline (m) 3

Douglas (m) 18

Kelvin (m) 16
Vincent (m) 13
Dickson (m) 9

Irene (f) 18

Wicklif (m) 5
Johidah (m) 8

Doris (f) 17

Caren (f) 11
Festas (m) 7
Perpetual (f) 3

Jonah (m) 17

Doris (f) 16

Linet (f) 15

Caren (f) 7
Precious (f) 9

Doughlas (m) 17

Ann (m) 16
Nancy (m) 14

Eulidah (f) 18

Jayden (m) 2
Erick (m) 14

Doris (f) 17

Fridah (f) 15
Caren (f) 13

Annita (f) 18

Alex (m) 6
Lenick (m) 3

Benson (m) 16

Dorcus (f) 15

Denis (m) 12
Mary (f) 17

The following describes how Zoe empowers orphaned and vulnerable children to move beyond the need for charity by comprehensively addressing the multiple challenges faced by those in living in ultra- poverty.

Group Formation

When Zoe first enters a community to help children, we begin by engaging the local leaders. Staff members explain how Zoe is an empowerment program, enabling children to move from crippling poverty and dependency to economic and social self-sufficiency. Although different from the usual relief approach, it resonates with leaders who want to see sustainable change in their village. Since staff are indigenous to each country in which Zoe operates they understand local customs, challenges, and resources available.

During the first meeting the youth elect leaders, make rules to guide their meetings, choose a group name, and decide when and where to hold weekly gatherings. To strengthen peer bonds, groups begin shared income activities and agricultural projects.

The youth complete training on topics of food security, health and disease prevention, business management, and child rights within the first six months. If they have access to land they receive seeds to start gardens and plant crops. If siblings are not attending school, Zoe provides uniforms and other resources to get them back into classes. Children who have skills are provided grants so that they can start small businesses, others begin vocational training. Most importantly, all begin to experience God's love and they realize that though many are orphaned, they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

The Dream

One of the first tasks new members complete is the creation of their "Dream" chart. Most orphaned and vulnerable children entering the Zoe empowerment program face a daily struggle to survive; there is neither time to think about the future nor reason to hope for something better. But through Zoe and your partnership, the children learn to imagine a new life and prepare to make it a reality.

The Zoe program facilitator leads members through an exercise called the Dream process where they examine their current situation and then set their goals. After considering their family's hopes and needs, the youth who is considered the head of the household and is the primary member of their empowerment group creates a poster of responses to a standard set of questions.



The youth then presents the Dream to the rest of the group members who express support and give feedback, especially concerning the primary goal. These Dream documents help the program facilitators better understand the conditions of the children's lives so they can address specific needs or traumas suffered. The family keeps a copy of their Dream, often displaying it in their home to provide daily motivation as they strive to create their new life. As they progress through the empowerment program they will often update their Dream.

Connections

One of the biggest disadvantages orphaned and vulnerable children face is isolation from peers and the larger community. Struggling on their own, the children lack moral support, access to community resources, and a network of people to help them progress and face challenges. Zoe creates connections.

Peer group. The youth served by Zoe Empowers have often dropped out of school and stopped attending church or community events. They do not even realize how many others share their plight but at the first group meeting, when each new member tells their story, the bonding process begins. By working together on income projects and helping each other make improvements to their homes and start businesses, friendships form and the group becomes an extended family – committed to helping each other face challenges and achieve their dreams. Groups meet for regional training sessions and experienced/graduated Zoe youth visit new groups. In this way, the youth learn from each other's experiences, form networking relationships, and are motivated.

Program facilitator and mentor. Zoe program facilitators usually hold a diploma in social work or related fields and have experience working with children. They care deeply about the children and are available to provide counseling as needed, but they do not fill a role of guardian nor do they attend all the group meetings. This is important so that the youth develop their own problem-solving abilities and can become fully self-reliant. Each group has a local mentor which they select to help represent and guide the group within their community. Mentors receive training from Zoe and then attend weekly meetings, make home visits, and help resolve challenges in the community.

Community leaders and government officials. This would include school administrators for school reintegration; local leaders who can address cases of abuse and improperly seized property; government officials who can provide expert advice on business development, agriculture and higher education; and health service providers.

And a powerful connection is you! All Zoe groups know the opportunities they receive are from God, through the love and concern coming from their partners far away. They are amazed that you would care for them without ever having met them. This powerful connection is further strengthened if a partner can visit the country to witness what the youth have achieved.

Child Rights

A major focus of Zoe's empowerment program is teaching children about the rights their local government and international laws promise. Such training is often conducted by the local officials in charge of enforcing child rights so the children get to know those who are responsible for their protection. Additionally, Zoe's group-based model creates crowd support through which the youth can defend each other from all forms of abuse; physical, financial or emotional.

In the many communities where Zoe works, young girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse and often feel they are powerless to resist. Protecting the rights of girls includes educating the entire community about the dangers and harm inherent in all forms of mistreatment, especially child marriage, sex trafficking, and female genital mutilation. Zoe's emphasis on forming gender-mixed groups strengthens the support available to girls within their groups and creates leaders who will encourage fair and just treatment for all.

Zoe's goal is to ensure that all children are able to stand up for themselves and their rights in the community. Often children in the Zoe group learn these lessons so well that they not only defend their own rights, but also the rights of others who may be abused or neglected in their communities.

Food Security

Children entering the Zoe empowerment program struggle every day to alleviate their hunger. Usually they try to find work, but because they lack status or an adult advocate in their community, they are paid extremely low wages or small amounts of food. They might try growing their own food, but they do not have the resources or knowledge to succeed. It is not unusual for these children to go two or three days without eating. Occasionally they must resort to begging or even taking from a neighbor's field just to survive. Even those children who do manage to eat daily suffer health consequences from the poor nutritional quality of their meals.

With guidance from Zoe program facilitators, new groups learn what foods they need to eat as well as explore different ways to attain a stable food source. Because Zoe is an empowerment program, the children are not told what to do, but are instead given options and training so that they can devise their own approach to becoming food secure and self-sufficient.

Children in rural areas who can access land will learn about the best agricultural practices for their region and then be given the seeds, fertilizer, and tools to begin vegetable gardens and/or plant crops like corn. Other Zoe households might start with raising small animals, like rabbits or chickens, after learning about animal husbandry. All children are encouraged to begin earning money as soon as possible to increase their food security.

Income Generation

Zoe helps the children generate an income at both the group and household level. A group project might involve growing a cash crop, raising small livestock, or producing and selling a product like soap. These projects provide experience, foster group cohesion, and produce profits for the group's savings and loan fund. Individual households also start small income generating-activities like buying and reselling food items, phone calling cards, clothing, etc. Some youth who are already skilled immediately receive resources to begin businesses in trades like tailoring, auto mechanics, or hairstyling. Zoe urges youth to continue growing their wealth and financial security by completing vocational training, expanding their business into new markets, or starting multiple businesses.

Before distributing resources, Zoe trains all empowerment group members on how to craft a business plan and manage money. After this training, the group members take the following steps:

- Brainstorm what businesses could succeed in their community
- Create individual and group business plans and present these to the group for discussion
- Vote to approve the proposals or help the members create a better plan

Once the business plan is approved, the individual receives a micro-grant and/or a start-up kit. The start-up kits provide money or resources to start trade businesses including required items/tools, rent, and business permits. Throughout this process the Zoe program facilitator is available to provide guidance but does not tell the group what to do or make decisions for them. If a poor decision is made, the youth will learn from the experience, but still have the support of their group and Zoe to try again.

To provide money for business expansion and also generate group income, many groups establish "table banks." Members start the fund by all contributing a set amount of money which is immediately made available for short term loans with the interest paid up front. This pre-paid interest is also available for loans. The fund grows fast. Some groups pay dividends to all members, others use it for something that benefits the whole group like their Christmas party.

Health and Disease Prevention

Zoe's goal is to address immediate health needs, teach the children how to live healthy lives, and connect them to medical resources. Preventative education includes:

- Basic hygiene practices such as hand washing, boiling water, and keep their home and surroundings clean
- Nutrition, especially important since the children have often had very limited diets
- Diseases transmission and treatment; especially for malaria and HIV/AIDS
- Dangers of substance abuse
- Specialized training for girls' personal health and safety

Many of the children have lost a parent to HIV infection and often the children too are suffering from the virus. Because of the associated stigma, they are usually reluctant to discuss their status and sometimes even avoid treatment. Zoe provides supportive opportunities for children to be tested, helps them access medications, and educates to counter the many misconceptions held in the community.

After youth achieve basic health and hygiene standards in their homes, Zoe distributes of items like mosquito nets, water tanks, blankets, and hygiene products a reward. Zoe also teaches the heads of households about health insurance and how to budget their own money for insurance, emergencies, and health related products. In Kenya, the government offers a health insurance plan, but many people choose instead to save their money to address health needs as they arise. Zoe encourages all families to purchase the insurance so that they can address health issues, especially emergencies.

The children are taught about the importance of improving their physical appearance and keeping their home clean and attractive for social integration. When the children look "smart" their confidence increases, they feel better about themselves, and others in the community begin treating them with respect and acceptance.

Housing

Often, children entering Zoe are living in houses left by their deceased parents that are in disrepair or are homeless without a permanent residence. It is also common for orphaned and vulnerable children to work in exchange for a room, this leaves them vulnerable to abuse and with little time for other activities or to earn money for food. In general, Zoe does not provide housing for the children, but it does give the group funds which they can use to help out those members in greatest need by providing temporary rent assistance or materials to make emergency repairs. In some programs, Zoe is able to provide basic construction materials like roofing materials or windows. Usually, the youth save money to improve their housing and their groupmates provide labor assistance as needed.

At times Zoe is able to partner with local governments or villages to find housing for these children or to supply land and other resources. Zoe's emphasis is on helping the children find appropriate housing while also teaching them how to save money to repair or purchase their own home. Sometimes this means they move in with another group member or find a reasonable renting situation while they save profits from businesses to buy land and build their own home.

Education

Zoe does not need to teach the children and young caregivers who join empowerment groups about the importance of education. These children desperately want to attend school. Prior to joining Zoe, many children participated in school, but were forced to drop out due to chronic illness, hunger, social ostracism, lack of clothing, and/or lack of money. Once in the program, the young heads of households (many of whom have been

out of the educational system for too long to be reintegrated) are eager to see their younger siblings back in school as soon as possible.

So that children can quickly return to school, Zoe will meet with school administrators and assist with some of the expenses such as uniforms, fees, and materials. The group may also pay for some of these materials when there is a special need. As with all other aspects of the Zoe program, the emphasis is on empowering the children to pay for their own educational expenses. It is a great source of pride and self-esteem for the youth who are the heads of their households to be able to share how they are able to work to send their younger siblings to school. It is like hearing parents brag about the accomplishments of their children and it is very moving to see in a sibling.

Spiritual Strengthening

Often the isolation that the children feel when they begin the Zoe program extends to their thoughts about God. Because they are abused and discriminated against by their community - and often this includes Christians in their village - they believe God has also abandoned or even cursed them. At other times they believe that maybe God does not exist, or if God does exist that they are somehow beyond God's love. In the very first meeting a Zoe staff member often shares the Lord's Prayer with the children, and talk about how they are not truly orphaned because they have their heavenly Father who loves them.

Meetings begin with Scripture readings, prayer, and devotions led by a group member, but while this is available to the children they are never coerced into the Christian faith. Zoe's program is religiously non-restrictive, yet offers a compelling view of the love Christians show to others. One of the most powerful parts of the empowerment program is the way these children put their faith into action in their own community. They forgive those who have harmed them; feed others who are even poorer than themselves; adopt other children and share their resources and knowledge with them; pray and care for one another; and pay fair wages to those who had once taken advantage of their situation with hard labor and poor pay. These children return good for evil and can be examples to all of what it means to live as Christians.