

Buckner Kenya leader pours himself into poor children

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By Ken Camp

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NAIROBI, Kenya—Children surround Dickson Masindano as he walks the 13.5-acre campus of the Baptist Children's Center in the Dandora section of Nairobi, clamoring for his attention.

Youngsters
from the
Baptist
Children's
Center in
Nairobi
surround
Dickson
Masindano
(right),
director of
Buckner
Kenya, and
Tom
Okore,
mission
director
for
Buckner
Kenya.
(Photo by
Ken Camp)

For nearly five years, they—and the other 1.7 million orphaned and abandoned children of Kenya—not only have had his attention, but also have captured his heart.

Masindano serves as Kenya national director for Buckner International, a children and family services agency related to the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“I never imagined I’d be doing this kind of thing,” said Masindano, who

developed the first foster-care program in Kenya and continues to hold a governmental post on the Children's Council, in addition to his responsibilities with Buckner.

When Masindano was a student at the University of Nairobi, he dreamed of continuing his studies at the graduate level and then establishing a counseling center in a rural area like Kiminini, the village in northern Kenya where he grew up.

Through a missionary, he learned about the graduate school at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene. He moved to Texas and earned a master's degree in counseling.

Shortly before he graduated, he talked with a friend at school whose parents were involved with Buckner.

"I found out Buckner was looking for an opportunity to do something in Nairobi, and they were looking for someone to lead the program in Kenya," Masindano said.

Buckner Vice President Mike Douris traveled to Abilene to interview Masindano four days before he was scheduled to return to Kenya. Douris offered him the job, and Masindano extended his stay in the United States to spend two weeks training with Buckner in Dallas.



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“When I first came here (to work with Buckner in Kenya), I was the only social worker, the accountant and the recruiter. I began the foster-care program. And for two years, I didn’t even have an administrative assistant,” he recalled. “But now they have sent people to help me out.”

Recently, Tom Okore joined the Buckner Kenya staff as mission director, working directly with volunteer groups who travel to Kenya to work with Buckner’s community development centers and other ministries to children and families.

Another worker who assists Masindano—Joseph—originally worked as a house parent with boys at the Baptist Children’s Center until he married recently. His bride, who came through the Baptist Children’s Center and later foster care, works with Masindano at Buckner’s office at the Nairobi Baptist Center.

Joseph had grown up in the city’s slums, and he was able to empathize with the challenges the children face.

“I feel God called me to minister among children who struggle as I did,” he said.

With additional help, Masindano spends less time working on clerical chores and on the logistics of providing transportation and lodging for visiting mission groups. That allows him more time to focus on the overall work of improving the lives and spiritual wellbeing of Kenya’s children—a job that has become his life’s passion.

“My greatest satisfaction is when I see a child succeeding in life,” he said. “When they come here (to the Baptist Children’s Center), most never had a mind of ever succeeding. All the odds were against them.

“These are the poorest of the poor. But they see they are the equal of anybody’s children. They are able to get an education, pass exams, go on to

college, maybe even become a doctor.

“When they come here, three meals a day does not seem imaginable. This is a fresh beginning for these kids. They are able to see life from a different perspective.”

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