



Kesho's Story

Kate Nokes Jan 2016

It all started in Wendy's garden, back in 2004.

Lisa White and Adam Bodley-Tickle, two UK academics, were living in Wendy Corroyer's compound, next door to Kate Nokes and her family. They were visiting the Kemri-Wellcome Trust Research Laboratories for a few months while Lisa did some advanced mathematical modeling work with Kate's husband James. Being passionate about education, Lisa and Adam started supporting two secondary students through school; Rose and George. When they went back to the UK, Kate was asked to ensure their school fees were paid. She did; it was all very straightforward.

When Lisa and Adam came back a second time, they had persuaded three of their friends to help too. Kate was once again asked to manage the payment of school fees. While she was keen to help, she wasn't comfortable with taking money off people she didn't know. "We need a committee" she said, "to ensure financial transparency". It will come as no surprise that Kate ended up the Treasurer for the next 10 years.

So in 2004, a meeting was called at Adam and Lisa's house. Kate Nokes (a UK academic) Zena Salim (Civil Society and Community Leader) and Anna Muli (Kilifi Resident and Housekeeper) were invited; a lovely mix of people who were united by their common concern about the lack of educational opportunities for children in Kilifi. It was there that Kesho was born, and where the tiny seed was planted of a very happy and fruitful ten year Kesho partnership between Kate and Zena.

As Zena says, "In those days we used to meet once a month, in each others houses, over a cup of tea and chapatti to discuss the individual challenges of the 5 children we were supporting and what we could do to help. Then, as numbers grew we divided the children among us, so we could continue to give them individual support and attention they needed; some of them had very complicated lives." Meeting the specific needs of individuals was then and remains now as one of Kesho's guiding principles.

When Lisa and Adam left Kenya for the last time in 2006, we were supporting 42 children through school. Their parting words of wisdom to the committee were "Try something new. Hold a Kesho Day where you can meet all the children together in one place; it will be fun everyone getting to know each other and it will be easier to discuss their progress, their challenges and successes and to write their cheques for the next term's fees!" It was a great idea. For the next two years the committee did just that; meeting the children at Kilifi Members Club, under the makuti thatch roof and overlooking Kilifi Creek, with a ready supply of soda's and chapatis for sustenance.



Children,
Terina
Carnall
and Kate
Nokes at
Kesho
Day
2006
Kilifi
Members
Club

Then in 2008 we prepared ourselves for a change of fortune and period of significant growth. Funds had been raised through a matching grant with the Rotary Clubs of Vinnings and Kilifi to support 50 students through secondary school over the next four years. Kesho was asked to manage the programme and to become a Cooperating Institution of Rotary International.

Kate, always the voice of caution on the committee, met the news with some anxiety; she was worried about managing the rate of growth of Kesho and was content with its current size and simple management structure. Zena and Tabitha Mwangi (another Kemri Academic) who had joined Kesho in 2005, were always the 'let's do it' voices on the committee and were therefore super excited about how this funding opportunity would help do more for children's education within our community. They were right of course. We didn't know then, but these initial opposing reactions to change by Kate and Zena were to be repeated many times over the following eight years under their joint leadership. However, by listening to their respective fears and dreams, and laughing at the predictability of their responses, together with the Board, they steered Kesho gently and boldly to becoming the award winning charity it is today. A true partnership and team built on friendship and respect.

When Kesho accepted the Rotary funding the number of Kesho children accessing higher education in our community was doubled. Restructuring was needed. Kesho employed a full-time Administrator; MacKinlay Mutsembi in June of 2008, registered as a Community Based Organisation in Kenya and were given permission to share the office space of Upendo, a local orphan support group in Kilifi. We used to hold our Committee Meetings in their grounds.



L-R: MacKinlay Mutsempi (Administrator), Zena Salim (Chair and Co-Founder), Saida Famau (Member), Sally Bagenal (Executive Chair), Tabitha Mwangi (Secretary), Sally Crompton (Member)

How we were going to fund the new administrative structure wasn't clear but it was a now or never moment. Good timing and good fortune were on our side. A founder of another education charity in Mombasa called ACTS, introduced Kate to Mrs. Wei Sinclair, a family member and Trustee of a small grant awarding charity in Bangkok called the Jonaron Foundation, or Jovinas Trust as it was known then. They were looking for small charities, like Kesho, to give a helping hand to. We fitted the bill. Their funds helped us to pay our rent, Mac's salary and our administration costs. What started out as a chance meeting over lunch led to a long and supportive relationship with Jonaron still funding Kesho today (2016).

As a Cooperating Institution of Rotary International we needed to think about a logo and branding so Rotary could be officially represented in the partnership. Lisa White, now in Bangkok, was there to help yet again; carefully choosing two of a long row of figures which Neema, Anna Muli's daughter, had painted on the back of a wooden bench on Kate's verandah with a bunch of other children one afternoon.



We turned to a good friend and neighbour of Kate's for Kesho's branding. Simon Crompton jointly owned a website design company called Symbiosis in the UK, and his business partner, Jane McNeil, produced the letterhead and branding we use today.



Finally we needed a website and a database. Kate, loving the back office tasks as usual, set out to design the website. Jules Johnson, another Symbiosis employee offered to design a bespoke database to help us manage our students and sponsors, income and contacts. The database has been invaluable and is still in use today.

The partnership with Rotary Vinnings turned out to be really successful. Under the initial leadership and commitment of Janet Midega, a malaria entomologist at Kemri, the Rotary Club of Kilifi became very involved with both the recruitment and student review process with many Rotary students going on to University under their guidance and support.

Having an office at Upendo and Mac as our Administrator was a complete breath of fresh air; giving the committee and the children all the benefits of having a central focal point, meeting place and clear organisational structure. There was new energy and a feeling of stability, empowerment and positivity. After a year, we decided it was time to take the next step and move to our own rented offices in Kilifi Town.

A double office became available in 2009, centrally located, and above Jacob's School Uniform Shop. It was perfect. We employed an assistant and used the back office as a resource centre and cosy safe space for children to come to read and study in the holidays. They loved it and so did we.



The same year we were the recipients of a huge secondhand book donation from BookCycle in the UK. We shared it with Kilifi Community Library, Upendo and Streetwise in Tanzania but there was still enough to stock our resource centres over night. Little did we know then it would grow to become the Literacy and Enrichment Programmes we have today.



Kate Nokes and Zena Salim opening books from BookCycle UK

2009 was an exciting year for firsts. It was the year ...

(a) our first Kesho students enrolled in university; Kai Johnson (Engineering) and Queen Gari (Law). An amazing achievement particularly for children from the coast region where only 3% of children attend university.

(b) We launched several important student events including our first annual careers day (Kesho's flagship event, supported hugely by Kemri employees), our first Reproductive Health Day and our first Christmas Craft Day; events which are core to Kesho's programmes and still running today.

After about a year in 2010, as fortune would have it, another double office, to the side of us, also became available. We took it without hesitation, responding to the growing demand for resource centre space by the students. The first back office became a Resource Centre dedicated to Secondary students with occasional seminars and a quiet place to study with the books they needed. The new offices were dedicated to the nursery and primary school children where we ran a regular activity programme in the holidays with games, puzzles and story time. Teacher Irene from Upendo helped us voluntarily and we never looked back.

The resource centres were so popular that in spite of this expansion the space still wasn't enough. We couldn't keep up. The secondary students started occupying the floor above us which was still under construction. It wasn't the safest of places but the students wanted it; it was quiet and breezy.



By now, we had over 150 students being sponsored. So much was happening that we needed a dedicated programme officer to take care of the Primary children and one for the Secondary students too.

Beatrice Njeri was employed that same year (2010) in September and Sandra Liani was employed shortly afterwards in July the following year. With two new programme officers in place Kesho was able to extend its services to children and take forward its enrichment, training and academic support programmes; tailoring the services to meet the childrens' needs.



Slowly the building work progressed and by mid 2011 Beatrice was able to start organizing seminars for students in the holidays; maths tuition, inspirational talks, films you name it, in response to what the students told her they wanted. There was plaster on the walls but no windows – it all added up to a light a breezy space. We borrowed furniture from Upendo to house everyone and ensure it was supervised at all times.



During all this time, Kate and Zena’s responsibilities were increasing rapidly and Kate was also the accountant and financial manager. It was time to employ an accountant. In 2011 we asked Ted Todd to be Kesho’s part-time accountant. He was ideal as he had helped Kate set up the accounting system from the start. We never looked back.

Then in 2012 we had a child protection issue present itself to the office. A Kesho child had been sexually abused. Not knowing how to best handle the situation we approached another small organisation in Kilifi operating at the time and met Isabel Mwangi who guided us through the process.

This incident stimulated a lot of discussion and concern within the office and highlighted the need for Kesho to have a proper child protection policy in place. In developing the policy, we realised the

first incident was not an isolated case. Isabel started volunteering to support Kesho with our child protection needs and by 2013 was a full-time programme officer responsible for developing and managing Kesho's Child Protection Programme.

By January 2012, Jacob had completed the upstairs and we moved lock stock and barrel to the top floor. It was a wonderful open plan and cool space; ideal for our offices and resource centres and with flexibility to move furniture around to create study areas as well as zones for seminars, meetings and so on. It was perfect! We held 24 events that year and the number continues to grow.



Throughout 2012 we were a happy and fulfilled team. Ted was the Accountant, Beatrice the Secondary PO, Isabel the Child Protection PO and Sandra the Primary PO. We were having such fun and supporting 275 children.



L-R: Ted Todd (Accountant), Beatrice Njeri (Secondary PO), Zena Salim and Kate Nokes (Co-Founders and Directors), Isabel Mwangi (Child Protection PO), Sandra Liani (Primary PO)

Then MacKinlay, our first employee completed his MBA and decided it was time to move on; pursue a career in music (he was an excellent jazz brass musician) and also look for consultancy work in the NGO sector. We valued his tremendous contribution during the early years of Kesho's development.

The organisational structure was still working but looking ahead it couldn't sustain itself for much longer. Kate and Zena, the only two remaining Founders were also the Chairperson and Treasurer while also acting as voluntary Directors. Kate focusing on fundraising, programme development, monitoring and evaluation and finances. Zena as the Ambassador of Kesho, the Community Engagement Programme Officer and specifically responsible for Child Protection and Family Support.

In 2013 we started planning for the future. Kate was working full time as the Executive Director in a

voluntary role. For family reasons, she would be transitioning to the UK with her children in 2015. Plans needed to be put in place to strengthen the organisational structure of Kesho and raise funds to support an Executive Director in a professional and salaried position. A period of transition was about to start and a succession plan for Kate needed to be put in place.

As a first step, we applied towards the end of 2013 for an Award with the Stars Foundation and were successful; competing with over X organisations in X countries. We had secured funds for consultancies as well as a significant percentage towards an ED's salary.

The next step was to develop our first 5 year Strategic Plan. While we had had strategic plans prior to this, they had only been for one year. The new Board Members, Tahreni Bwanaali and Kelly Muraya provided enormous expertise in steering Kesho carefully and thoughtfully through the next phase. With the facilitation of Sarah Forde in February 2014 and contributions by all staff and Board Members, due time and consideration was given to Kesho's needs, sustainability, succession planning and how to best meet the needs of the children and families we were supporting.

During 2014, we secured funds from Leger Foundation and Berkeley Trust who were both willing to put some funds towards our institutional strengthening. It was now obvious that for Kesho to be sustainable the need for a salaried ED was essential and the succession plan for Kate to move to a Board position only, should proceed without further delay.

In July 2015 Kesho found it's new ED in Evans Odhiambo. He was smart, committed, considered and with past experience of growing an NGO. Within one year he appointed a new full-time Accountant (Wycliffe), a Programme Officer dedicated to the University and College students (Anthony) and a voluntary Programme Manager (Sandrae).

The foundation was placed for launching the future....

The Staff



Front L-R: Tina Mwangi (Cleaner), Beatrice Njeri (Secondary PO), Pameliah Choni (Assistant CP Officer) Evans Odhiambo (ED)

Back L-R: Zena Salim (Co-Founder), Sandrae Estermann (Programme Manager), Charity Kaluki (Primary PO), Isabel Mwangi (Child Protection PO), Anthony Yamina (School Leavers PO)

The Board



L-R Santie de Villiers (Secretary), Mary Muthoni (Treasurer), Saida Famau (Member) Sam Kinyanjui (Member), Zena Salim (Chair and Co-Founder), Tahreni Bwanaali (Member), Kate Nokes (Member and Co-Founder), Kelly Muraya (Vice Secretary)

The Growth

Students sponsored by Kesho from 2004 to 2015

