



Karen and I are both retired teachers with grown children. One evening in 2006, we attended a talk given by Sr. Florence Muia. She explained, and showed with a photo-laden PowerPoint presentation, how HIV and AIDS were affecting the people in Kenya. Upendo Village was her vision to address this epidemic.

We heard Sr. Florence say that the children of these families are often prohibited from attending school, owing to the poverty of their family (sick people cannot work), the need for many children to care for their sick parents, or the need for eldest children to raise younger siblings where both parents have died, which is a common situation there. We listened in total silence. When Sr. Florence was finished, we turned to one another. I heard myself say to her, "We're going there, aren't we..." And I heard her respond simply, "Yes."

We asked to meet with Sr. Florence a few days later to discuss with her an idea Karen had for starting a sponsorship program for the children of Upendo Village clients who were not able to attend school. Sr. Florence was interested, enthusiastically so, and a plan took shape as we talked. When Sr. Florence returned to Kenya, she identified children who had academic potential and could be helped. A staff member wrote biographies and had pictures taken of 19 children, one for each of us and 17 more. We began to talk about this new program, which we named C.U.S.P. (Children of Upendo Sponsorship Program), to people we knew in many areas of our lives, and many expressed an interest in sponsoring a child right away, so Karen and I had to move faster than we had expected to create the process for sponsorship: forms, check deposits, fund transfers to Kenya, and so on.

From the beginning, Karen and I have always striven to ensure that all donations identified to specific children are used for their education, food, medical expenses, and support. These dollars are not sent to the families, but rather wired to the Upendo Village account, dispersed as needed for education and food and medical expenses, and receipts meticulously recorded in files for each child.

We made a further commitment to visit Upendo Village, traveling at our own expense. Our goals have been many: to meet the children and their parents or guardians, visit the schools, and see some of the kids in their homes. Another important goal has been to monitor all the CUSP donations once they arrive in Kenya, and we have been well pleased with the detailed procedure for both dispensing and accounting for these funds to parents and guardians of CUSP kids. We have made three such trips, and each one has been educational, inspiring, and great fun.

Since we first met Sister Florence Muia over a decade ago, CUSP has become a thriving venture for so many kids who would otherwise have few if any chances to escape a life a poverty and despair. CUSP has given opportunities to children who, just like other children the world over, deserve a vision of a bright future.