Please support the Youth Drop-in Centre
Centre for Compassion, Rehabilitation and Development, Machakos Diocese, Kenya

Most people in the world simply want to live in an environment of peace and safety, and be able to work and earn money in wholesome ways to provide for themselves and their families. While we take this for granted in the West, for millions of people, this is an impossible dream. But in many nations, people can be helped through barriers of poverty and other personal adversity to reach their potential and contribute to their own country. Churches have always been at the forefront of enabling this kind of personal and community development.

Kenya is a great example of a country where this kind of development works well. There is poverty, and lack of basic services reach the whole population. But there is relative stability, and churches have long been active in making disciples of Christ and building communities of hope. There are many amazing Christians in Kenya, who dedicate their lives in sacrificial service to uplift those around them. Relatively small amounts of help from outside can make a huge difference.

An excellent project worthy of support is the Youth Drop-in Centre based at St Paul’s Church, Athi River, part of the Centre for Compassion, Rehabilitation and Development of the Anglican Diocese of Machakos near Nairobi. Many young people in Kenya face poverty and unemployment, but today there are ideological pressures as well. Some are lured by radical Islamic terrorism, while others are affected by new ideas from the West about sex and marriage which are undermining traditional culture and Christian teaching about family life. In some cases, young people are being led into dangerous lifestyles. Serious sexual abuse, a lifestyle of drugs and promiscuity, and the (often tourist-driven) temptation of earning money through prostitution, is affecting both girls and boys. In a context of poverty and poor health care, a breakdown of sexual morality has devastating consequences, while sexual continence and faithfulness in marriage in the context of Christian faith is a life saver.

Revd Martin Olando, Principal of Bishop Hannington Institute of Theology and Development in Mombasa, is consultant to the Centre and provides oversight. He says:

I appreciate and am delighted with the Youth Drop-in Centre at the St. Paul’s Church, Athi River. I am excited by its potential to reach out to struggling youngsters, and help them with sexuality, literacy and holistic life issues within the community.
Part of this Centre’ ministry is a **Youth Drop-in Service**, which has seventy or so youngsters on its books, from profoundly disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom have suffered sexual abuse. Young people meet regularly under the guidance of Peter Mulinge, BA, a social worker, youth educator and counsellor. Peter says of the psycho-sexual and medical problems experienced by some of the boys and young men as a result of unsafe sexual practices:

> “How long can our young guys suffer in silence? What can we do to bring out this issue into light for young people to have some voice? I am happy that as we start we have people coming to us already. We pray that more young people will talk to us and find peace with God who will ultimately give them total healing of heart and mind.” 

In particular, Peter’s work at the Centre is pioneering and modelling a new African Christian approach to homosexuality. Traditionally, people who have admitted homosexual feelings or been involved in gay sex have sometimes been condemned and shunned. But because of the influence of Western media and LGBT activism, more and more young people in urban Africa are now seeing a gay lifestyle as valid and desirable, or an economic necessity. The Athi River Centre maintains the historic bible-based approach, but is realistic and compassionate about desire and sexual history in young people, enabling them to leave behind damaging lifestyles and false self-identities, receive God’s forgiveness and grace, and ongoing practical help.

Mr Mulinge has worked in this field for years, and is helped by other colleagues. As well as providing a safe space for counselling and Christian discipleship, the centre also provides teaching on health, literacy and numeracy, art and sport, and involves the young people in projects to help their community such as environmental clean-ups.

The aim is for the Centre to train young people in practical employable skills, and also to develop income generating capacity of its own, for example, by gaining access to its own water supply and creating a market garden. Meanwhile funds are required for ongoing running of this ministry in a very disadvantaged area where even the basics of food and medical supplies are not always available. Help is needed to provide a small regular salary for Peter, and essential costs for the work.

The Bishop of the Diocese, Joseph Mutungi, also gives an endorsement: “The Youth Drop-In Centre is a project we launched recently to rehabilitate victims of the gay lifestyle. We appeal for financial support or in kind service. I am delighted to support the Youth Centre and give it my full backing!” [Funds are channelled through Anglican Mainstream to the Diocese of Machakos.]

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