

Karl and Fiina Ojansuu Foundation



Karl and Fiina Ojansuu left a mark to future generations

Widow Fiina Ojansuu founded The Karl and Fiina Ojansuu Foundation in 1963 after the death of her husband Karl, who was a storekeeper in Helsinki, Finland. The Karl and Fiina Ojansuu Foundation's purpose as defined in its charter is to support underprivileged children by funding projects that benefit these children both domestically and outside Finland. Fifty years later, the Foundation still continues the work of Karl and Fiina Ojansuu by for example 'giving grants and scholarships' and by 'establishing and supporting nurseries and other organizations'. The Foundation's three-member board consists of experienced and reputable former and present banking and business executives. The equity of the foundation is divided into Finnish traded stocks and security, international funds, shares in housing co-operatives and interest-bearing deposits.

The Mathare Special Training Center (MSTC)

Today the Karl and Fiina Ojansuu Foundation is the main sponsor

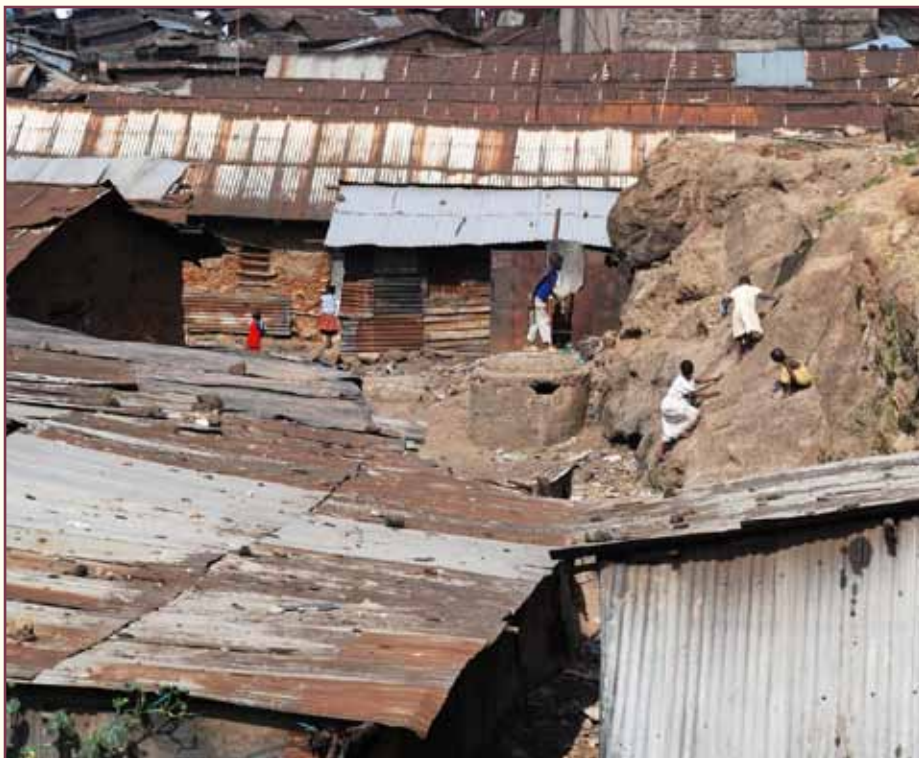
of the **Mathare Special Training Center (MSTC)**, a vocational school for mentally disabled children and youth in the informal settlement area of Mathare, one of the largest slums in Nairobi, Kenya. The purpose of the project is to strengthen educational opportunities for disabled children and to help them become self-reliant and full-members of society.

The Karl and Fiina Ojansuu Foundation has supported the MSTC since 2008. It has done this with support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland since 2011. The project promotes one of the cross-cutting objectives of Finnish development policy and co-operation, namely to support the rights of the most vulnerable people. The Finnish Development Policy Programme of 2012 explicitly articulates a human rights-based approach to development. The reduction of inequality especially for women and persons with disabilities is an important part of it. The objectives of the project are derived from intergovernmental human rights Conventions that both Kenya and Finland are committed to.

Mathare slum area

Life in the Mathare slum area in Nairobi is hard for everyone. It is especially so for disabled children and young people and their parents. In just three square kilometres some 600,000 people work and live. The Mathare Valley is one of the oldest and largest informal settlement areas in Nairobi where the degree of poverty is rife. People live in 6 ft. x 8 ft. shanties made of old tin and mud. There are no beds, no electricity, and no running water. People sleep on pieces of cardboard on the dirt floors of the shanties. There are public toilets shared by up to 100 people and residents have to pay to use them. Those who cannot afford to pay must use the alleys and ditches between the shanties. Most people in Mathare live on an income of less than a dollar per day, and unemployment, crime and HIV/AIDS are common. Many parents die of AIDS and leave their children to fend for themselves. There are an estimated 70,000 children in the Mathare Valley, with only 3-4 schools to educate them. Many children do not attend school. Without an





education, the children in the Mathare Valley often turn to a future of crime, prostitution, drug abuse and disease.

Giving hope for children living with mental disability and their parents

Mathare Special Training Centre (MSTC) aims to improve the life of those children and young people who have disabilities – both physical and mental. It teaches them skills that will prepare them to face the outside world helping them to fulfil their full potential.

Enhancing employment opportunities for self-reliance

The MSTC was established in 1982 as a community based institution by the Kenyan government to provide special education and vocational skills training to children living with mental disability. Its establishment was undertaken with the co-operation of the Mathare community, local administration, social workers and NGOs in their capacity as funding agencies.

The motto of the MSTC is “*Determination towards self reliance*”. The Center’s aim is to equip vulnerable children with vocational skills. As well as giving basic education, the school teaches vocational and basic entrepreneurial skills, which help students become self-reliant in the long term.

The MSTC offers learners opportunities to develop, interact, play, learn, work and experience the feeling of belonging to a community. The school work is undertaken in accordance with each student’s potential, taking account of their individual circumstances. The Centre has the capacity to enrol over 200 students from primary class up to vocational learning opportunities. MSTC is directed by a Headmistress



with a staff of approximately 20 teachers. All the teachers have wide experience in teaching students with special needs. On completion of their studies the students are awarded a leaving certificate outlining the areas they excelled in while at school. During graduation they are given start-up packages to help them establish small scale businesses for their upkeep alongside help from their family. Packages may include for example assistance towards sewing and knitting machines, salon kits, carpentry toolkits, masonry tools, cookery items and beadwork materials. Opportunities for external coaching and follow-up after graduation are also made available.

The project utilizes different stakeholders' own strengths

One of the objectives of the project is to promote community awareness about disability. Inclusive education is a relatively new development in Kenya and many adults and children with disabilities have not been part of any previous education development programs. The aim of inclusive education is that everyone, including those with disabilities, attain basic skills needed in life and work.

Efforts to promote inclusion are needed in Kenya and in other African countries to reduce the



deep-rooted inequalities facing those persons with disabilities. One of the aims of the project is to address the stigmatization of mentally handicapped people among the public and policy decision makers in Kenya. As part of this process, an important long-term goal is to develop good governance arrangements which in turn will contribute to greater social cohesion and thereby achieve a more stable and democratic society in Kenya.

One aim of the project is to enhance MSTC's ability to function inclusively and effectively in supporting the children. The project is based on the human rights of everyone and the project plan is implemented by taking account of the region's own resources as well as the needs of

children. In this regard, the project utilizes the strengths of the different stakeholders.

Mathare Special Training Center has become an exemplar of inclusive education in Kenya

People with disabilities face various challenges in becoming fully integrated members of society in the developing countries. The Karl and Fiina Ojansuu Foundation's work reduces the violation of the human rights of those with disabilities. It also works to change attitudes towards people with special needs. MSTC represents new thinking in the field of inclusive education. It is a pilot project not only in Kenya but also for the whole region in East Africa. In the Mathare Special Training Center children learn that everyone has something to offer in society.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland has supported the project since 2011 and the project's current programme is planned to last for 9 years (2013-2022). A new multi-purpose sheltered workshop building constructed in 2014 with the help of the Karl and Fiina Ojansuu Foundation will be opened in the early part of 2015. The project has several different stages. During the next phase of the project (2016-2018) the old school building will be renovated and equipped for new activities, for





example bakery and masonry work. Business start-ups by students and product development will be strengthened during the period 2019-2021.

New workshop building opens up new possibilities for training

A new workshop building will shift the focus of the school even more to inclusive vocational training centre. In the Center's vocational classes learners will gain in-depth understanding of skills such as: masonry, tailoring, waste paper recycling and basket-making, beadwork, knitting, welding and fabrication, cookery, agriculture, poultry, dressmaking, embroidery, weaving, carpentry, furniture making including door and



window manufacturing and bag making.

The Center's activities are environmentally sustainable. Materials such as old posters, safety belts, tyres and clothes - are recycled. The products made by the students are sold in the exhibition showroom for visitors to the Center and are for sale in curiosity outlets, hotels and shopping malls. One outcome is that both the student and his or her family receive a share of the price of every product sold. At the same time both the students and teachers gain practical experience in how to take forward the marketing of the products. With this training, valuable skills are gained in the process and with external coaching, mentally disabled students will be ready to face the outside world after their graduation.

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