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**Finally, Jacqueline and her siblings have a home**

By ASUNTA WAGURA

At last, at long last, Jacqueline and her three siblings have a home. KENWA’s Murang’a children’s home.

I have not had a chance to speak to her and find out what she feels about the home, but her younger brothers and sisters are, no doubt, thrilled.

After sharing Jacqueline’s story a few weeks ago, I thought it would end there. I had exhausted all possible means of helping the poor children.

I thought I would forget them the way I forget many other cases and move on to newer ones.

But the miserable picture of these children kept haunting me. Each time I was served a hot meal as I watched television in the evening, or fed my children, the picture of Jacqueline and her three siblings would flash, in slow-motion, in front of me and I would wonder how they were faring in their cold empty room and on empty stomachs which, I was sure, added even more misery to the cold.

I felt like I had sinned and needed to confess to a priest, yet I was holding back, and it was coming back to haunt me — this sin of commission and omission — even as I tried to forcibly park my guilt into my subconscious and go on with my life.

I am convinced that sometimes I heard God asking me: “Asunta, you promised me that if I gave you one more chance, you would offer to those in shoes like yours what you were not offered.”

Over a decade ago, when I bargained with God about my HIV status, I asked Him to give me the strength and the means to offer what I was not offered when I tested HIV-positive.

When I set up KENWA, I also wanted it to ease my access to treatment, even as it benefited other HIV-positive people.

I have made sure that my staff fully understand and appreciate issues that affect people like me. This means that even when I am away, everything moves as if I am still there.

It is with a similar mindset that I set up the children’s home. I was thinking about my children — where they would end up should I die. I was trying to provide a safety net.

A mother living with HIV cannot be too careful. Initially, Peter was the target, but he is now an adult and will not need the home. Perhaps, just perhaps, my other children will need it. But then again, only time and God’s grace will tell.

As the indicting visions of these children flashed before me, I heard their gut-wrenching cries: “What about us? Who’ll care for us if you don’t act?”

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love,” I remembered these words of wisdom from Mother Teresa one night.

The next morning I woke up and forgot about all the institutional rules we have put in place. I called the home’s director and told her that Jacqueline and her siblings were to be taken in.

“The authorities have told us we’re overcrowded and we need to find a solution as soon as possible,” she said.

“No buts,” I told her, “let the children sleep on the floor if there are no beds.” You should have seen their smiles on their arrival as they were welcomed by other children and given platefuls of food. The coordinator said she feared they were overeating.

“Let them eat as much as they can,” I said, “it’s the best thing that has happened to them since their mother died.”

The foster mother had to wash the children’s soiled bed linen every morning.

Those of you who are mothers know what happens at night when children overeat. Since these children were taken in, the images that were haunting me have stopped. Now I am working at placing Jacqueline in boarding school and I’m happy with how things have panned out.

I thank all of you who assisted this family. Through your donations, we were able to buy them clothes and shoes and everything else that they needed.

I’m happy to report about the genuine smiles on their faces. I’m happy that, although I will never replace their mother, I have, in a small way, brightened their future.

*This is the diary of Asunta Wagura, a mother-of-three who tested HIV-positive 24 years ago. She is the executive director of the Kenya Network of Women with Aids (KENWA). asuntawagura@hotmail.com*