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Voices reaching far and wide

April 22, 2009**By Kaitlyn Amos**
Contributor

"I believe that we can change the world," sang Matt Wertz, Christian-acoustic musician who played at Waco Hall last January.

In the past two years, Omega Kids successfully reeled in musicians such as Wertz, Dave Barnes, Andy Davis and Jon McLaughlin.

This year Baylor will hold its third-annual Omega Kids benefit concert today in Fountain Mall with expectations of another high turnout.

The concert, 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. the eve of Diadeloso on Fountain Mall, will feature popular jam artist Dr. Dog. Tickets will be \$10, and proceeds will go to providing Nairobi, Kenya, pastor Boniface Mwalimu with a car.

The Omega Kids' story, however, carries more than a mere music advertisement.

The tale begins with Mwalimu.

Mwalimu said he decided as a young man to surrender to God's calling, leave his official position in his church and return to the rough streets of the city.

The extreme poverty that looms over Kenya not only mandates young children to leave their suffering families, but it points them to the hopeless city streets where they sleep, steal, maybe eat and definitely sniff glue.

Mwalimu said that almost every "street kid" desperately clings to their one purchased or stolen possession, a cheap bottle of glue containing enough chemicals and fumes to sniff-and-numb out the pain and hunger of life.

"Witnessing (the street kids') depravity and dependence on the glue knocked the air out of my lungs, yet it gave me hope that they are seeking refuge in their good friend, Pastor Boniface, who loves them deeply and has not abandoned them," said Ryan Pryor, a Baylor junior who traveled to Kenya with University Baptist Church in 2007.

As a child, Mwalimu had experienced the street life alongside his brother. Unlike many, he was able to escape it in two years when his parents scraped up enough money to sustain their family.

Later, he said he was fortunate enough to receive an education, a degree and, eventually, a leadership position in a church.

After years of disregarding the tug he felt in his heart to return to these streets, he finally gave in.

"Just like Jonah, I was running from what God wanted," he said.

Mwalimu explained that his typical day now consists of waking up at 3 a.m. to visit and walk alongside the street kids.

His role encompasses just about anything from praying with the kids, to reading to them, giving them what little food he has and attempting to take care of their physical needs.

He said he lives to give these dying souls a "hope in Christ and through the Word." He said he longs for these kids to realize that they are more than trash, which is what Mwalimu said "the world named them."

Beyond that, Mwalimu's daily life twists and transforms with each passing hour. He has no concrete schedule to follow for his day-to-day service. Mwalimu lives each tomorrow completely different from yesterday, and he is always on his toes.

**Courtesy photo**

The Omega Kids organization will be holding a concert 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. Wednesday night on Fountain Mall featuring Dr. Dog. Tickets are \$10 and will benefit Nairobi, Kenya pastor Boniface Mwalimu with a new car.



Courtesy photo

According to the Omega Kids Web site, Omega Kids was created to give kids of all ages a chance to express their God-given talents, a chance to blossom and grow. The organization has been successful in recording a music album in which the proceeds went to helping less fortunate African children.

Lord, she said.

Thus Blackburn's first home-based project centered on such melody. She raised enough money in the U.S. to send the Kenyan children to a recording studio; enabling them to record their own album and, essentially, provide for themselves through what they possess, their voices.

"I was just in the shower one day thinking about what they have, and then I was like, 'Dang, all those kids are singing it to you!' So I thought, let's record their voices," Blackburn said.

The success of this album birthed Blackburn's idea of holding fundraising concerts, and in March 2007, Omega Kids put on its first show.

Not only did the benefit concert raise \$13,000, but it also served as the first CD release for the street kids' album.

The ball was now rolling.

Blackburn knew that Mwalimu had owned a 2.5-acre plot of land outside Nairobi's limits. It had been a gift, supported through a previous missionary connection to a private donor.

What Blackburn didn't know was that Mwalimu closely considered selling this plot that had merely sat untouched for seven years.

But good timing of an inspired idea allowed for the concert-funded developments to secure the soil. The \$13,000 from the concert helped to build a property-encompassing fence, a water tank and trees for Mwalimu's land.

Blackburn didn't stop there.

In January 2008 she produced yet another benefit concert, which raised \$25,000, enough to build a house on Mwalimu's land for his family to live in.

Their home is called the "Liberty House," and also exists as a rehabilitation center for the street children.

As development of plumbing, electricity, farming and education advance on the property, Mwalimu hopes to bring more and more street children, who have overcome their addiction to glue, out to live on the land.

In the future, organizers of the movement hope it will become self-sustaining and expand into other large Kenyan cities.

In the meantime, Ben Dudley, community pastor of University Baptist Church and close friend of Mwalimu, encourages students to visit Kenya, either through his church or Baylor Missions.

"There is so much to learn by visiting a different culture," Dudley said. "Westerners have so much and take so much for granted. To get to be a part of one of these Baylor trips to Kenya really helps put things into perspective."

Blackburn said she encourages students to stop by Baylor's "Liberty House" on Eighth and Daughtry. This is her home, and also a full-time open-door space to come pray for lives in Kenya.

To Baylor students, Mwalimu said, "Don't take things for granted. Listen to your heart, not your mind. Pursue that calling and you will see (God's) goodness. If God is calling you to do something, do it, because then you will do it well."

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Back on this side of the Atlantic, Mwalimu said that God moved and stirred the pieces into order as well.

Through mutual ministry connections, and reference from a missionary from Alabama, Baylor ended up directing its missions programs toward Kenya.

In 2005, the first Baylor group journeyed to Nairobi to team up with Mwalimu. Seeing potential fruit from their labor, the university continued and expanded treks to this nation.

In 2006, then-freshman and volleyball player Jenne Blackburn jumped on board. Deeply moved by what she saw and experienced during her two weeks in Kenya, Blackburn began a journey that has yet to end.

She was immediately drawn to Mwalimu, because to her, this local was different from the rest.

"No one there (in Nairobi) was helping. No other locals seem to do anything," Blackburn said.

Mwalimu recalls a little blond girl coming up to him one day and boldly declaring, "The Lord has spoken to me to come and walk with you."

At the time, the pastor had trouble believing her. She was "just a student," Mwalimu said.

Little did he know how vital her faithfulness would actually prove.

When Blackburn returned to the U.S., all she could think about were the kids she had encountered, and the nothing-ness they had. After weeks of prayer and pondering, she made some decisions that would change the course of many lives.

Blackburn quit her life-consuming sport and dreamed of a way to support God's work in Nairobi. With the help of her family, some generous supporters and creative minds to activate the already-existing resources, her foundation, Omega Kids, began.

Why is it called "Omega Kids?" Blackburn said it is because these Kenyans may be the "last" kids people think about.

Blackburn said she initially wanted to craft a way for the children to begin to support themselves. She said that these kids own absolutely nothing.

What they do have, though, they will share: A profound joy for life and pure voices to praise the

