

# From Docklands with love

***New Quay residents Catherine Whiting and Javier Martinez know how lucky we are to live, work and visit Docklands.***

The couple recently spent six months working within Africa's largest slum and plan to return soon to continue and build on their work.

More than a million people struggle to survive in Kenya's Kibera slum - within an area equivalent to Melbourne's CBD.

"Nothing prepared us," primary school teacher Catherine said. "Even knowing all that background, I wasn't prepared for the work that we were doing."

"That smell that hits you straight away makes you physically sick. Their homes have nothing in them except lots of children and people just trying to survive."

Considered an illegal settlement, the slum has no services, such as water, sanitation or power. What it does have in abundance is violent crime, disease and pollution.

Catherine and Javier operate a stall at the Docklands weekend market selling African products under the banner "Impoverished Children". And they are conducting a fundraising lunch at the New Quay Buffet at 1pm on November 28.

Funds raised will be spent on establishing a school and teachers college on the outskirts of Nairobi.

"People want to help themselves but they don't know how. Once you give them that knowledge, they are willing to run with it," Catherine said.

Catherine and Javier are currently liaising with a young Kenyan social worker called Omega who is continuing to monitor the programs the couple set up in "informal" schools within the slum.

Informal schools are established by untrained teachers as a business in order to survive. Their English and maths lessons consist of

meaningless repetition devoid of context of understanding.

"As a teacher, these schools were merely day care centres," Catherine said. "They are just like big chook sheds. The children are crammed in and they just keep making way for more."

But Javier said they achieved a remarkable turnaround with a short time. "At the end of the six months we had implemented teaching programs just like you would have in a western school," Javier said.

"Those kids were learning. Those kids could read and they could write and they could comprehend."

Catherine said their trip to Africa was motivated by contact with Somali and Sudanese families that she had come across in Flemington and Springvale.

"No matter where we were, our core purpose was to understand the struggle that they were facing and then to use the skills that we could offer to help them help themselves," she said. "I don't think you can help anyone unless you understand their situation."

"No matter what you have, you can always give something to somebody else. It might be just giving a child a hug so they know someone cares about them."

People wishing to attend the fundraising lunch on November 28, can contact Catherine on 0400 747 977 or via email on [cwhiting@impoverishedchildren.org](mailto:cwhiting@impoverishedchildren.org)



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