

WISER 2023 UPDATE

Achieving the  
*Highest Outcomes*  
for the Hardest to Reach Girls



The Women's Institute for Secondary Education and Research  
[WiserGirls.org](https://WiserGirls.org)

*Educating a girl has dramatic health and economic benefits for her, her family, the community, and the world. WISER's model is based on global research that shows girls' education is the most powerful tool for reducing infant mortality, HIV risk, and poverty across entire communities. Educated girls also increase climate change resiliency and democratic governance in their countries.*



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***"We've been told the sky's the limit, but  
there are footprints on the moon."***

*—from the WISER song "Life is a Journey"*



*Pictured (opposite page): Girls enjoy Field Day 2023; (this page, from left): 1. Classroom instruction in a newly renovated classroom 2. Girls participate in the school football (soccer) club; 3. A Houses of Wisdom session, where girls receive peer-to-peer counseling.*





# *Our Mission*

The Women's Institute for Secondary Education and Research (WISER) empowers girls and communities through transformative education and wholistic health. Our community-engaged, girl-centered interventions help girls transcend poverty, HIV risk, and gender-based violence.

Our 10-acre campus is in Muhuru Bay, Kenya, a remote village on the shores of Lake Victoria, where gender inequity is inextricably linked with health, socioeconomic status, and education. Girls from similar communities across Kenya come to WISER to live in safety, learn, and thrive on our campus and in our programs. WISER provides fully funded education, safe housing, leadership development, technology training, guidance & counseling, reproductive health and rights education, balanced meals, clothing, and medicines to 240 girls each year, with the goal of growing to 360. We know girls must be safe and healthy to thrive.

## ***Why WISER is Different***

Some schools take in girls who have already excelled academically; we work in an area where girls are gravely under-served. Once in WISER, our students become the most successful in the region and are nationally competitive for scholarships to university. WISER also hosts community health events, reproductive health and rights training to thousands of adolescents in the community, and clean water to 7,000 community members.

**WISER is a hub for innovation, excellence, and outreach in one of the hardest-to-reach areas of Kenya while creating impact for thousands of girls and their communities.**



# The Challenges

## Girls in Migori County face

Only **8%** of girls complete secondary school.

**70%** of girls are child brides.

**More than 10%** of babies are born to an adolescent girl aged 15-19 in Migori County

**80%** of girls experience gender-based violence.

Highest **maternal mortality** rate in Kenya.

**400%** higher incidence of HIV in girls than boys.

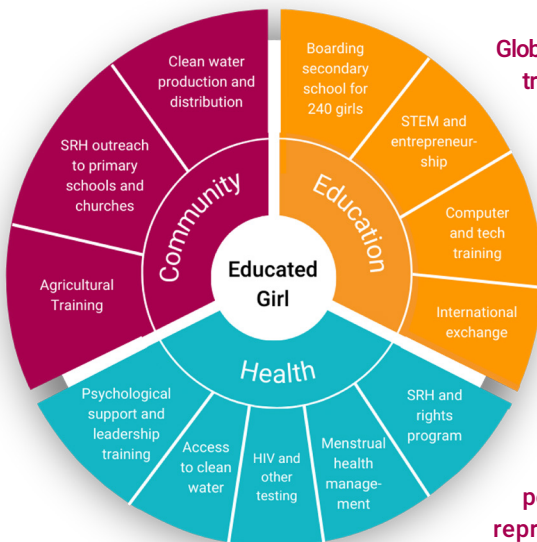
Girls don't know their sexual, reproductive, health, and human **rights**.

Women are missing from **political and legal systems**.

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## ***WISER partners with the people in rural areas to drive community change***

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Global data shows that educated girls transform the health, economic development, governance and climate resiliency of their communities and countries. According to the World Bank failure to compete secondary school costs countries \$30 trillion in lost productivity and earnings.\*

Poor, rural girls are often missing from education, causing their communities to stay poor, sick, and lacking female representation.



***Educating girls yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world.\****

**Improve a girl's life and you improve a community. Our hope is that women will be able to maximize their potential to be active participants in their communities, not just as women, but as women changemakers, economic entrepreneurs, and leaders.**

***Donate Today!***



source: World Bank Report



# A Brief History

In 2006 Dr. Sherryl Broverman, a biology professor from Duke University in the US and Dr. Rose Ogwang-Odhiambo, a biology professor at Egerton University in Kenya, were working together to develop HIV education programs. Dr. Odhiambo was from Muhuru Bay, a remote village on the shores of Lake Victoria and an area with some of the highest HIV rates in Kenya. Together they explored the conditions that put women and girls at risk for HIV and other health issues, including gender inequality, sexual abuse, lack of access to clean water, the cost of education, traditional gender roles, and economic underdevelopment. The WISER school and programs emerged as an intervention to create a 'gender-safe path' through adolescence for girls, reducing HIV risk, increasing economic autonomy, and producing educated, healthy, flourishing young women who would be new leaders in their communities.

Education is only a dream for many girls in rural Kenya as families must pay to send their daughters to school, when instead they could arrange a marriage for their daughter at 12 years old in exchange for money and cows. Sons are seen as worth investing in. Before WISER opened, Migori County had 2,488 registered primary girl students but space for only 40 girls at the single existing secondary school. And at that time, NO girl in 20 years had qualified for university from Muhuru Bay schools.

A joint Kenyan and Duke research team devised the theory of change for the WISER Secondary school and programs, identifying the resources, experiences, and support needed to produce healthy, educated, HIV-negative young women who had avoided child marriage and pregnancy, who qualified for university, and who were ready to lead change.

A key component of WISER's intervention was access to clean water: in Muhuru Bay young girls can spend 5 hours a day collecting water from Lake Victoria, walking at dawn and dusk, making them at risk of sexual abuse and increasing their HIV risk. WISER's clean water kiosks give girls back that time to study and be in school, keep them safer, and provide clean water to their families, reducing cholera, typhoid, and other water-borne diseases to their families.

Since its inception, **WISER has graduated 11 classes of girls and, despite coming from failing primary schools, we have 99% completion, EVERY girl who graduates qualifies for placement in university or place of higher learning, and our girls earn government scholarships at 3 times the national average.**

# Campus Expansion 2022

In 2019, the Kenyan government mandated that all Kenyan Secondary Schools would be required to add grades 7 and 8 as part of the rollout of a new school curriculum aligned with the Kenyan 2030 goals in health, technology, and economic growth.

For WISER, this meant buying more land and building a new 'junior' campus. In 2022 we added a new dormitory, library, four new classrooms, new toilet facilities, seven teacher houses, and two volunteer houses (*come visit!*). In January 2023 the Kenyan government changed its mandate to now house grades 7 and 8 in primary schools, but given the quality of our new facilities WISER was approved as the only secondary school in the district to offer 'junior secondary'. This is an exciting opportunity as it has long been a strategic goal of WISER's to work with younger girls, before they become sexually active, pregnant, married, or HIV+ and we look forward to developing a 6-year educational and supportive program for girls from early adolescence through to adulthood.

WISER has been fortunate over the past two years to receive transformative capital gifts that have helped build our infrastructure to accommodate more girls in the WISER school than ever before. The most substantial was a \$750,000 grant from Jack Dorsey's philanthropic initiative, #StartSmall, to build the junior secondary campus. We are now equipped to house the additional 120 girls and provide them not only with safe, comfortable living facilities, but also with state-of-the-art technology for their STEM-based education.



*pictured from left: 1.completed dormitory for girls 2. WISER class of 2026 in front of new classroom block. 3. completed twin classroom. Opposite page: completed Dorcas Oyugi Library.*



*In 2022 we added a new  
dormitory, library, four new  
classrooms, new ablution block,  
seven teacher houses, and two  
volunteer houses.*



***Donate Today!***





# 2022-2023 Recap

***A Unified WISER. Stronger, Together.***

## **2022 Highlights**

2022 and 2023 have been full of growth and change for the WISER organization. In fall of 2022, WISER completed construction of new dormitories, teachers houses, the Dorcas Oyugi Library, and new toilet (ablution) facilities, enabling us to offer junior secondary education in the future. We're also thrilled to announce that WISER now has four alumni as teachers and one trainee for finance and administration.

## **WISER's Response to COVID**

When Kenya closed all schools for Covid, WISER remained dedicated to keeping the girls engaged in learning. Globally, school closings had a disproportionate effect on girls as home child pregnancies, economic vulnerability and gender-based violence kept them from coming back once schools reopened. However, WISER developed a suite of programs


to support our girls even while they weren't on our campus, including home visits to every girl, personal delivery of schoolwork by motorcycle each week, providing cell phones and delivering education via weekly WhatsApp meetings, and on-campus outdoor, distanced group therapy sessions. We also used the expertise of our board member Linah Achieng, former head of HR for the Kenya Red Cross, to develop a food delivery program to reduce hunger in the families of our students.

When WISER was unable to provide its standard training on agriculture and nutrition on campus, an alternative, innovative plan was devised where WISER was able to reach members of the Muhuru Bay community by working with students undertaking agriculture training for community members in their neighborhood during the holidays.



*pictured from left: 1. WISER girls marching on International Day of the Girl 2023  
2. Dr. Broverman and Madame Dorcas on campus 3. girls play volleyball on field day*





***Strong, authentic, and respectful relationships are at the heart of how we work - with our communities, partners, and donors - and why we are successful.***

### **A Joint Board Governance**

Over the last two years WISER created a special task force to look at how other organizations with 'one foot on each continent' work jointly, and convened strategic planning sessions on how to move forward using the best practices in modern philanthropy and development. As a result, WISER has created a new joint board governance structure emphasizing the local knowledge provided by our Kenyan partners.

We are also excited to announce two new board members, Nick Santangelo and Hillary Omala. As of January 2024, WISER's board will include: Sherryl Broverman, Linda Kamau, Nick Santangelo, Hillary Omala, Seth Borden, Neema Kanyua, Prashant

Swaminathan, John Muthee, Linah Ochieng, Lawrence Oimo, and WISER alumna Lydia Odhiambo.

### **Saying Goodbye to a Hero**

A big change for all of us has been the retirement of our beloved inaugural Principal, Madame Dorcas Oyugi. Dorcas took an empty campus in an isolated, rural area and created an educational program that received national recognition for the quality of its students. Madame Dorcas has changed the lives of 100s of girls, and certainly all who had the honor and pleasure of working with her.

While she will be deeply missed, we look forward to the next phase of WISER under the leadership of Principal Violet Singoei and Deputy Principal Kennedy Mikula.



7,000

People now have access  
to clean water



99%

Reduction in pregnancies



5,500

Textbooks provided



615

Students admitted to WISER  
to date



250,000

Number of school days  
saved with menstrual  
hygiene management



99%

Graduation Rate

## Our Impact

*Before WISER, only one girl in the history of Muhuru Bay qualified for university. Today, 100% of all WISER alumni have qualified for tertiary education.*

Other measures of our outcomes include:

- 100% voluntary HIV testing.
- 43,000 students with sexual and reproductive health education.
- 100% passing national exit exams.
- 80% placement in tertiary education (with the 2023 class achieving 100% placement!)
- 3X the national qualification rate for university.
- New alumni network of girls from a rural area.
- Cultural change in the valuation of girls.
- 100% of WISER alumni registered to vote, giving them the opportunity to have their voices heard when historically they have not.



*pictured: WISER girls and their families at graduation*

# Leadership Team

WISER is proud to have a Leadership Team that consists of individuals who have been with us since the very beginning. Our Principal Madame Violet Singoei has taken over the role of Principal, ensuring that the tradition of excellence continues while bringing in her own unique leadership style. Kennedy Mikula has joined us as our Deputy Principal and is also responsible for spearheading academic innovation and implementing new programs. Lastly, Grace Murika, our Country Manager, will continue to oversee all organizational processes and serving as a liaison with our international partners. These three professionals possess invaluable knowledge of community needs and understand the impact of our programs. With their expertise, we are confident in our ability to continue to have a positive difference in the lives of those we serve.



**Mme. Violet Singoei**  
Principal



**Kennedy Mikula**  
Deputy Principal



**Grace Murika**  
Country Manager



**Dr. Sherryl Broverman**  
Co-Founder and Chair

## ***Board of Directors***

(As of January 2024)

Sherryl Broverman  
Seth Borden  
Linda Kamau  
Neema Kanyua  
John Muthee  
Linah Ochieng  
Lydia Odhiambo (WISER alumna)  
Hillary Omala  
Lawrence Oimo  
Nick Santangelo  
Prashant Swaminathan





***Your donation  
changes lives!***

**\$2600**

sponsors everything a girl  
needs for one year.

**\$500**

provides a girl with all her  
books, school supplies,  
clothing, hygiene products,  
health care and sexual  
reproductive health  
resources for one year

**\$500**

provides a girl with safe  
housing and nutritious food  
for one year

**\$100**

ensures clean water,  
electricity, internet access  
and administrative support  
for one year.



***Ready to make a difference?***

Scan or click on code to

***send your support***

## *Call for Action*

**Ultimately, WISER strives to trigger a cultural shift in the value of young women.** As girls become more educated and empowered through WISER's programs, their confidence builds, and they begin taking on larger roles in their communities, securing strong university acceptances, and well-paying jobs. Over time, the community that once thought of girls as being beyond help came to see them as the drivers of progress.

**WISER needs your help now more than ever.** The Kenyan economy-and the global economy in general-struggles to keep up with high inflation rates and losses incurred by COVID-19. We rely heavily on our everyday heroes: the individuals who are committed to raising awareness, fundraising or sponsoring a particular girl. Your tax-deductible donations go directly to supporting our girls. We are calling on all everyday heroes to help us change a girls life and help an entire community.



*pictured: WISER girl Faith Francis receives the award for being the best candidate in the regional Computer Studies exam.*

# WISER, STEM *and* Climate Change

***WISER ranks in the top 1% of 400 schools in its county and is the best school in the region for girls in STEM.***

STEM education develops students with the necessary skill set to thrive in an ever-changing world. The technology section in Kenya is rapidly expanding and careers in STEM provide greater job availability, a higher salary, and the opportunity to make an important impact on society. Like in many parts of the world, girls and women are underrepresented in STEM education and jobs.

Two WISER faculty, Kennedy Mikula and Judith Atito, are now part of a Global Water Fellows program. As Fellows they will work with colleagues from the US, India, Latin America and East Asia on water quality improvement and disease monitoring. Judith and Kennedy have exciting plans to engage WISER students in community science to monitor water quality in the community and identify possible sources of contamination, while continuing to educate the community about clean water.

**Research suggests that girls' education can strengthen climate strategies in three ways: by empowering girls and advancing their reproductive health and rights, fostering girls' climate leadership and pro-environmental decision-making, and developing girls' green skills for green jobs.\***

Formal education is one of the most crucial ways of putting girls on the path of leadership. Further, studies show that women's political empowerment is strongly linked to better environmental outcomes, including the creation of more protected land areas, the ratification of environmental treaties, stricter climate change policies, and smaller climate footprints.



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*pictured: (from top): WISER student Inner teaches male community members how to rig sustainable lighting; (center and bottom) WISER students perform experiments and process data in our state-of-the-art STEM labs.*

\*Source: "Why is girls' education important for climate action?" Christina Kwauk, February 10, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-is-girls-education-important-for-climate-action/>

# *Honor Your Everyday Heroes with End-of-Year Giving*

This past September, Madame Dorcas Oyugi finally retired from WISER after 14 years of service. During her tenure, Madame Dorcas has become a local hero: to our school, organization at large, and the greater Muhuru Bay community. In honor of her service and acts of heroism, ***we are dedicating the remainder of our fundraising for 2023 to Madame Dorcas and to all of the everyday heroes who work tirelessly to improve the lives of other s and make the world a better place.***

We invite you to think of a hero (or heroes) who, through simple acts of generosity, kindness or bravery has impacted you or their community, and make a donation in their name. All of our heroes will receive a thank you care package and certificate of appreciation to acknowledge their invaluable service. Further, your hero(e)s name(s), photo (if provided), and the reason why they are a hero will be posted on the WISER website, our social media, and be printed on a sign that will hang proudly at the WISER school to act as continued inspiration for our girls. To honor your hero with an end-of-year gift to WISER, visit our website [WISERGirls.org](https://WISERGirls.org) or fill out the donation form (just be sure to write in why they are a hero, and an address to where we can send their gift) and send it to 2608 Erwin Road Suite 48-#107, Durham, NC 27705.

If you have any questions or would like to send your dedication directly via email please contact [communications@WISERgirls.org](mailto:communications@WISERgirls.org).



# Donate Today

*and help ensure our continued success*

## YOUR DETAILS

FULL NAME:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

ADDRESS:

CITY:

ZIPCODE:

TELL US MORE:

- ☐ I would like my donation to WISER to be anonymous.
- ☐ Please send me future updates, news, and information about your organization.
- ☐ I am making this donation in honor of my hero(es):  
(please use the bottom of this form to let us know why)

## DONATION DETAILS

DONATION AMOUNT:

- ☐ \$25                      ☐ \$50                      ☐ \$100
- ☐ \$150                      ☐ \$250                      ☐ \$500
- ☐ \$750                      ☐ \$1,000                      ☐ Other Amount:

FREQUENCY:

- ☐ One-time Donation    ☐ Monthly Donation

## PAYMENT DETAILS

YOUR PAYMENT:

- ☐ Check                      ☐ Cash                      ☐ Credit Card

CARD NUMBER:

EXPIRY DATE:

CVV CODE:

NAME ON CARD:

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR HERO:** (if you need more space, please use an extra piece of paper and include it with submission-and don't forget to tell us where to send their appreciation gift!)

Please send this form and payment to:

WISER INTERNATIONAL  
2608 Erwin Rd Suite 148 - #107  
Durham, NC 27705

YOUR SIGNATURE:

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions or concerns please contact Jocelyn Luhr at [communications@WISERgirls.org](mailto:communications@WISERgirls.org)





*“My time at WISER has undoubtedly contributed to the refinement of my goals and the development of my global health perspective. It has further solidified my commitment to making a meaningful difference in the world through my academic pursuits and future endeavors.”*

**-Shanell St.Brice,  
DukeEngage student 2023**



# Our School Partnerships

Since the inception of WISER, students at Duke University have collaborated with WISER staff and Muhuru Bay locals to seek sustainable solutions to health and education challenges through the DukeEngage Program. Through the two-month internship, students work closely with the community to provide teaching support in primary schools, research the impacts of clean water, perform data analysis at local clinics, and respond to other community challenges. Students also collaborate with WISER teaching staff to facilitate tutoring sessions, co-curricular activities, sexual reproductive health curricula, literacy projects, and create documentaries on campus. With this experience, students are encouraged to understand the complexity of social detriments that reduce health outcomes and the importance of culturally anchoring interventions.

The DukeEngage internship is a transformational experience not only for the project outcomes but also for the strong friendships with the WISER students and locals. Duke students enjoy living on campus with the WISER girls, sharing meals, participating in sports, clubs, church services, and dancing at entertainment nights.

WISER also works with schools around the world, including the Dwight School and Tasis International Schools to develop cross-cultural exchanges amongst youth. In past years, students from Switzerland and the US have visited the WISER campus during a week-long immersive experience to learn more about Kenyan culture and the WISER mission. Our partner schools also provide fundraising support through student club organizations.



Watch the WISER documentary short, "[What a Girl Can Do](#)," produced by Duke Engage students Anjali Bandi and Sonali Patel.



*pictured: students from partner schools on the WISER campus creating change and building relationships with students and staff.*



***"The most challenging experience in my life is living without parents...and if I was not at WISER, I might be having a husband.***

***You cannot be discouraged when you are here at WISER. WISER can improve your life, and the lives of people in the whole community for the better. The school saves many people... through it, many girls are able to (help) their community and families"***

***-Elizabeth, WISER class of 2019***