With your help, thousands of people are being fed and receiving water and more in the Horn of Africa.

In Dhobley, Somalia, this week, we saw weary, exhausted mothers and fathers who had left their homes and walked for weeks wait patiently in line to receive food rations – finally able to feed their hungry children. They sat in the dust beneath bare trees to drink and eat. Some have told us this is the best meal they’ve had in months.

Malika is one of those we’ve helped. After traveling in the back of a truck for days with her five children and 14 other families, she rested in a makeshift shelter near the Somalia-Kenya border. Her face was expressionless as she contemplated the journey to the overcrowded refugee camps. Certainly she thought about the desolation she’d left behind, and wondered what was ahead for her family.

We were able to give Malika and her children enough food for 20 days, including rice, beans, oil, salt and sugar, along with some necessities – a cooking pot, water jug, mosquito nets, blankets and soap.

“This is exactly what I needed,” she said with gratitude. “It allows me to cook and do washing for my family. This is very important to me.”

We’ve been able to feed more than 20,000 hungry people in the desperate, war-torn town of Dhobley. Thousands more are receiving food each day through a unique voucher system. Families redeem the vouchers for specific food items from local shops. This supports the struggling local economy, ensures food ends up in the hands of those who need it most, and helps build relationships in places that are usually inaccessible.

Recent fighting in Dhobley limited our ability to reach people for a few days. But this week we were able to return and distribute more vouchers for food.

We’ve also brought life-saving water to an additional 19,500 thirsty people in Kenyan communities hardest hit by drought and the massive influx of refugees. We’re fixing broken or inadequate wells, and in some cases, delivering emergency water by truck.

Amuma, a town about five miles from the Somali border, has no water source, so we are trucking water in to meet the immediate need. But with hopes of rain coming soon, we are desilting and improving a large existing dam (the town’s only source of water), which will be filled by the rain and sustain the community for up to four months.

The team recently selected the contractor from the community that will do this work. Rather than bringing workers in from the outside, we’re involving the community to make the decision. The team met with the chief, elders and counselor (local politician), then with a representation of the community. All parties signed an agreement that they would be a part of the process and were happy with what was happening.

After the visit, the community members presented the World Concern staff with a goat as a gift. They said, “Not since independence (1963), has any organization ever been so consistent and transparent” with them. They were thankful for the team coming in early to ask questions and learn from them, finding ways to keep the work in the community and allowing them to participate and to make decisions – all in an honest and transparent way.

Learn more at worldconcern.org/crisis or contact Chris Sheach at chriss@worldconcern.org
Staff Spotlight

Q&A with Stephen Houston, Disaster Program Manager

By Edwin Kuria

Stephen Houston is currently serving as World Concern’s Horn of Africa Disaster Program Manager. He’s a Canadian who calls himself “a 21st century nomad wandering to and fro on the face of the earth” on his Facebook page. He answers some questions about his work with World Concern below.

What does your work involve?

It is very much disaster response recovery. Sometimes I am a manager, sometimes a planner, other times I do external evaluation.

What is your role at World Concern?

When the country director telephoned me in Canada to interview me, he said he wanted somebody who was familiar with disaster response and the pace of it.

My assignment was to give this program a disaster response pace and style. I think that’s happened in the programs and the group here. People are getting used to the idea that you see something that needs to be done, you make a reasonable plan, get the plan approved and you move. You don’t take time because you don’t have the time.

Did you ever imagine you’d be here?

It didn’t surprise me, because I watch the news. I have previously lived, travelled and worked in every country in southern and east Africa except Uganda and Lesotho, so an emergency in this part of the world, given my history, I was not at all surprised that I would get a telephone call.

What do you hope to achieve?

I have a three month contract. If we have smoothly operating programs, the management is in place, the staff are in place, budgets are in place and we are getting things done, then I’ll go back to Canada happy, because that’s what I came to do.

Looking beyond disaster response, what do you expect?

In this case, World Concern has been looking to work in this part of Kenya for a long time and they have worked in Somalia for a long time. Dhobley is now the closest we are to working in Somalia. We have managed to deliver a fairly sizeable good impact in the community by provision of medical services, de-silting dams, emergency distribution and solving problems. Now we’ve opened an office in Garissa and it is the emergency situation that has allowed us to do this. I would expect over the next 18 months that decisions will be made on how to continue operations here.

How’s your experience with the team?

This has been a very, very good group to work with and not a difficult project to manage. There is good support from management and our difficulties with each other here have been minimal. We’ve also been able to get things done and that helps a great deal.

Emergency programs tend to attract people who are very highly motivated. If you are managing a relief program, you don’t spend a whole lot of time worrying about whether people are sufficiently motivated or not. They wouldn’t be out here if they weren’t motivated. So management is more about trying to set a direction on where we need to be going, making some sensible decision about what is possible. The disaster manager’s job is really to pick up the flag and march, letting the other people know where we are going.

What makes this team special?

Well, number one, it’s mostly Kenyans. When I come in from the outside, I know how the international system works. But that’s no substitute of having grown up in Kenya, speaking Swahili or Somali, or both. And understanding how Kenya works – especially how the Kenya-Somalia border works. And there’s a really good blend here. What I can bring from the outside in terms of management and systems and a lot of good people here they know about how things work here. When you can have those fitting perfectly together, you are a long way to having a good program and I think we have that here.

Anything you enjoy doing every day?

I get up in the morning, I go straight to the kitchen, and put the coffee on. I put the coffee into the Bodum, pour the water into it, bring it to the little sitting area out here and sip it quietly in a corner. That is how I like my day to begin.

About World Concern

World Concern is a Christian global relief and development organization. With our supporters, our faith compels us to extend life-saving help and opportunity to people facing the most profound human challenges of extreme poverty. Our areas of expertise include providing access to clean water, agriculture and livestock development, education, child trafficking prevention, microfinance and business training, health and sanitation services, and disaster response.