

On a mission: Br Frank O'Shea, who runs the non-profit Ruben Centre, which educates children who live in the Mukuru slum (below).

This is Frank O'Shea - Mother Teresa meets Crocodile Dundee



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Touring Ruben, we encounter many women — stirring vats of corn kernels for the children's lunch, sewing uniforms, and mixing coal dust with paper to make cheap fuel for cooking. In one demountable there's a working bee of ladies making hand-beaded jewellery. Incredibly, a \$2.30 bracelet will keep a child in school for another month. We buy up big.

Mercy, 11, is one of the many confident, articulate students we meet. She tends flowers in the market garden and would live at school if she could. Mercy adores Ruben and says Brother Frank is "a good man".

"I don't like being in the slum," she says softly. "It's very unsafe and dirty, but I don't have a choice."

Later, when I tell this to O'Shea, his eyes water. "You know," he says after a long pause, "I set out to make

Ruben a place you want to be, to build a sense of ownership and, well, to be a bit like an Irish pub.

"When patrons stay past closing time the publican hollers, 'Don't you have a home to go to?'"

AKENYAN classroom must be a teacher's dream. Children respect their uniform and are eager to prove education is their ticket out of poverty. No wagging class. No fibs about homework.

Brother Beausang School in Embulbul, about 24km west of the Nairobi centre, is a shining example of what foreign resources can achieve. The school of 750 students from prep to Year 12 could be any other in rural Australia — except that here, pupils are fed a

hot lunch, probably the only meal they'll eat all day.

Peter Shanahan was the lay principal of St Paul's College in Adelaide before upping sticks for Africa five years ago. Strolling around the spacious grounds — which include a toilet block that baffles students accustomed to defecating in plastic bags — Shanahan says he planned to be away from Australia for only 12 months.

"The Kenyan people won me over straight away," he says. "I have great admiration for them. They never give up."

Brother Beausang costs \$400,000 a year to run, with the Edmund Rice Foundation funding \$220,000 of it. The government contributes nothing, since the school is classified as private. The shortfall is met through fees of \$140 to \$300 per year,

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which few parents have any hope of paying.

This is where donors from St Bernard's (Catholic boys') College, Melbourne, steps in. They sponsor families who are assessed by home visits from school staff, according to three levels of need: almost desperate; desperate; very desperate.

Of the 90 children who complete Year 12 at Brother Beausang, three or four will qualify for a scholarship to university. While this ratio is dismal by Australian standards, in impoverished parts of Africa it provides a foundation for growth.

"We are giving kids a pathway after high school, and they've never had this," says Shanahan. "Even if only a few make it, it gives hope to the younger ones coming through."

BACK at the Mukuru tip, on the last day of Gone Fishing, the reaction of our Kenyan guide Godfrey Isali is telling.

One of nine children, Godfrey, 24, was raised in Kibera, Africa's largest slum, where a million people are sandwiched into 2.5sq km of red dirt.

He's been by our side and remained stoic throughout, expressing confidence that change is coming to Kibera.

A \$300,000 United Nations-funded project will be used to build roads and map the area, while access to electricity and piped water is slowly improving.

But here, as we stand together in the Mukuru dump with the undertaker birds and the children scavenging for plastic, Godfrey is desolate.

"This is a real shock to me, I never knew people could live like this," he says, shaking his head.

Godfrey is ready to move on and so are we. Leaving Kenya, however, is hard. There is so much to do.

We've made friends, real friends, with Kenyans at the coalface and feel guilty going back to our affluent world where people are troubled by the smallest of things — bad drivers, disappointing restaurant meals, homes without ensuite.

But each of us leaves with a promise — and business plans are in progress — to make a difference, to teach other human beings to fish so that they might one day fish for themselves.

For information about the next Gone Fishing program in October, email AWRyan@edmundrice.org



Melbourne school makes a difference

Erin Marie

FIVE-year-old Teresia Wavinya might seem like a world away in Kenya, but her struggle is close to the hearts of students at an elite Melbourne college.

St Bernard's College is a champion of social justice in Teresia's impoverished Embulbul community in Nairobi. The funds raised by the college will allow children such as Teresia to be educated through a fully sponsored scholarship to nursery school.

Since 2007, the Essendon school has raised more than \$360,000 and has helped establish the Brother Beausang Catholic Education Centre.

Eight students and two teachers from the college are preparing for its 2013 Kenya immersion trip in July. Students will attend classes, play sport and visit homes to assess students' eligibility for funding.

Year 12 students Sam Woods, Zachary O'Halloran and Daniel Allison, all 17, have continued to advocate for the cause since going last year. "To see a community in such need is pretty confronting, but the children are all so upbeat about school and life. They have taught us so much," Zachary said.

Year 12 co-ordinator Chanette Glynn said one student had been so touched by the experience he accepted donations for the school in lieu of gifts for his 18th birthday.

On May 3, the college will hold the Edmund Rice Founders Day Walk-A-Thon. It has raised more than \$60,000 each year for the cause.