

Hello Everyone!

Many runners know Thomas Omwenga as a Kenyan marathoner, two-time winner of Manitoba Marathon (2012, 2015), four-time winner of BMO Vancouver Marathon (2007, 2008, 2010, 2013), two-time winner of Victoria Marathon (2011, 2012), just to list a few of his incredible achievements in Canada. His best personal record for a full marathon was 2:10:44, which was set in Seoul, Korea in 2004.

Some of us know him growing up poor in Kenya in a family with no real history in athletics. One of his first pair of running shoes was made of canvas with the rubber from an old tire as soles. He and his wife have three children. Besides their own, they also care for four other children as well as Thomas' mother.

Since he, himself, moved to live and train in Hamilton, Ontario in 2011, he sent all his money won from marathons (along with some additional money earned while doing custodial work) to his family to install electricity for their mud house, purchase land for farming to improve their living standards, and pay for medical and education bills for his children.

" I'm running because of my family," he was quoted in Vancouver Sun, two days before he became a four-time champion of the BMO Vancouver Marathon in May 2013. "I want my family to live a better life. I want to educate my kids."

His second child is Mercelline or Mercy, now 11 years old. She was born with spina bifida and has been unable to walk since birth, with a complication of urinary incontinence requiring intermittent self catheterization. The great news right now is that The Shriners Hospital for Children in Montreal has accepted Mercy for evaluation of her condition. If treatment is deemed appropriate, the hospital agrees to finance all costs related to the treatment of Mercy's orthopaedic condition. What is not covered is the funds for transportation from Kenya, travel insurance, accommodation, meals, translator services if required. The length of stay for this medical intervention will likely be up to six months.

Thomas is currently working with Michael Frederiksen, President of Community Education Services Canada (www.cescan.ca), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing secondary school education for Kenyan youth orphaned by the HIV/Aids pandemic. CES is assisting Thomas to sponsor Mercy to come to Canada. They are estimating a modest budget will be around \$9,000 Canadian. The exact amount will be determined by the length of stay in Canada. Travel insurance alone for Mercy, a guardian (likely her mother, Margaret) and her sister Sylvia (10 years old) is around \$1700.

Currently, we have formed a small committee consisting of Lucien and Barbara Debreuil, Bob Stewart, Amanda Younka and myself. We are trying to find a non-profit organization that has the capacity to issue tax receipts to donors. We are working towards collecting the needed monetary donations to help Mercy to come to Canada for medical assessment and stay for orthopaedic treatment. Hopefully, the family will also experience a happy reunion after five years of separation. Please stay tuned.

We recently received an email from Community Education Services (CES), to inform us that they have been assisted by Canada Helps to set up an online method for processing donations for Thomas Omwenga's daughter Mercyline (Mercy). Canada Help is a registered charity that acts as the processing centre for online donations for hundreds of charities across the country.

It has been clarified that although they have labeled the fund as Mercyline Nyakundi Medical Fund, The Shriners' Hospital in Montreal will be covering all the actual medical costs. The donations we make will go towards airfares, insurance, meals, accommodation in Montreal or any other related expenses while Mercyline receives tests and treatments. Please note that Nyakundi is the middle family name, as in Thomas Nyakundi Omwenga.

Here is the link to donate online to this fund. Our Committee is appealing to you to please donate as generously as you can. Also, please broadcast this email to all your contacts, other running groups, athletic organizations, and hopefully we can help collect more donations.

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/community-education-services-ces-canada/mercy-nyakundi-medical-fund/>

If you prefer to write a cheque rather than donate online, you may make your cheque out to Community Education Services (CES) Canada, with "Mercyline Nyakundi Medical Fund" written on the memo section of the cheque. Either mail it directly to CES Canada, 8 Pine Lane RR#1 Barrie, Ontario, Canada L4M 4Y8 or pass it onto Bob Stewart who will collect the cheques and forward them to CES Canada. CES will then issue tax receipts and mail them to donors.



Please meet Mercy (in T-shirt) 11 years old and her sister Sylvia, who is 10 years old, in the pretty red dress.