



Leroy Blessing, 15, with his mother, Ketty Omondi, at home in Nairobi. At age 9, he disappeared. Maryana Munyendo, the head of the Missing Child Kenya Foundation, stepped in, and two days later a tipster provided Leroy's location.



Monica Makhungu, seen with a teacher, vanished at age 3 in Nairobi in 2016. She has not been found.

# Desperate and despairing, Kenyan parents tap sleuth to bring lost children home

BY RAELE OMBUOR  
Special to The Washington Post

**NAIROBI**  
When Leroy Blessing went missing, his family panicked. The autistic 9-year-old could not talk to strangers easily, and police in his native Kenya scoffed when his desperate parents sought help, saying he was old enough to look after himself.

"They said, 'He's a big boy; he will come back home,'" Ketty Omondi, Leroy's mother, recounted. "They never received me with kindness or pity."

Then Maryana Munyendo stepped in. She heads the Missing Child Kenya Foundation, an alliance of volunteer sleuths tracking down missing children. She plastered up posters and blasted social media. A stranger called two days later with the boy's whereabouts.

Since setting up the group in 2016, Munyendo said that out of the 1,551 missing children that parents have reported to her, she and her two-person team have reunited 1,055 children with their families. Another 153 were sent to government homes and 28 were declared deceased, leaving 315 active files.

Munyendo, 41, set up the group after a 10-year-old girl went missing in the neighborhood near her office. Locals spotted the lost child after Munyendo put up posters, and the girl was reunited with her family after two days. More

families got in touch. Buoyed by early successes, Munyendo and her friend Jennifer Kaberi set up the foundation, running it on a shoestring out of Kaberi's living room. Many of the children were runaways or the victims of parental abductions or traffickers. Some were simply lost and unable to tell strangers where they lived.

The volunteers started with posters, social media and the introduction of online hashtags and the keywords "Missing-ChildKE" to bring up names and posters. Then the group expanded, setting up Kenya's first toll-free number for tracing missing children and badgering local news organizations to air features on the missing. Just before the start of Kenya's soccer championship match in 2019, her team arranged for players to hold up placards with pictures and names of missing children. The moment was broadcast on television and led to four reunions.

Their methods work. Blessing, now 15, disappeared twice more, and each time, strangers contacted Munyendo to say they had seen him. During his last disappearance, a comment by a stranger on the Missing Child Foundation Facebook post helped trace him to a hospital.

Another parent, George Ouma, 51, said Munyendo also helped find his 17-year-old autistic son. He was missing for 10 days before a conductor noticed him at a bus terminal staring at a poster of his own face.

**FEW ALTERNATIVES**  
Kenya has an epidemic of missing children. Police did not respond to inquiries on

related statistics, and there's no national database on missing children. But in May, the cabinet secretary for labor and social protection, Florence Bore, said in a speech that 6,841 children were reported missing from July 2022 to May 2023. Only 1,296 had been reunited with their families, she said.

Most of the government's budget for vulnerable children goes to the state-run Children's Welfare Society, but while it runs homes, it does not conduct investigations. The society relies on the police for that function. But multiple families, like the parents of 3-year-old Monica Makhungu, said in interviews that the police had done little and had asked for money. Police did not respond to requests for comment.

The girl disappeared in 2016 while playing in her Nairobi neighborhood. Playmates said they saw a man give her a bottle of water and carry her away. Her father, Enock Mudavadi, went to the police, but he says they repeatedly asked him for money. Friends searched the area and found one of Monica's pink shoes a few kilometers from her house. Weeks later, police said they had no resources to continue searching and asked for money to fuel the police car. Desperate, Mudavadi said he sold everything he had. He spent so much time searching that he lost his job.

Finally he turned to Munyendo, and she issued posters using forensic age progression technology — provided by the Italian Missing Children Institute — that produces updated identikit of the disap-

peared. But Monica was not found.

Even after 1,500 more cases, Munyendo said quietly, "I still cannot forget about Monica." Despite setting up the toll-free number, she will never change her personal phone number, she said, in case one of the old leaflets is found and someone calls with word about the girl.

Munyendo works closely with Kenya's Directorate of Criminal Investigations, which launched an Anti-Human Trafficking and Child Protection Unit in 2016. Many of its cases involve parental abductions and child trafficking. The unit's chief, Mueni Mutisya, said, "People like

Maryana fill in the gaps. Sometimes we also ask Maryana to post for us the pictures of the missing. They publish the information, and people often contact her."

## INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

Munyendo is tackling a major global problem. The International Center for Missing and Exploited Children says only 45 countries have specific legislation or policies concerning missing children, although other laws can apply. Athena Morgan, the center's Africa head, said that most African nations do not keep records on missing children and that the problem is rarely a government priority.


But Munyendo's success has inspired others. She set up a webinar for Africans working to find missing children and met the Ghanaian journalist Regina Asamoah, who set up Missing Children Ghana in 2020. The next year, Asamoah released a documentary featuring more than 30 missing children, some of whom had been living in orphanages for a decade. It became a series. Families told the stories of

their lost children, and those who had been reunited shared their stories. One boy was reunited with his family after 14 years. He had gone missing at age 3.

So far, the Ghanaian group has reunited 203 children with their families in two years and is searching for 660 others. Asamoah also met the police chief. Ghana set up its first missing people unit last year.

The work is never easy. This past summer, Munyendo's toll-free number was cut off because there was no money to pay the bill and was out of service until an anonymous well-wisher paid the outstanding bill this month. Last year she could not give her volunteers bus fare or lunch money, so now they work from home to save costs. In November, their office roof collapsed. Yet she carries on. This autumn, in a shared Nairobi workspace, she stared at a photo of 3-year-old Daniel Yasin Meke on the screen of an old computer. He was last seen a year ago near his Nairobi home. There had been no leads. She reposted his photograph anyway.

"We never give up," she said.



## CITY OF DORAL

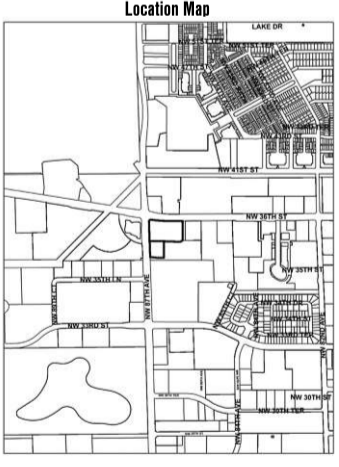
### NOTICE OF ZONING WORKSHOP

All residents, property owners and other interested parties are hereby notified of a **Zoning Workshop on Monday, February 5, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.** The Meeting will take place at the City of Doral, Government Center, 1st Floor Multipurpose Room located at 8401 NW 53rd Terrace, Doral, Florida, 33166.

The following application will be presented:

**HEARING NO.:** 24-02-DOR-02  
**APPLICANT:** Doral Court Retail Investments, LLC (the "Applicant")  
**PROJECT NAME:** Doral Square Media Board Special Exception  
**PROPERTY OWNER:** Doral Court Retail Investments, LLC  
**LOCATION:** 8700 NW 36 Street & 3737 NW 87 Avenue, Doral, FL  
**FOLIO NUMBER:** 35-3027-001-0245 & 35-3027-001-0243  
**SIZE OF PROPERTY:** ±5 acres  
**FUTURE LAND USE MAP CATEGORY:** Downtown Mixed Use  
**ZONING DISTRICT:** Downtown Mixed Use (DMU)  
**REQUEST:** The Applicant is requesting a Special Exception to allow for the approval of two (2) Media and Public Service Board Wall Signs for the Doral Square DMU project pursuant to Ordinance No. 2023-34, codified in Sec. 80-258(a)(2)(b) of the City's Land Development Code.

**Location Map**



**ZONING WORKSHOP PROCESS:** The zoning workshop consists of two sessions:

- First Session.** The first session of a zoning workshop shall provide a forum for members of the public to learn about proposed developments within the city. Developments may be presented to the public simultaneously, in several locations within the meeting site. During this session, members of the public are encouraged to ask questions and to provide feedback to the applicant about the proposed development. The applicant shall provide visual depictions, such as renderings, drawings, pictures, and the location of the proposed development. In addition, representatives of the applicant shall be available to answer questions that members of the public may have about the proposed development. The members of the City Council shall not be present during the first session of the zoning workshop.
- Second Session.** The second session of a zoning workshop shall provide a forum for the City Council to learn about the proposed developments discussed at the first session of the zoning workshop. No quorum requirement shall apply. Developments shall be presented by the applicants sequentially, one at a time, for the City Council's review and comment. The applicant shall again present visual depictions of the proposed development. In addition, the applicant shall be available to answer any questions that members of the City Council may have about the proposed development.

**No quorum requirement shall apply nor will any vote on any project be taken, but roll call will be taken, as it is a publicly noticed meeting.**

Information relating to this request is on file and may be examined in the City of Doral, Planning and Zoning Department located at **8401 NW 53rd Terrace, Doral, FL 33166.** Maps and other data pertaining to these applications are available for public inspection during normal business hours in City Hall. Inquiries regarding the item may be directed to the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, all persons who are disabled and who need special accommodations to participate in this meeting because of that disability should contact the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL no later than three (3) business days prior to the proceeding.

**NOTE:** If you are not able to communicate, or are not comfortable expressing yourself, in the English language, it is your responsibility to bring with you an English-speaking interpreter when conducting business at the City of Doral during the zoning application process up to, and including, appearance at a hearing. This person may be a friend, relative or someone else. A minor cannot serve as a valid interpreter. The City of Doral DOES NOT provide translation services during the zoning application process or during any quasi-judicial proceeding.

**NOTA:** Si usted no está en capacidad de comunicarse, o no se siente cómodo al expresarse en inglés, es de su responsabilidad traer un intérprete del idioma inglés cuando trate asuntos públicos o de negocios con la Ciudad de Doral durante el proceso de solicitudes de zonificación, incluyendo su comparecencia a una audiencia. Esta persona puede ser un amigo, familiar o alguien que le haga la traducción durante su comparecencia a la audiencia. Un menor de edad no puede ser intérprete. La Ciudad de Doral NO suministra servicio de traducción durante ningún procedimiento o durante el proceso de solicitudes de zonificación.

Connie Diaz, MMC  
City Clerk  
City of Doral



## Omni

COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

### OMNI REDEVELOPMENT DISTRICT COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

PLEASE ALL TAKE NOTICE that a Board of Commissioners Meeting of the Omni Redevelopment District Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is scheduled to take place on Thursday, February 8, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. or thereafter at the Miami City Hall, located at 3500 Pan American Drive, Miami, Florida 33133.

All interested persons are invited to attend. For more information, please contact the OMNI CRA office at (305) 679-6868.

Ad No. 41150      Isiaa Jones, Interim Executive Director  
Omni Redevelopment District  
Community Redevelopment Agency