



ORPHAN SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Registered charity no: 1095767

www.themangotree.org

A Brief History of The Mango Tree Orphan Support Programme

When we were first married, Gail and I served as VSO volunteers in Tanzania. We returned home to start a family and pursue a career in the family business.

By the late 1990's I was chairman to The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. Whenever I travelled overseas on behalf of my company, I tried to visit research projects of the School. In 1998 I visited a project attached to an organisation in Entebbe which had been set up by people who were HIV+. While I listened to a presentation by the members of TASO, all aged between 25 and 40, I came to realise that I was the only person in the room who would still be alive about 18 months later – this was before anti-retroviral drugs had become available to most people in Africa. I thought that all these people would have several children. What would happen to these orphans?

Gail and I then started looking at the provision for orphans and street children in several countries – South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, India, Zimbabwe – but we saw nothing that would begin to cope with the thousands and thousands of children that were being orphaned.

In 2000, I was High Sheriff of my county. We were advised to take the whole of the month of August off, as "No one leaves Balmoral during August!". We decided to go back-packing in Africa, starting in Blantyre, Malawi and finishing in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. While we were steaming north on the good ship "Ilala" on Lake Malawi, we met an American couple, Will and Jane Lotter. They had just been visiting an orphan project in southern Malawi, run by a Malawian but funded by returned Peace Corps volunteers in the States. The more we heard about this project, the more we thought this was a really practical solution to the orphan problem – the orphans continued to live within their extended family and were provided with healthcare and educational support through a network of village volunteers. Most importantly, they remained within their own communities.

When we reached Dar es Salaam, we failed to see an old colleague with whom I had worked 35 years before. Two weeks after our return home, I received a letter from him in which he said he was sorry not to see me, because he was wanting some career advice. He felt that he had one more challenge left in his working life and, as ten of his twenty-two brothers and sisters had died of HIV/Aids, he felt drawn to doing something for orphans. He had NO idea that we were thinking along the same lines! I wrote to him immediately to tell him what we had heard about in Malawi.

At Easter 2002, we returned to Tanzania, met up with Andilile Ibrahim and drove with him to Southern Malawi, to see for ourselves the work of The Malawi Children's Village. We were ALL very impressed with what we saw. I had already visited some of the funders in the States, who were flattered that we were thinking of copying their project. Andilile was so enthused that he resigned his job on the spot, despite protestations from us that we had no money, we had not registered as a charity, we had no name and we did not know where we would work. "All this will follow!", he said.

Our nephew Bob Dowson had also visited the Malawi Children's Village at about this time, so he joined the team. We defined our criteria around what we saw as the area of greatest need and potential and we started the process of registering as a charity. Andilile looked at areas of southern Tanzania, two near Morogoro, two near Mbeya and Kyela. I went out again to look at his favoured area in Kyela. The local government officials were very welcoming and supportive. The area is right on the border with Malawi. The border post closes at night, but truck drivers arrive ready to make an early start the next morning. They never sleep alone, so they spread the disease. There is a coal mine employing single miners, so they add to the problem – and there are

many cross-border markets in the area. If someone has had a good day at the market, they often have a few glasses of the local brew and then misbehave.

I took a pair of strong boots with me on that visit, as I thought that I would be walking long distances to visit orphans in the villages. At our first stop, we visited a family hosting several children. After our visit, I noticed that the chairs we had been sitting on were being carried behind us. The next house hosting an orphan was the next house – and there were orphans in the next and the next. In fact, it seemed that every home was looking after these children. I have not taken boots to Africa again!

Andilile moved to Kyela and started to map the orphans in their villages. At the same time, we registered a charitable trust in Tanzania. We still did not have the registration in the UK, so we funded it ourselves (with Bob). In the spring of 2003, we received the Charity Commission registration, so were then able to appeal for funds. We wrote a letter to our extended Christmas card list – between 700- 800 letters, which produced an over 60% positive response. In our letter, we cheekily asked our friends and acquaintances to give us £ 100 per year under Gift Aid. We were fortunate that our appeal coincided with Bob Geldof's campaign, so the plight of the African orphan was well known.

We developed a system of registration of orphans, which was a three stage process, in order to ensure that they really were genuine orphans. We recruited and trained our Village Volunteers, who were mostly local subsistence farmers. We gave each Volunteer a tee-shirt and a bicycle. We recruited a nurse to head up our healthcare programme and she recruited another two nurses and started regular visits to the villages and schools on bicycles to treat the children for the sort of conditions that a mother would normally deal with – worms, malaria, bilharzias, and various parasitic infections. We purchased primary school uniforms and gave these to our orphans along with some exercise books and pens and pencils.

About a year later, we had a visit from a young Kenyan social science student, Consolata, who had worked with street children and orphans in and around Nairobi for about ten years as a nun. She wanted to write a dissertation on community orphan care programmes. At the end of her visit, Consolata asked us to remember her, if we EVER thought of starting a second programme, because her home area around Lake Victoria was similarly affected. The money continued to come in, so after another year, we decided that we would support Consolata, who had now married Peter Kunyada (a former brother), a trained mechanic, social worker and book-keeper. We visited Consolata's home area and we are appalled at the conditions in this part of Kenya. We decided to support them and they started their work with us in September 2006.

In 2008, one of our major donors, Michael Oglesby, founder of the Bruntwood property group, visited Kyela with his wife Jean. Michael immediately noticed that the one area we were failing to address adequately was vocational training for those who fail to go on to secondary or tertiary education. He offered to provide the funding to purchase a derelict hotel building. At about the same time, we received a windfall donation of \$1,000,000 from Google Inc, so we decided to put half these funds towards the building of the Kyela Polytechnic College and the other half was earmarked for a girls' secondary boarding school in Kenya.

Kyela Polytechnic College opened in June 2012 with courses in hotel management, accountancy and business administration, masonry, IT skills and journalism.

Following a baseline survey, which we conducted in 2012, we realised that the local economy in and around Kyela has significantly improved during this time. Whilst in 2002, there was much untilled land in the villages, today this is not the case, as the children have grown into adults and are now actively productive. Bicycles and mobile phones are now very evident. We are currently rethinking our approach to orphan care. We have invested much time effort and resources in developing our communities, by encouraging income generating activities at the household level, so we believe that we ought to be able to start winding down our direct orphan support and start handing this over to the communities in Tanzania, who are now capable of supporting their primary school students. We are also beginning to think about developing the girls' secondary school in Kenya.

William Fulton
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