

Reaching the most vulnerable

Fed up but not giving up

Right now I'm really fed up. I don't ever want to despair again at an ambulance that breaks down for three hours while a girl lies dying inside. I don't ever want to pay for another post mortem. Or hire a car to take a 12 year old's body home from the mortuary. I'm fed up of seeing children die for no reason. Fed up of it all.

I've been working in Africa for 25 years and during every visit there are similar events that stir such emotions. This time there were three that really shook me. Jacinta was admitted for a simple operation that went tragically wrong. Joy was abandoned by her parents and lives with HIV and cancer. Seven year-old Cherish escaped capture by a witchdoctor in search of albino body parts.

Can you imagine Jacinta's mother's grief? Joy's anguish? Cherish's terror as the intruder broke down the mud wall of her slum home late one night?

What gets me as I write this, while waiting for a flight back to the UK sitting opposite the VIP Lounge in Nairobi's airport, is that none of these things would have happened in my own country. I'm annoyed by that lounge too,



Cherish with Peter Ogik, the Chairman of our partner the Source of the Nile Persons with Albinism. Peter is devoting his life to fighting the persecution of people with albinism.

and the 'VIP' label on its door. Aren't we all supposed to be equal in God's sight? Aren't Jacinta, Joy and Cherish no less 'Important' or deserving of a capital 'P' than those inside enjoying their comfy chairs, free drinks and canapés?

Please forgive me for my rant but it's been an intense three weeks in East Africa. I'm fed up but not giving up. None

of us at Advantage Africa are. In fact, the poverty, lack of healthcare, ignorance and inequality that beset Jacinta, Joy and Cherish make us even more determined to fight for change. We'll continue to work hand-in-hand with partners who love and care for vulnerable children and strive to improve their lives. Until justice is done.

Andrew Betts

The work of Advantage Africa is driven not only by the injustice and inequality that prompted Andrew to write this article. It's motivated by compassion, and knowing what a difference we can all make to build the resilience of vulnerable children like Jacinta, Joy and Cherish.

Building the resilience of vulnerable people

Advantage Africa is helping some of Africa's most vulnerable people to overcome the prejudice surrounding HIV and disability, work their way out of poverty and become more self-reliant.

Thriving on safe water

The lack of a safe, close and reliable water supply is a major cause of vulnerability, illness and death in Africa. Advantage Africa's rehabilitation of a borehole used by the Bowa Kibiira Single Parents' Group in Uganda has brought safe

water to 120 families, many of them affected by HIV. These families no longer have to make a four-mile round trip for water in intense heat and can drink, cook and wash without the risk of water-related disease.



Accessible water for hand washing dramatically reduces diarrhoeal disease.



A boy in Bowa Kibiira pumps water for his family.



Betty (left) says she is 'no longer poor'.

Earning an income

With the water supply in place, Advantage Africa has helped the 60 most vulnerable families in Bowa Kibiira to earn an income by rearing pigs and poultry. Their nutrition is improving and the sale of meat and eggs brings in money for school costs and healthcare. Betty says her hens are laying many eggs and her family is 'no longer poor!'

The membership of the single parents' group has grown to reach over 1,000 children and adults and the wider benefits of the project include manure for their crops and children attending school.

Taking a stand against sexual abuse

Disabled children and adults are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse and Advantage Africa's response is a project to prevent such abuse and secure justice. Gathering together survivors of abuse, their families, community authorities and organisations, NGOs, police, medics, government officials, lawyers and the judiciary for a training workshop in Kenya to address

this issue has already made a difference. When a young disabled woman was recently lured into a man's home and raped, those who had attended the workshop took unprecedented swift action. They provided care and counselling, preserved medical evidence and ensured the suspect was arrested and taken into custody, where he now awaits trial.



Training workshop on justice for disabled people.



Boys and girls try out the play equipment at the new nursery school in Kalulini.

Receiving an education

Education is a powerful tool to overcome poverty. Good quality early years' education and care provides young children with a head-start at primary school and releases parents to earn an income. The community of Kalulini in eastern Kenya, where many families are vulnerable due to disability or HIV, is excited by the imminent opening of a nursery school built with Advantage Africa's support. The nursery will be the first ever facility for pre-school children in this drought-prone rural location.

Protected from malaria

Kenya has the highest number of malaria cases in the world and exposure rates in Kenya's Siaya District, at around 300 infectious bites per person per year, are among the highest in Africa.

Advantage Africa's malaria project in Obambo has reduced the sickness, anxiety and death caused by malaria, particularly among vulnerable groups such as orphaned children, the elderly and people living with HIV. Through an education campaign and the distribution of insecticide-treated nets, the project has protected nearly



Long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets ready for distribution.

4,000 people from malaria. It has improved health and school attendance and equipped people with the knowledge and skills to prevent malaria for many years to come.

£10 can protect a child from life-threatening malaria

£50 can help a widow start an enterprise to provide for her family

£100 can provide sturdy equipment for a children's nursery



Kalungu enjoys learning new skills at school.

Gaining life skills

Advantage Africa recently helped the special unit for disabled children at Mitaboni Primary School in Kenya with horticulture training for teachers plus seeds and tools to establish a fruit and vegetable growing project. The pupils learnt to grow their own food and the teachers love teaching them practical life skills that equip them to become more independent. 15-year-old Nzula Kalungu, from a very poor home and with severe learning disabilities, has thrived on this activity.



Children at Mitaboni water their seedlings.

Included in society

The myths surrounding disabled people in East Africa are a major cause of their vulnerability to abuse, neglect and exclusion. That's why all Advantage Africa's disability projects include education and awareness-raising among the local population. For example, our support to Special Children Special People in Ggaba, Uganda has enabled them to hold several public events to promote more positive attitudes to disabled children that help them reach their potential.



Raising awareness of children's rights in Uganda.

The Milton Keynes Marathon is the real thing

'Is it a real marathon?' people kept asking me, as if I was taking part in a fun run round the park. 'Yes' I explained, 'It's the full 26.2 miles, but it doesn't have the million cheering supporters and glamorous landmarks, of London, just the cycle paths and roundabouts of Milton Keynes'.

Just a few days before, I'd read about how the marathon would stretch me beyond my physical and mental limits. 'The Marathon rattles you to the core. It deconstructs your very essence, stripping away your protective barriers and exposing your inner soul. When you are at your most vulnerable, the Marathon shows no pity...'

With many months training behind me I did beat those demons of self-doubt and made it, albeit deconstructed, to the finish line. It felt amazing to have run the whole way,

beaten my target time and raised more than £5,000 to help some of East Africa's most vulnerable people.

This money will help more than 300 people with albinism in Uganda's Busoga region to improve their lives. Without protection from the powerful sun, most people with albinism in Africa die by their thirties and live isolated lives because of the fear, misunderstanding and prejudice surrounding their condition. Thanks to many generous sponsors, Advantage Africa can now start providing life-saving sun protection and dermatology clinics and ensure children with albinism attend school.

It was thinking about little Cherish, hunted by witch doctors who say albino body parts make people wealthy, so desperate to learn, have fun and play with friends, that got me to the finish line. Together we can help her, and hundreds like her struggling with isolation and despair to find hope for the future.

Jane Betts



She did it!

If you would like to sponsor Jane, her fundraising page is still open at www.justgiving.com/andrewandjane

We can't all run a marathon, but there are many sponsored challenges available. We're always encouraged by the creativity of our supporters who have trekked, canoed, and sung for Advantage Africa. Check out the 'support us' page of our website www.advantageafrica.org for other fundraising ideas.

Just £10 a month can provide a child like Cherish with regular sun protection and skin checks.

Nanziga needs

Advantage Africa is seeking support for a new project in Nanziga, Uganda where poverty, unsafe water, HIV and malaria mean that the most vulnerable families

with single parents can no longer cope. Advantage Africa is determined to support their vision for a better future. Could you, your family, workplace or church help fundraise for this project?



In Nanziga, Esther (left) is increasingly frail, her daughter Phoebe (centre) has a heart condition and Rita (right) has Down's Syndrome. They all have malaria but have no means to earn an income to pay for treatment. This vulnerable family is longing for the opportunity to overcome their challenges and build a habitable home.

Milestones is published by Advantage Africa, who support people affected by poverty, disability and HIV to improve their education, health and incomes. Our work helps people to help themselves and build a better future for their families and communities.

Registered Charity Number: 1092719 **Company Number:** 4388034, England

Staff: Andrew Betts, Rob Aley, Sarah Cox, Jane Betts, Charlotte Cashman

Trustees: Stephen Blakemore, Laura Sullivan, Ann Tennant, Paul Winnan, Christopher Chapman. **Patron:** Martyn Joseph

Address: Advantage Africa, 26a Market Place, Olney, Buckinghamshire, MK46 4BA

Tel: 01234 711005 **Fax:** 01234 711006 **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/advantageafrica

Website: www.advantageafrica.org **E-mail:** information@advantageafrica.org