



OUR VALUABLE CHILDREN

twelve stories of hope

The AVSI OVC Program in Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda



www.avsi.org

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DEDICATION

This booklet is dedicated to all orphans and vulnerable children of Eastern Africa, of whom the twelve stories here narrated are a peculiar example.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Introduction by Dr. Lucia Castelli	5
INDIVIDUALS	1. Every Hope Is Permitted	6
	2. Accepting Reality Can Make the Difference	8
	3. The Quest for Education and Hope for the Future	10
	4. A New House, A New Life	12
FAMILIES	5. Restoring the Role of the Extended Family in the Care of OVC	14
	6. Nutrition as a Building Block of Education	16
COMMUNITIES	7. Holistic Community Support Brings Change	18
	8. Supporting Communities to Support Their Children	20
	9. Support a Local Association	22
CBOs AND NGOs	10. Pamoja Tunashinda	24
	11. Give Value to Life to Prevent HIV/AIDS	26
	12. Strengthening Community Capacity to Care for OVC	28

SOCIAL STUDIES (SST)

20/6/2007

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2005, AVSI started to implement a four-year program among the neediest areas of Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya. Building upon past experiences and replicating best practices, this program, *Increased Care and Support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa*, is giving quality services already to more than 12,000 orphans, vulnerable children (OVC) and their communities through an operative network of 100 local partners. This program is funded in part by the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and by private donors through AVSI.

This booklet tells the stories of twelve children among the twelve thousand which are but a few of the many successes shared by each of AVSI's partners. Those of us "in the field" and living and breathing within the scope of development programs have little doubt that the change we witness can be described as "impact" or "success." The brave sponsors and donors who make their way into the heart of Africa and trek around with our staff to visit project sites are always left amazed and inspired by what they see taking place. At the same time, the reports we prepare as the most common vehicle to share our work and success will never be capable of conveying the African reality, nor the results of gradual change in an individual.

Considering a program and methodology that places the individual at the center and aims to nurture that individual along his or her path of growth, the measures of success must be as numerous as the number of beneficiaries. After just more than two years of the PEPFAR funded program, and scaling up of the AVSI program with OVC, we are definitely seeing change at

each level of our intervention, children, families and community based organizations

What AVSI hopes to accomplish through the support provided within this program is to promote education and personal growth for the most vulnerable children of Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya. We hope to see more children experiencing the joys of childhood and youth—learning, playing, and growing—with hope for the future.

Success today also means that parents and relatives understand the value of all the children in their care and feel hopeful about their capacity to provide a loving home.

Success also means that tomorrow, when AVSI scholarship funding is required to scale back, parents will be better equipped to support their children's education and health. Groups and associations will be more able to understand the challenges facing children and youth, especially in light of the impact of HIV/AIDS, and capable of responding with prepared staff and the management and financial systems in place to keep needed services going.

The stories in this booklet present a few of the faces of children, parents and organizations which remind us that change is taking place, change that can be qualified as "success."

AVSI hopes to continue to nurture all positive change in individuals, families and communities, so that the transformation of love, friendship and hard work can continue to spread and shape the future of Africa.

Dr. Lucia Castelli
AVSI OVC Program Manager

story one...

Every Hope Is Permitted

Providence's Rights Restored

Little Providence Iradukunda is a tiny eight year old girl born in the District of KAMONYI, MUSAMBIRA sector, Rwanda. Sadly, Providence's life is marked by developmental handicaps resulting from the close relationship of her biological parents. Providence's mother was young herself, only 15 years when she became pregnant, and in a compromised family situation as a result. When the baby was born, the father recognized her as his daughter and even gave her the name of Providence. Yet as her handicaps became more evident, her father turned his back and distanced himself from Providence.

In time, Providence's mother received and accepted a marriage proposal from another man, and so she moved with her baby to her new home. The family soon grew to include another daughter and a son. Providence's problems were becoming increasingly serious. Foreseeing the potential problem of integrating Providence into the new family, the child's extended family decided to intervene by bringing the child back into the home of the maternal grandmother.

When the rain would begin to fall, Providence could not move by herself to enter the house and so the child remained under the rain until help arrived.

Providence had significant psychomotor problems that kept her from standing on her own until four years of age. She remained seated all the time and was often left alone while others tended the fields and were busy with chores. When the rain would begin to fall, Providence could not move by herself to enter the house and so the child remained under the rain until help arrived.

Although scarcity of food was a general condition of the entire family, it was more serious for Providence who needed greater attention because of her other health problems. Providence's health deteriorated day by day.

When Providence was identified for sponsorship by AVSI social workers, her mother proposed that AVSI should instead sponsor the younger daughter who was healthy, explaining that 'Providence was a useless burden; she was considered dead in the eyes of her family'. The mother insisted to the point of declaring that if AVSI would not take the sister instead of Providence, she would refuse any help from AVSI at all. However, after much counselling and discussion, Providence was finally given a chance to enrol for sponsorship.

AVSI continued the dialogue with the family and the parents in particular to help them understand that in spite of Providence's handicaps, she has the same rights as any other child. Over time, the parents have come to accept their responsibility and their child's rights.



Providence's malnutrition was severe and the doctor recommended immediate intervention, which was done. After two years, Providence could stand with difficulty and was ready to begin physiotherapy. She was enrolled in a boarding school for children with special needs called, "Handicapped Restored in its Rights." In this school, Providence receives just what the doctor ordered, including physiotherapy and the special care of one attendant who gives her a generous dose of love and affection.



Today, Providence is able to walk, eat independently and smile, which is something that her family had never seen before. Her resilience gives all of us hope that one day this little girl will one day be able to enjoy life to the full.

Today, Providence is able to walk, eat independently and smile, This story highlights the important educative work with parents. While an extreme and difficult case, the reaction of Providence's parents and family to the special needs of their child can be understood given the context of scarcity in which they live. AVSI is always looking for ways to involve the parents in the care for their children which is facilitated by the sponsorship program, so that rather than taking the place of the parents' responsibility, the assistance can bolster their responsibility and commitment to caring for their children.

story two...

Accepting Reality Can Make the Difference Being HIV positive no longer kills the person



Since she was seven, Lamwaka Joan, has lived with her grandmother and siblings in Gulu District in the northern region of Uganda, after both of her parents died of AIDS.

A few years ago, AVSI came in contact with Joan through her grandmother and immediately took note that Joan was always sick and weak. With the encouragement of AVSI social workers, Joan went for testing and it was confirmed that this twelve year old girl had been living with the virus since birth. Joan sought frequent counseling and psychosocial support through AVSI and grew to accept her status. Voluntarily, Joan decided to testify publicly about her status and to share her experience with other children.

Today, Joan is very busy sensitizing and counseling other children.

Through her testimony, Joan conveys a message of positive living and explains how it is possible to live with one's family while protecting them from infection. Attitudes have changed as a direct result of Joan's example and the interactive messages embedded in songs and plays that involve other children under AVSI support.

Children can now see that even with HIV/AIDS, they can still live meaningful lives and be useful to both their families and the community.

Joan continues to be supported by her grandmother who sells foodstuff along the road and maintains a vegetable garden for home consumption. AVSI Gulu supports the family with extra food like milk and eggs to

Through her testimony Joan shows that even with HIV/AIDS life can be meaningful.

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story three...

The Quest for Education and Hope for the Future

Escaping the challenge of early marriage

During his campaign in 1996, the president of Uganda, His Excellence Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, promised Universal Primary Education (UPE), and this pledge was realized in 1997 when the legislation was introduced. The abolishment of primary school fees elicited great excitement among the population of Uganda, but especially among the poor whose children were previously unable to attend school due to the high costs. Although UPE did go forward, it was not enough to see every child in school. Most schools continued to prohibit children from attending classes without a uniform, books, pens or pencils and a contribution to feeding or building funds or for the parent-teacher associations. For the majority of orphans and the most vulnerable children, schooling and UPE became an illusion. Most dropped out of school, or would continue with very irregular attendance, resulting in poor performance. In 2006, the Museveni government pledged Universal Secondary Education, but the story line remains the same.



"I hope to have a bright and prosperous future because of the support you have given to me"

ADEKE SCOVIA tells her story of her own quest for education and how AVSI's intervention has helped her along the way.

"I am Adeke Scovia, my original home is in Kumi district in North Eastern Uganda. I am in Mother Kevin Secondary School and I joined this school in Secondary one. I am an orphan. My parents died in 1995 and 1996 respectively when I was in Primary Two. We were left 6 children and I am the 5th born. I dropped out of school in Primary Six and stayed at home for some time. Later on, I was brought to Jinja in the year 2000 by my aunt. She told me that I was coming to study but when I arrived, I was made a baby sitter for one year.

In 2001, a kind man decided to take me back to school to Primary Seven. I joined Mother Kevin in 2002 in Secondary one. While in Secondary one, this man started demanding a love relationship from me and threatened not to give me school fees if I refused him. Worst of all, the man was over 50 years old.

When I explained my problem to Sister Bonnie, the headmistress, she told me not to give in to this man and encouraged me that I was going to study without any problem. After some time, Sister Bonnie told me that I could receive a scholarship through AVSI. I became very happy and grateful for what she had told me because I felt I was released from this problem which would have forced me to either drop out of school or give in myself to this man because of education.

Furthermore, the place I used to stay also had its own problems. The aunt I used to stay with was also poor with her own children whom she was unable to pay for. Due to this scholarship offered to me, I am now able to get school fees, soap, books, pens, Vaseline which I was not able to get before; not only that but also things like bed sheets and blankets which I never had before in my life. As for now, I am even free to speak among my friends because those days, I had no freedom due to the oppression I had. Due to all these problems, maybe I would have been in the village married to some poor man suffering in some one's home and facing the consequences of early marriage or even have AIDS.

According to where I am now, I hope to have a bright and prosperous future because of the support you have given to me. Before this OVC program started to help me, I could imagine that I was forgotten by God and I could even regret why I was born. Worst of all, I could recall about my late parents and start crying all day and I could think that it was the end of me. But now I feel happy and I hope to help some body in future also. I was able to pass my Secondary four exams well and I believe even in Secondary six, I will do well, and join a public university."

story four...

A New House, A New Life

Mama Pendo and her new house



Kware is a huge slum situated on the northeast side of Nairobi in Ongata Rongai and is one of the most populated slums in Kenya. Most of Ongata Rongai is a quarry where people make a living by digging and breaking stones to be used as building materials. Casual labor is the primary source of income for most residents, in large part because of the poor soil quality which makes agriculture unproductive. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to aggravate the difficult conditions in the slum, where malnutrition, disease, and lack of education affect most households.

AVSI currently provides support to 324 orphans and other vulnerable children served by the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary, an African congregation of religious sisters.

In 2005, the sisters met with many families and identified the most vulnerable living in the slum. At this time they met a 40 year old Tanzanian lady named

Mama Mary, otherwise known as Mama Pendo. Mama Pendo's house was destroyed on a raid by the city council determined to drive out illegal squatters in Kware slum. With both parents unemployed and five children, the family's situation was dire. For a time, Mama Pendo and her family moved from place to place, burdening other slum residents, until finally settling in a big hole, covered by rags and a tent in the vicinity of an open sewage system. Those responsible for the collaboration of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary and AVSI, Sister Lucy Nduta and Sister Mary Wambui, were moved by the needs of this family and took immediate action. Two of the children, Pendo and Gathoni, were offered

The active, constant presence of the Sisters in this neighborhood led to an encounter which has provided a solid basis for hope for this family.



sponsorships to attend nursery and secondary school respectively through the AVSI OVC program. Furthermore the Sisters asked AVSI for more support in the form of iron sheeting to build a simple house for this poor family. The Chief decided to give them a small piece

of land to be used temporarily. The Sisters gathered together some parents from the local parents' organizations and together they began construction. In one week, Mama Pendo and her children moved into the new house composed of three rooms. Unfortunately, the family still does not have a toilet so they are using paid toilets or the common "flying toilets" (garbage bags used to dispose waste into the river at night) and they shower in an improvised facility at the entrance of the house.

When AVSI staff visited Kware to meet Mama Pendo and her family for the first time in March 2006,

Mama Pendo was almost crying because of happiness, saying that her gratitude is infinite. The sisters helped Mama Pendo purchase some cows which now provide a regular income. As an active member of a parents' group, Mama Pendo is always ready to assist needy families as the Sisters did for her.

The story of Mama Pendo demonstrates the irreplaceable role of local level organizations, including faith based institutions such as the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary. Given her fluid situation, Mama Pendo and her family could easily have been overlooked for services and increasingly marginalized. The active, constant presence of the Sisters in this neighborhood led to an encounter which has provided a solid basis for hope for this family.

story five...

Restoring the Role of the Extended Family in the Care of OVC

A child poor in health but rich in family



Just as in most African countries, the tradition of the extended family has always thrived in Uganda. The family provides a network capable of responding to social needs and most importantly is integral to the upbringing of children. In fact, among the Baganda, one of Uganda's biggest tribes, a brother to one's father was never referred to as uncle, but as 'my young father'. Because of this tradition, even when one's father had long passed away, the child was never a total orphan since he or she still belonged to the clan. A number of factors, including the spread of HIV/AIDS since the 1980s, have weakened the social structure of extended families, leading to increased vulnerability for orphans. AVSI places great value on the role of the family for the healthy development of all children, and AVSI social workers struggle to have this social responsibility revived.

NAKIWEWA TEDDY.

In 1992, Teddy was born to a very weak mother suffering from AIDS, and Teddy too was infected although no one was aware. Little Teddy never had the joy and comfort of a stable family life, since she lost her mother before she was one year old and her father a few years later. At four years old, Teddy was living with her illiterate grandfather who did not take good care of her. Going out for his daily chores, the grandfather would leave Teddy at the doorstep of his locked house and with no food for lunch.

On one of her visits to the village, Maria Teresa, the sister-in-law of Teddy's grandfather, found the little girl locked outside the house. That evening, Maria offered to care for Teddy. The grandfather consented and Teddy was welcomed into Maria's large family of eleven people, most of whom were young orphans, in Kampala. As a food vendor, Maria did not earn enough to send the orphans she cared for to school, but at least they were well fed and safe. One day while buying vegetables from Maria's stall, a volunteer from Meeting Point Kampala, an organization that partners with AVSI, noticed a number of young children playing. Through this encounter, Maria learned about the support provided for orphans through the AVSI OVC program and was able to enroll her children.

At twelve years old Teddy had never stepped into a school and was placed in Primary one. Yet Teddy's poor health prevented her from attending school regularly. With attention and counseling by a social worker from Meeting Point, Maria eventually confirmed that Teddy was HIV positive. Maria adds that "I am grateful for the support for Teddy and the other children; my support load has been alleviated. Now I have to ensure that Teddy takes her medication twice a day; in the morning and evening". With a big a smile she says, "... the children eat their lunch at school all courtesy of Meeting Point Kampala, this has helped me to save money and I have opened a small eating place for the people who build in the neighborhood come for their lunch and dinner. My income has now increased ... I am able to buy some other necessities for my home and adequately play my role as a grandmother of orphaned children."

Teddy was welcomed into Maria's large family and her life could start again

In conclusion, AVSI's believes that all the support offered to the OVC should be done in collaboration and to reinforce the efforts of the children's families. The family social networks will provide the best support to orphans if only they can be reawakened where they are missing and strengthened where they exist.

story six...

Nutrition as a Building Block of Education

A creative involvement of parents in response to a very concrete need

On the hills surrounding Nairobi, Kibera is one of the largest slums on the African continent with close to a million inhabitants. Most parents and guardians engage in the daily struggle to provide for their families by engaging in ‘Kibarua’ —temporary, low wage, manual jobs. Given the bloated number of inhabitants, even these harsh jobs are scarce. The former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan observed that, “Rural poverty has long been the world’s most common face of destitution but urban poverty can be just as intense, dehumanizing and life-threatening.” This statement conveys a very real side of life in Kibera.

The abysmal situation of life in the slums has been aggravated further by the impact of HIV/AIDS, a disease which thrives in such conditions; sickly parents are left unable to fend for children who are denied the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty through education and investments in health.

A parent-driven school feeding programme gives a balanced diet to 1,100 school children in Kibera slum

In schools in and around Kibera, AVSI is giving the chance for 800 OVC to enjoy a healthy childhood filled with learning and play. After many years of experience, AVSI realized that there was a continued problem of irregular school attendance caused in large part by the inability of many households to provide adequate food to sustain the children throughout the routine of the school day.

To address this problem, AVSI embarked on a parent-driven school feeding programme. Groups of parents received start-up materials and contracts to provide meals for their children. Now, 1,100 children receive a balanced diet through this program. Teachers have noted considerable improvements

in school attendance and performance. AVSI program officer, Romana Koech, says that, “we used to have so many children complaining daily of headaches, but surprisingly after the feeding program was introduced, these complaints have ceased. One would say that the food also doubles for ‘medicine’.” Moreover, what makes this program even more important to AVSI is that the children themselves value it so much. Anyango Jane from Toy Primary school in Kibera shocked her teachers one day when they found food tied in a plastic bag in her small school bag. Her response to them was, “I cannot afford to eat all the food that I am given here at school when I know that my little brother and sister did not have anything for the entire day. I have to pack half of my share to take to them when I return home”.

Many parents have also benefited. Five parent collectives are supplying the hot lunches for the OVC children in collaboration with AVSI. The head of one of the groups, Mr. Edward Malelu, explains that “... the proceeds from this activity are shared amongst the participating parents, and over the years, our lives have improved since we have a regular and consistent income. We are now able to provide basic needs to our families and to support our other children in school”. Another parent, Janet Iminza, has said that “... the satisfaction I get from participating in this activity is not minor. It gives me much joy to see that I am able to provide food to these children who would otherwise go without anything if it weren’t for this feeding program... as a mother, I go through a lot of agony to see hungry souls ... people with food in abundance may never imagine what it means to be hungry, but I tell you my children have gone to bed on an empty stomach before, leaving me sleepless the whole night, so seeing happy and satisfied children gives me the first fulfillment besides the earnings from this activity”.



story seven...

Holistic Community Support Brings Change

Moving out from under the Miraa Tree



Mutuati is a division in Meru north district in the Eastern province of Kenya. The inhabitants of Mutuati, a Bantu group referred to as the Ameru people, number around 100,000 and rely primarily on subsistence agriculture. The fertile land in Mutuati produces cassava, bananas, fruit, tea and coffee, however harsh climatic cycles challenge even seasoned farmers. Access to water is greatly restricted and as a result, many households are forced to trek for many kilometers to obtain water. Animal rearing is a potentially productive activity that is hampered by the lack of water.



These conditions have favored the growth of the Miraa tree, an indigenous plant that has proven resistant to long droughts. It is an evergreen shrub whose fresh leaves and twigs have a stimulating and euphoric effect when chewed. Recreational use of the Miraa tree as a form of drug is illegal in many countries, including Kenya, though it is widely used in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Canada.

While not enough research has been done on the full effect of this drug, it is commonly known that fertility and physical strength are greatly hindered, thus reducing productivity and the general well-being of families. As in all instances of substance abuse, those who suffer the most are always the children who are unable to fend for

themselves.



Cyprian Kaliunga, the head of the Don Bosco Association and teacher at Mutuati Primary School, says, "In fact, in Mutuati the majority of children are malnourished due to, among other factors, the effects of Miraa on their parents whose productivity is very low. Child labor is widespread, these children miss out in school are abused by the farmers and never get a chance to be children".

The greatest detrimental effect of Miraa cultivation is the fact that many young children, and especially boys, drop out of school to assist farmers in plucking the twigs of the Miraa tree since only light and agile persons can climb the fragile branches of the shrub. Attracted by the opportunity to earn an income, and in many cases because of their position as heads of households, many children opt for work rather than school. Some parents encourage their children to work and contribute directly to the family well-being.

Given this background, community members and organizations including the Don Bosco Association, have decided to tackle the problem of Miraa cultivation head-on by promoting a diversity of sustainable economic activities.

On the one hand, the Association is making an effort to spread awareness about the effects of Miraa use, and on the other, to offer technical and financial support for alternative income generating activities. AVSI encourages parents of OVC to form business groups which receive basic training and follow-up technical assistance for small income generating activities. Cyprian testifies to the positive results: “Some of the most successful stories of income generation include one guardian who tends a tree nursery and others who set up grocery shops, raise poultry, and grow vegetables”. AVSI is keen to support the tireless effort of the Association in front of all the needs of the community. One area of collaboration is adult literacy. Over the last two years, the Don Bosco Association has provided adult education to over four hundred guardians and parents. Romana Koech, the AVSI program officer, says “reaching this number is indeed a turning point because illiteracy is quite high in Mutuati. Adult literacy means more people will be able to think positively about their lives... Above all, more opportunities are now open to them besides the fact that they have been able to see the harmful side of Miraa. Several parents and guardians are now more than ever determined to see their children succeed in school, for the benefits they have got with just the adult literacy lessons are an incentive they never before imagined”.

The school teacher Cyprian Kaliunga and others have decided to tackle the problem of Miraa cultivation head on by promoting a diversity of sustainable economic activities

story eight...

Supporting Communities to Support Their Children

“We must never forget the importance of family and community in the life of a child”

It has been a decade since the Rwandan genocide claimed the lives of about 937,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus, a decade in which refugees have returned home to join their people’s effort to rebuild a livelihood for their families while also overcoming ethnic divisions and forging a national unity. During this time, the alarming reality of high numbers of orphans and vulnerable children has emerged even as the people seek unity and commit more than ever before to the hard work of rebuilding. AVSI has been humbled to walk with the people of Rwanda as they strive to make their country a lovely home and shares the following stories about the struggle for economic and social reliance.

In face of an urgent need to care for and support the orphaned and vulnerable children in Ruhango district and to improve livelihoods, a number of people came together into groups. With the intention of offering each other moral support and collective work

Eleven groups took the form of associations and demonstrate improved capacity for action

towards economic strengthening, eleven of these groups took the form of associations which afforded them more strength and recognition. As an AVSI social worker describes the associations, “they started while being groupings of people without the least organization. Thanks to the formations and various technical, material and financial support received, they have reached a stage where they have become vectors of development in the administrative sectors where they intervene”.

The achievements of the associations speak for themselves, demonstrating improved capacity for action.

In 2006, they produced and multiplied the 289,700 cuttings of cassava (manioc) which were distributed to their members and sold to other people in Ruhango to replace the cassava that had been attacked by the cassava mosaic that was almost finishing off the crop, an important staple food in this region of Rwanda. This intervention made it possible to renew

the cassava seedlings and to ward off the negative consequences of insufficient production.

Yet the impact of the cassava multiplication project went beyond immediate food security. The association members took the effort so seriously, that the production levels surpassed immediate needs and provided the opportunity to generate some income. According to one social worker, “the members of these associations drew benefit from it because they are all able to meet their primary needs: they are affiliated with the health insurance, they can pay the school fees for the members who do not benefit from AVSI sponsorship, they can purchase clothes. One association acquired 17 goats from its own capital and seven people built their own houses”.

When in 2007 the government called on people to form into cooperatives, the association members enjoyed an advantage. Mobilization was not difficult and the 11 associations amalgamated to form three cooperatives which are in the process of obtaining approval and recognition by the district and the Ministry concerned so that they can easily benefit from government interventions.

Ruhango district is in the process of establishing a partnership with these cooperatives to pilot the implementation of a governmental policy of land consolidation and specialised farming. These cooperatives are now in a position to champion a request in agreement with the district, and with the assistance of AVSI, to contribute to the supply of cassava cuttings at an affordable price for the population which will engage in this program of specialised farming.

This opportunity should lead to greater and more regular income generation for cooperative members and consolidate recognition of the cooperatives as partners in the development strategies of the district.



story nine...

Support a Local Association... It Will Create a School and a Co-operative

Give them a fish and they'll eat for a day. Teach them how to fish and they'll eat forever.

Abishyizehamwe association, in the District of Gatsibo, Rwanda, first received support from AVSI in 2003 within a project funded by the Italian government. The most vulnerable members (widows, mothers of seriously malnourished children, and others) received direct support in the form of cattle or farming equipment. In the end, the interventions had little long-term impact because the items received were badly managed and because of the extreme vulnerability of the participants.

When the OVC project commenced in 2005, and in light of on-going partnerships with UNICEF and WFP, AVSI changed its strategy to reinforce the capacities of association members in specific areas such as financial management and to reaffirm their value and ability to cope with problems. As a result, the associations increased their activities and consolidated their income generating activities in particular in the production of coffee and corn.

As the school year began in 2006, the majority of the members were confronted with the problem of their younger children. Indeed, 44 mothers had a total of 75 little children who had not yet started to go to school. Unable to send the children to private nursery schools, they decided to work together to come up with a solution. Together, they women pooled resources to rent a room at the sector office and pay a mistress to care for their children for a half day.

This small private initiative aroused the interest of other parents until the association took the next step to buy a field to build a nursery school with their own means. A family contribution of 300 frw (half a dollar) per child per quarter generates revenue insufficient to cover costs, but the association has decided to pay the difference.

The support to income generative activities is an educational process. It is not enough to give. It is initially necessary to prepare the ground, to look at and understand who is the person we are giving to and why



Recently, the association decided to join with two other associations to form a cooperative. The cooperative, called URUMULU, is made up of 154 members of which 116 are women. The cooperative is consolidating the inheritance of the three associations to equalize the shares of each member according to the principle of equality which marks the difference between a commercial company and a cooperative.

The cooperative supports families in addressing the most important needs of their children, including health and education. Each member and his/her family are enrolled in health insurance, all children of primary school age are enrolled, and most members are elected leaders in the community. Even the local cultural group which greets visiting guests and other authorities is made up of members of the cooperative.



The formal structure of the cooperative helps this community to answer more quickly to all government programs, ensures a legal personality, and represents the possibility of contributing to district and even national level development programmes.

Support to income generating activities is an educational process. Giving things is not enough. It is necessary to prepare the ground by looking at and understanding who the person is and to try and understand together what he /she needs. The work of AVSI consisted in helping the recipients to identify their real problems and needs and to conceive of solutions. In this way, they are made more aware of their own resources and possibilities.

Give them a fish, they will eat today, teach them to fish, and they will eat every day, and you will remain teaching them or discovering with them, new and tastier ways of cooking that fish to share together.

story ten...

Pamoja Tunavshinda

Together we succeed

Elizabeth was fifteen years old when she left her home in Kabale district in south western Uganda to live with her aunt and attend secondary school in Jinja. With school sponsorship provided by AVSI through the OVC program, Elizabeth entered Mother Kevin Secondary School where her teachers found her to be bright and out going. At some point, Elizabeth's teachers began to note a change in her demeanor and conveyed their concern to Sr. Boni, the school's headmistress. Sr. Boni quickly recognized the dramatic change in Elizabeth and one day called Elizabeth to her office for a chat.

It was not easy to get the truth out of Elizabeth in the beginning. But with constant counseling, warmth and great care that Sr. Boni exhibited, Elizabeth finally revealed that she was pregnant and desperate with anxiety. She was scared of dropping out of school but most of all, how could she face her auntie and her other relatives with this bitter truth?

Sr. Boni decided to accompany Elizabeth to her home to face her auntie in person. Through long discussions, Elizabeth and her auntie came to accept the situation, and Sr. Boni promised that after Elizabeth had delivered and nursed her child to a stage where the baby could be left at home in some other person's care, Elizabeth would be allowed in school. Hope returned to Elizabeth's life, only to be challenged. At a pre-natal visit, Elizabeth discovered that she was HIV positive. Blown away by this reality, she decided to keep her status a secret. One day, Elizabeth's auntie found Elizabeth's pre-natal health card and noticed a sign that made her suspicious. After taking the card to some health personnel, the aunt understood. Upset and angry, the woman forced Elizabeth to leave her home.

Elizabeth could have easily become a story of lost potential without the attention and understanding of her school's headmistress

With no one else to turn to but Sr. Boni, Elizabeth soon appeared at the school's doors. Sr. Boni felt at a loss in front of Elizabeth's circumstances, so she called upon AVSI for support. AVSI staff knew immediately where to turn, and linked Elizabeth up with a professional counselor, Ms. Rose Busingye, the manager of the Meeting Point International (MPI) in Kampala, another local partner of AVSI's OVC program. Feeling an immediate and reassuring sense of trust, Elizabeth immediately opened her heart to Rose and told her everything about her life.



Soon thereafter in one of their community fellowship events, Rose discussed the problem facing Elizabeth with her clients, the women of Kireka's Acholi Quarter, a slum in Kampala where she works. The Kireka women instantly agreed to welcome the two of them into their community and to care for them together. One lady, an HIV positive woman named Josephine, personally invited Elizabeth and her new born baby into her house where she lives with her husband and eight children. Josephine

wants to ensure that Elizabeth has the chance to continue her education, finish school and have an opportunity to care for her child and other people in the society.

Elizabeth, now 17 years old, is a hard-working student in class S3 at St. Noa Secondary Boarding School in Kampala, hoping to secure a bright future for her child and to repay the kindness of the ladies of Kireka, and especially Josephine and her family. Her little daughter, almost 2 years old, lives with this new family where she is cared for with love. Every three months, Josephine visits Elizabeth in the school and brings her food and some pocket money, earned through her new small jewelry business and added to by contributions from the other HIV positive ladies in her fellowship at MPI.

Even the strongest institutional relationships and most refined processes will never take the place of real people with their hearts open to seeing the needs of another

This story shows that AVSI's support to Sr. Boni, as a local partner counterpart, was clearly more than just financial. In Uganda, AVSI links together a wide range of organizations with different missions, capacities and localities that together formed a safety net capable of catching Elizabeth and her child. Yet even the strongest institutional relationships and most refined processes will never take the place of real people with their hearts open to seeing the needs of another.

The generosity and friendship extended gratuitously to Elizabeth by the women members of Meeting Point International is the most impressive sign that beauty, community and charity are still possible despite the poverty and disease that marks everyday for many Ugandans.

story eleven...

Give Value to Life to Prevent HIV/AIDS

Faith moves mountains

Five high school students in Rwanda not only learned about the prevention of HIV from an AVSI sponsored training session, but were so moved by the message about the “Value of Life” that they have made it their mission to share it with peers and countrymen alike. Four young men and one young lady, all enrolled in AVSI’s OVC program, Jean Claude, Marcel, Magnifique, Vedaste and another Jean Claude, attended a training session in 2006 using the Value of Life curriculum. This training module developed by AVSI is addressed to school teachers, social workers and youth to promote behavior change in order to prevent HIV/AIDS. While the curriculum incorporates a wealth of information about the transmission of AIDS, it’s most interesting and important contribution is the interactive and personal exploration of the needs of a person and the meaning of love, freedom and sexuality.

These particular students considered the approach of such high value that they immediately began talking about how to share it with their friends and peers. Three of them had just finished secondary school and decided to form an Association through which they would circulate information on the Value of Life.

Today, these young people lead a strong association which is now recognized even at the district level. They continue to go from village to village and school to school sharing their experience with others. Their messages don’t only address people of the same age, but they speak with any age groups that seek their advice. All of the effort given by these young people has been done entirely free, without trying to get any reward or advantage. Their single and biggest reward was the possibility of sharing what they learned with their community.



One of the young men declared that after the training he has understood himself more as a Human Being, and as such with an individual, infinite value. Another told us that he had become more determined and capable of taking responsibility for his own life, to choose the best for himself while weighing the pros and cons of each decision. He now feels in full bloom, more at peace with himself; “it is as if a layer of dirt has been taken off my brain.” Another told us that he feels like he really has something to offer the community. “It is as if a layer of dirt has been taken off my brain “ . ..He now feels in full bloom, more at peace with himself.

All of them were very much satisfied to be able to give a message in public. They are esteemed among peers and community leaders, while their admitted purpose is to help the other youngsters to find an objective in their life.

Youth who have benefited from the Value of Life training seem to be revived in front of the preoccupation with HIV/AIDS since the message provides answers that go beyond the disease. The Value of Life sessions provoke the young people to ask themselves, what is life, why live it, and how to live it? Once engaged at this level, and guided by peers who can relate and understand, young people can find themselves open to learn about available strategies to fight against the threat of AIDS.

Our young people are an inestimable asset because they are our future

Our young people are an inestimable asset because they are our future. They have the power to change the world and they are thirsty for a better world free from useless suffering. They wish for a world that doesn't force them to be what they cannot be or don't want to be, and where they can experience real freedom, like the young man who is “in full bloom” and “in peace.” This sense of harmony with oneself and with others comes from realizing one's own true, infinite value. With the force of their passion and creativity, the students behind this association declared to us that they had decided to be known as the Living Men instead of the Living Dead!

story twelve...

Strengthening Community Capacity to Care for OVC

Starting from the positive to build local partner's capacity

In the remote district of Tororo in eastern Uganda, the Child Development Corporation (CHDECO) started as a community initiative in 1996 to support educational opportunities for poor and disadvantaged children. CHDECO managed to support a few children with its resources. The initiative gained strength day by day, and over the course of a few years, the number of enrolled children increased from just a handful to hundreds of children in the community. The burgeoning workload and financial requirements challenged CHDECO management and staff to come up with new ideas for how to deliver the best possible

With the OVC project, success has not been defined only by the higher number of children attending school, but also by the improvement of local partner's skills and capacity

services to the beneficiaries in such a way that they really feel cared for through a relationship with a responsible adult. The manager of the organization, Mr. Osinde John Paul, recalls that “before the start of the OVC project, CHDECO, had a lot of children in need on the waiting list. We had been looking around, knocking doors of big organizations and of course the district office responsible for community development to no avail. But when the OVC project began, 150 of the children that had been referred to us by the community leaders were privileged to enter the doors of classrooms thanks to the friendship and partnership we developed with AVSI”. Mr. Osinde continued to explain that, “The support towards caring for children did not stop at this, but in the several trainings we have attended arranged by AVSI, our capacity to handle children has changed dramatically; we now look at children positively as human beings like all the others as opposed to beggars or ungrateful children, we treat them with a lot of respect and we can see that as a result, this has increased their dignity”.

He also adds that with the OVC project, success has not been defined by and limited to the number of children attending school. The benefits to the organization have been many as well: “The OVC project gave CHDECO a great and rare

opportunity to expand, improve her structures, acquire managerial, financial, psychosocial and development skills; all of which enabled the staff to deliver quality services to the beneficiaries, through organized trainings and what however has been so enriching is the comprehensive manner through which these trainings are organized to cater for all departments; finance and administration, social workers and the organization heads. Coupled with these trainings are open meetings and discussions that are frequently available at any time and the quarterly follow up visits by AVSI to our offices in Tororo or CHDECO staff to the AVSI office in Kampala”.

CHDECO continues to face challenges, but the uniqueness of this organization lies in the way such challenges are confronted as positive opportunities for growth. As the head of the organization explains, “as a local organization grows, there are always challenges. One which we experience is holding or keeping employees because the more they are trained, the more they are likely to compete for higher jobs and the more they get them...this is one of our experiences, however, we are proud that we have now systems in place that make it very easy for new competent staff to catch up. Moreover, we don't look at the exit of our staff negatively, since we appreciate that they too want to reach out for greater, rewarding opportunities that we are not yet able to offer”. The manager has expressed his appreciation for AVSI in saying, “even if the project comes to an end, CHDECO wishes to appreciate in a very sincere way the capacity building opportunities that we have received. It has enabled us to offer quality and effective services to our children, given an opportunity to some of our employees to compete for greater opportunities and has put CHDECO in a different class and level among other NGOs in Tororo. We are most grateful”.





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the child is the centre



Our Valuable Children

