

Project Proposal: Long-Term Orphan Care

St. America's Orphan Care and Development Center, Uganda

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Introduction

We have all heard that children are the future. With them comes the hope that the world will be a better place for them to live. Parents hope for the best for their children and are constantly investing in them to give them the best lives they can. A good parent is selfless and does everything in their power to give them the opportunities to succeed in a broken world. Orphans around the world do not have this opportunity. Where is the provision for them? Who will be their caretakers and look out for their best interests? Who will provide them an opportunity to make their own decisions? Orphans are often left out of any plans. With governments concentrated on the general population of those who are most able to give back, orphans are neglected and oftentimes end up in the cycle of poverty. What if instead of being victims of a system, they could be empowered to change the system? Within the lives of children is the future; we aim to include orphans in the equation as full citizens capable of changing the course of their communities and nations. Humble beginnings produce high hopes. Unlike the children in well-maintained and well-cared for households, orphans identify with the outcasts of society. Orphans know what it is like to be left out, but with the right tools of education and empowerment, they can be agents of change for the marginalized in their societies. Their motives are genuine, and their ideas relevant.

An orphan care development program at St. America's Orphan Care and Development Center in Mbiko, Uganda will give orphans the option to ascend the negative cycles of poverty, live an abundant life, and be agents of change in their communities, cities, and the world. The needs and assets of the Center will be determined to further provide care and education in sufficient ways. Projects will be established to generate solutions for problems that exist and that

may arise in the future. Outside help from local and international communities and individuals will be handled transparently and effectively.

Edith, the Director of St. Ameria's has already shown transparency and effectiveness in caring for the orphans and making sure that they have at least a primary education. She has aspirations for caring for more children in response to the large numbers of orphans in Mbiko and Jinja. There are sustainable solutions internally at St. Ameria's, so the program is based largely around those aspirations. From the outside, financial support and accountability will be integral to accomplishing these aspirations. Ideally, the financial support would be greater at the beginning of the program, and then taper off to a minimal level once the sustainable programs are in order. Even with sustainable programs, we must keep in mind that this is the care of children. Parents spend money on their children to provide for them. These children have no parents to provide for them so aid is a necessary aspect to the development of orphans.

Background

The motivation for working with Edith from St. Ameria's came in 2007 when I (John) was helping set up an international HIV/AIDS conference in Jinja, Uganda. Through a series of circumstances and new friendships, my friend Alex Fung and I ended up at St. Ameria's to hear the small children's choir sing songs about AIDS killing their parents. Alex and I continued to visit the orphan care center and spent our time there playing soccer with the children, taking their photos, and talking with Edith about how she started the center and where it could go in the future. She was an orphan herself and started caring for orphans in 1994 when she accepted the first child into her home. She hasn't turned one child down since and continues to do everything she can for the children. Now, there are over 100 totally orphaned children full-time at St. Ameria's, and approximately 100 more partial orphans (one parent who is unlikely able to care

for them) during the school year. She is able to give them meager meals, a roof (even if it is leaky), and a basic primary education. She is short-staffed and under-resourced. She led us on a tour of the “facilities”. During this tour, we made it to a room that housed most of the boys at the center. A small room housed about 40 boys who all slept on the floor like sardines packed in a can. It was at this point where I knew that I wanted to help these children. Alex and I continued to spend time with Edith and the children, meeting temporary needs like establishing a bank account and email accounts for international donations and communication. I have continued to look for ways to partner with Edith as she cares for the orphans of Mbiko and Jinja.

Orphan care is vital to the country of Uganda and to Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. In 2005 there were 2.3 million orphans in Uganda and 48.3 in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was estimated that by 2010, the number would increase to 2.5 and 53.1 million respectively. The AIDS epidemic is a strong contributing factor to leaving many children without one or both of their parents. Of the 2.3 million orphans in Uganda in 2005, 45% of the children were orphaned due to AIDS and many more will suffer as a result (UNICEF, 2006).

When children lose their parents, they often lose their freedoms as their support crumbles and they become marginalized from the rest of society. They lack the understanding, resources, and support they need to be fully engaged in society. Martinussen (1997) looked at the Human Development Report from 1990 that focused on the three essential choices that are vital to human development. They included, “the opportunity to lead a long and healthy life; the opportunity to acquire knowledge; and the opportunity to have access to resources needed for a standard of living” (p. 38). Orphans often lose all three of these opportunities and become limited in their human development, which effects them both in the short and long-term. As Sen (2000) explained, “what people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities,

political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives” (p. 5). When opportunity is taken away, it affects every area of life. It is important that each child is given the chance of living a sustainable life that contributes to the society as a whole.

Orphans not only lack opportunity and the love, care, and support parents would normally provide, but they also become vulnerable members of their societies and easy targets for acts of injustice such as child labor and sex trafficking. When children lose their support system, they are unable to take care of themselves. Children need to be looked after and provided with the care, education, and training they need to become contributing citizens of their societies. As Gabriel Rugalem (2004) stated, “the learning process breaks down when parents die. Someone has to ensure that knowledge and skills are imparted, to enable these children to grow up to become integrated members of the community” (Economic Commission for Africa, 2004). Edith has committed her life to taking care of orphans, but she continues to need funds and resources to help more children and be more effective in the work she is doing at St. America’s and in Uganda.

Project Justification

The children of Uganda are the future of Uganda. Children, like Uganda, have immense potential. Uganda is known as the Pearl of Africa and has access to plentiful natural resources, good soil, and a varied climate. But as with any other nation, there are problems and issues. What does the future hold for Uganda? Many of the influential people in Uganda are educated in Western systems. This education is beneficial, but can also present some problems. They focus on the elite and those who can give back the most to the system; the issues that they listen to are from people with a voice and do not encompass the voices of the marginalized. The

marginalized, even though they are often neglected from society, have tremendous potential that is stifled. They do not have the option of making their voice heard or creating a better life for themselves.

Meeting the needs of orphans will require investment and community cooperation in order to bring sustainable change. It will require a similar approach that Sachs (2005) outlined as a solution for ending poverty. Sachs believed that ending poverty would require investments that would eventually yield returns. He stated, “sooner rather than later, these investments would repay themselves not only in lives saved, children educated, and communities preserved, but also in direct commercial returns” (2005, p. 235). Similarly, as people invest in the lives of orphans, not only will the individual orphan’s needs be met, but eventually a multitude of needs will be met, as orphans are cared for and educated, that will contribute to the nation as a whole. Orphan care partnered with a good education can work together to produce strong community leaders. Strong community leaders become strong national leaders and innovators. Strong national leaders and innovators are capable of making wise decisions to benefit the general population, but also alleviate the suffering and oppression of the marginalized. Caring for the orphans will require a significant investment, but in the end it will lead to sustainable results for the individual orphans and the nation, as great leaders are created that can contribute to the growth and progress of Uganda.

Many people are looking for ways to get involved in issues of injustice by advocating for justice and helping the poor and oppressed in the world. Child sponsorship, as well as church and town sponsoring is an effective way to be involved with the at risk population of orphans by investing in meeting their short-term and long-term needs. Sponsors will not only provide funds, but they will also have the opportunity to build friendships with Edith and the children of St.

Ameria's. Visits from individual sponsors can be arranged as well as a long-term plan for short-term teams from churches and communities.

Presenting the issue of orphan care to those who can offer support is difficult due to the overwhelming need. Breaking down the need into smaller units, such as the specific community of St. Ameria's and each individual child within St. Ameria's, enables donors to connect on a personal level to the issue of orphan care. Making a difference in the life of one person is empowering, but requires those willing to make an investment both financially and relationally.

Project Activities

In order to accurately provide for the needs of St. Ameria's, an accurate assessment of the needs and assets of this small community must be taken. The first step in the development of an orphan program will be a visit to St. Ameria's. Using tools such as Kretzmann/McKnight's ABCD Basic Manual (1993), the internal capacities of St. Ameria's will be evaluated as well as the current and projected needs outlined by Edith, the Director of St. Ameria's. This assessment would include the basic needs of the children like food, water, shelter, clothing, and security. It would also examine the levels and quality of education, capacity for sustainable income from agriculture and husbandry, the long-term strategies to accomplish goals, and the overall maintenance of the facilities including care givers, house moms, etc. Once the total cost (financial and otherwise) is determined, further progress may be made.

Next, Edith must be encouraged in her role as the Director of St. Ameria's. With the assets of the Center realized, internal approaches to some of the problems and issues can be identified, and goals can be established. Some of these decisions could mean working toward crops on existing land, restructuring of the staff system, application for government grants and scholarships, and better educational approaches. Goals must also be established for the amount

of money that will need to be raised from outside donors and sponsors. It is also important to determine the most vital areas of need, so as funds are raised there are specific details on where money should be allocated. Money will not come in immediately, so steps will need to be determined to ensure Edith can continue providing for the children as funds are being raised.

Photos and video will be taken of each child, dependent on their willingness to participate in the child sponsorship packets. The cost to sponsor each child will include a number of factors. The overall cost of the operations of St. Ameria's includes a stipend for Edith and the staff and faculty, the establishment of a scholarship fund for further education, building maintenance, water and future electricity, the total cost for food and clothing for the children, and the establishment of a sustainability fund. The sustainability fund will be used to experiment with different crops, the acquisition of land for farming and husbandry, water recycling and purification systems, and waste management solutions. This total cost would be divided by the number of children living at St. Ameria's, taking into account the addition of children and the partial orphans living there during the school year. This cost would be the sponsorship amount for each child. Sponsors donating money can expect limited communication with their sponsored child. The sponsorship money would be pooled together to address the total needs for all of the children, not the sponsored child specifically. Limited funding would mean that the sustainability and scholarship funds would not always be deposited into, in order to fully meet the immediate needs of the children first.

Church sponsorship would be a one-plus-one system involving one church from Uganda and one church from the United States. For every church involved in the U.S., a church in Uganda will be involved as well. This promotes partnership not only in the care of the children at St. Ameria's, but in the establishment of long-term friendships between churches in the

community and those overseas. Churches in Uganda would be responsible for accountability and check-ups for St. America's, and would provide the church in the U.S. with an accurate picture of the realities of the center. Together, they would work with Edith to accept short-term teams from overseas. The goal of church involvement would be a long-term partnership and friendship. Short-term teams would be involved in building projects, sports camps, and Bible schools. Partnership with local churches can also provide spiritual enrichment and mentorship for the children as they grow and mature as individuals.

Community sponsorship is also a possibility. A similarly sized town in Washington state would be approached and urged to become a sister city with Mbiko, Uganda, the town where St. America's is located. The community sponsorship program would establish a dialogue between the government and community structures in the U.S. and Uganda. The fruit of this friendship could mean a decrease in corruption, sound government practice, and a greater awareness of relevant issues on both sides. This program would be a side-by-side approach, not a "big brother" approach, to the friendship where both parties would be active in the enrichment of each other's communities.

The implementation of these programs are multi-faceted. The money from the child sponsorship program will be ongoing. Times of economic and sustainable prosperity will mean the care for more orphans, or more money allocated for the scholarship fund. Continual assessment of operating costs will ensure that money will be handled appropriately. The more sustainable St. America's becomes, the more the scholarship fund will be given to, enabling more and more children to pursue higher education.

Aid from churches and the community will be heavier in the first few years of involvement. St. America's sustainability would be an ultimate goal and something they would

continually work towards. Dependency on any church or government structure would conclude in adverse consequences for the center and the children that live there. The model of sustainability, not dependency, is something the children would learn from and apply to their lives once they leave the program. As time goes on, churches and community leaders would provide a different kind of support than financial. The relationship would develop into an advising, encouragement, and two-way accountability friendship.

Evaluation

St. America's will receive support on many different levels and will generate progress reports and accountability statements that measure the well-being of the children, their educational advancement, the progress on sustainability measures, and the growth of the scholarship fund. It may take many years to evaluate the long-term goals of community involvement and professional investment of the children of St. America's. Yearly or bi-yearly visits, email and skype conversations, and church check-ins will maintain the friendships and ensure that the children are being cared for and getting the best education possible. Re-evaluation will be ongoing and the procedures altered accordingly, always with the goal of the child's current and future well-being in mind.

Conclusion

The holistic care of orphans is vital to enabling each child to become a contributing member of society and an influential leader in their nation. We want children to be given opportunities, so they are in the best position to be able to choose what they want to pursue in life. Whether it is being a farmer, economist, or a president, education and sustainable care will give opportunity to those who did not previously have it, making it possible for them to not only have abundant life, but to care for others in their community. A network of support will enable

holistic care that will promote financial responsibility, sustainability, and transparency. The support will not only be to meet immediate needs, but will continue into the future as orphans become independent, contributing members of society. The orphans of St. Ameria's have faced many hardships and lacked critical necessities for human development, but provided with holistic care and opportunity, they can be agents of true and lasting change in Uganda.

Hopefully, this program will not only help the children of St. Ameria's, but will be adaptable to the circumstances of other orphan care centers elsewhere in the world.

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