

# The Bottom Line

An investment in Scouting is an Investment in the Future

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This picture was taken in 2001 just after (from left) Said, Liz, Jackie and Max joined the Sunrise Project. In February 2001, three of them are benefiting from scholarships and are attending school.

## Street Children:

# A New Dawn, a New Beginning in Uganda



The “Uganda Sunrise Project” - quite a lofty title for a programme ... quite a lofty goal to achieve in any programme, and were the results measurable, it would take a brave programme director to pen such a title.

Victoria is such a brave director, for, as Chief Commissioner of the Uganda Scouts Association, member of the Africa Regional Scout Committee, and senior manager in the Uganda Social Services commission, she has also decided that she will do some real work, touching real lives ... where her results can be seen by all.



Victoria inspects the quarters of her “family” of formerly homeless children who now live as Scouts, and prepare for a responsible future.

And so when she rescued a flagging street kids programme and applied some basic Scout principles to its management, and a lot of hard work with some colleagues (and some of her own family members), she bravely set this lofty goal. And she’s reached it. In the words of an external evaluator from UK, “the lives of 16 children have been transformed in a way that could never have been envisaged a year ago”.

Not content with reaching the sunrise, Victoria wants more.

Uganda is a country ravaged by poverty and the scourge of HIV/AIDS, with over 20% of the population of 22 million of the country infected by the HIV virus (officially over 3 million people). The death toll peaked in the last years, thankfully because of concerted action from government and non government bodies. But, already, the social effect of this epidemic in a country of the size of Uganda is frightening, with the income of the affected families slashed, driving them further into poverty, and, worse still, making hundreds of thousands of children orphaned.

Normally, in the country’s tradition, the extended family takes the responsibility for orphans but such is the overwhelming effect of the epidemic, even this traditional safety net is wearing thin, so the numbers of children abandoned to the streets is skyrocketing.

Faced with this challenge, a number of local organisations and foreign NGOs have worked to redress the situation. One such foreign initiative was “Uganda2000”, a UK based charity which tried to establish a farm manned by street children, on land loaned by a senior member of the Uganda Scouts Association. This initiative sadly became a work camp, with the children exploited as cheap labour, and was deemed to have failed in its action.

Enter Victoria, with her colleagues and friends of the Uganda Scouts Association network, armed with a youth-based approach, tonnes of energy, enthusiasm and love. *(continued)*



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continued ...

## A New Dawn, a New Beginning in Uganda

Recruiting young people directly from the street, Victoria and her team quickly established the ground rules: a “Scout” contract between the kids and the team. With a letter of Scout membership, these kids were no longer harassed by the authorities when they were going about their daily business. With the influence of the Scouts Association, each kid has free health referral through the government health system. And with the sheer logistics of daily life for a “family” of 20 children and one adult, the importance of the shared responsibility using the Scout method became clear to all. There were a couple of drop-outs early on, but the majority have stayed. And the 20 or so kids working on the farm now own and sell what they produce, and live and work under their own management team.

The Sunrise Group ground rules are based on three basic duties of each member, following the Scout principles:

- Duty to God – each day the kids join together in prayer. The children come from a mixture of faiths – Protestant, Catholic and Muslim;

- Duty to Others – the family responsibility of each member – the strong taking care of the weak, new members being treated as equals, and the children are seen to work and play together, interacting well with each other and with the adults involved. The family has formed a wonderful choir, which raises funds for the family budget. The group is well liked within the village community, and are seen as children of the village, rather than being labelled “ex-street-kids”.
- Duty to Self – the children are encouraged to maintain links with their roots, their tribal traditions, their family’s faith, and continue their formal education according to their own abilities. Health education and hygiene are fundamental elements of the discipline in the life of the group. And the group itself, through “forum meetings” is encouraged to support each member to fulfil his/her life goals.

The external evaluator appointed by the UK-based charity which funded the original project, Elspeth Eggleton, visited the project three times between April 2000 and June 2001. Elspeth concluded:

“The programme for Children of the Sunrise has gained the respect of child care professionals and youth workers in Uganda. Long gone are the resentful,

distrustful little band of children and young people who were frightened of the world and covered up their insecurities with menacing attitudes. Today, this Scouting programme has undoubtedly turned these children into beautiful young people with a bright future ...”

### And for Victoria and her team?

Well, they have elaborated an ambitious scheme to expand this self sustaining pilot programme to a further 30 young people in the coming year. It will involve the building of two new family centres, the training of staff, and the recruitment of more kids from the street.

This pilot project has been a real challenge, well documented in the Uganda Scouts Association own report, and in the external evaluator’s reports. This next phase is a real challenge, involving not only the expansion of the current programme in terms of childcare, but also extending the management and support teams beyond the close-knit group which has worked so far. And of course it involves a significant capital investment, by Uganda standards. The aim is that within the first year this next phase will be self sustaining too.

Quite a challenge, but for someone who has made the sunrise happen, with a little external support of US\$40,000 what comes after the sunrise must be sunshine. Victoria will do it!

**The World Scout Foundation helps the growth and development of Scouting worldwide by providing the financial support for the World Organization of the Scout Movement.**

**Some priorities include: Improving child health. Helping marginalized youth. Actively protecting nature and the environment. Assisting in the development of Scouting in newly emerging countries. Helping Scouts address community needs in developing and industrialized countries.**

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