

The power of friends.



As a teenager, local woman Jannah Currie didn't really know what she wanted to do with her life. But there was one thing she felt for sure – Africa was calling. Today, the ex-Orara High School student has found her calling, founding children's charity Friends Vision in Kenya.

After leaving school and spending several years moving around Australia, studying conservation and land management at TAFE, and working in hospitality “just to get by”, Jannah couldn't get Africa out of her head. Finally in 2007, she'd saved enough money to take that long-awaited journey that would prove pivotal in her life.

“I was actually meant to be going to Botswana to volunteer with park rangers, but my travelling companion convinced me to volunteer in a children's rescue centre in Kenya instead,” Jannah said. “It turned out to be one of the most amazing experiences of my life.”

“The children in the rescue centre were orphaned, abandoned, abused or had simply been separated from their families. It was very hard to see how the children had been treated, but at the same time so inspirational to see how resilient they were. There were a lot of times I was crying my eyes out but still smiling a big smile at the same time.”

After more than three months in Kenya, Jannah came home to Australia to take up a job in the Tiwi Islands in the Northern Territory, mentoring Tiwi employees who worked for the conservation company on the islands. “It was such an amazing experience, spending every day with the local indigenous people (the Tiwis) learning about their culture, beliefs and the land we were on. It's something that will always stay with me.”

Then in 2009, Jannah's Kenyan ‘sister’, Peris Mwangi, wrote with a proposal that Jannah found impossible to turn down.

“Peris told me she wanted to build an orphanage, to give the children a chance at life. I told her I'd support her in any way I could and flew back to Kenya the next month. I knew I couldn't walk away from the beautiful children I had spent my time with. Kenya gets into your skin that way. You never walk out the same person that walked in. We began contacting other volunteers we'd met at the centre, to see if they would come on board. Every one of them said yes.”

Fast-forward to today and the group of friends have built, from scratch, a solid foundation for Friends Vision. The organisation runs a child sponsorship programme which so far has given 32 children the chance to go to school. They also run a volunteer programme,

and are launching community development projects designed to reach out to more people in need.

But their major goal is to build a home, to give orphaned children a chance at a loving, family life.

“We've purchased three acres of land in a town called Naivasha in the Great Rift Valley, and have been slowly growing our funds over the last two years to build our home. We hope to start building very soon, with a goal to have the kids in the home before Christmas this year.”

Jannah will be the first to tell you it hasn't been an easy road. But she says she's driven by the children's smiles and the desire to give them a happier life.

“We started Friends Vision from scratch because we'd seen too much corruption within many organisations in Kenya. We simply couldn't trust that the money and supplies would go where they were meant to go. We've been up against resistance because we are mzungus (white people), have been forced to move towns, had prices quadrupled on the spot and countless other issues.”

“But seeing the smiles and growth of the children makes it all worthwhile. It is so amazing to see the kids off to school for their first time. It is a chance they would not have had without sponsorship through Friends Vision and they are so

grateful for the opportunity. I am so proud of our team and what we have achieved through pure dedication for our kids. We all put in so much of our time and effort to run this organisation completely voluntarily. “

For someone who confesses five years ago she had no clear career path, these days Jannah struggles to find time to do much else but work.

Currently studying a degree in Humanitarian and Community Studies full time, Jannah also works two jobs, one of which involves managing a sector in a detention centre in Western Australia, providing support to unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. On top of running Friends Vision, it's not surprising that Jannah says her life is “hectic”.

“I try to spend time relaxing with my friends, away from work and uni, but I find my head is always thinking of what I need to do for Friends Vision. I am on the phone to Kenya a couple times a week, or Skype with my Friends Vision colleagues, and it is always in the back of my mind. My friends and family keep me in line though and make sure it doesn't take over my life entirely,” she says with a smile.

“I meet a lot of people who can't believe what I do, but I just think of what poor people in developing countries have to do to simply find enough money to feed themselves and it no longer seems too much for me. It is nothing compared to the struggle in countries like that for the basic things in life we all take for granted over here. And, of course, seeing the beautiful smiles on my Kenyan kids' faces as well as having the support from everyone helps keep me motivated.”

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The Miracle Babies

Friends Vision sponsorship program and Children's Home have a big focus on providing a home, love and care for the 'Miracle Babies'.

London-based Archbishop Gilbert Deya claims to be able to make infertile women pregnant through the power of prayer. Once 'impregnated,' he would send the mothers to Kenya to give 'birth' to their miracle baby. The 'mothers' believed they were pregnant and even experienced labour pains, having been brainwashed by Archbishop Gilbert and his wife, Mary. The women returned home with their newborn, having paid a hefty fee to be impregnated by God.

The appalling truth is that the babies were stolen by Gilbert and Mary Deya from poor mothers in poverty stricken slums and given to these women as their own. The real mothers were told their babies had died after birth.

Ten of these children were returned to Kenya, after their 'parents' were arrested for involvement in the child

trafficking ring. Sadly, it has proven impossible to find their real families. Six of these 'miracle children' were sent to live in the Government Children's Rescue Centres, which Friends Vision is closely linked to.

Friends Vision made a commitment to giving the 'miracle babies' a chance of a stable and happy life, despite their traumatic history. All six children are now sponsored and attending school, thanks to the kind supporters of Friends Vision. The children will also live in the Friends Vision Children's Home when it is built this year.

It is unknown how many children have been stolen over the years. Sadly, many of Gilbert's 35,000 followers worldwide still believe that he is a miracle maker and can impregnate infertile women through the power of God.

Mary and four other accomplices were arrested for child trafficking and sentenced to two years in prison. They have already been released. Gilbert Deya has orders to be extradited back to Kenya to be charged, but has so far avoided the authorities.

Hopefully he will be brought to justice soon.



How to get involved

Join Friends Vision volunteer or child sponsorship program. Hold a fundraiser or donate clothes, medical supplies, books or money. Little things go a long way.

Check out Friends Vision's website www.friendsvision.org for more information or contact Jannah on jannah@friendsvision.org.

Donations can be made through www.givenow.com.au/friendsvisionappeal

