

Consigning orphanages to the history books starts with you





Together, we can make families, not orphans

Globally, between 5 and 6 million children live in orphanages,^[1] but 80% of those children have family. We work in Uganda, where numbers of children in orphanages rocketed from 1,000 in 1996 to a staggering 50,000 by 2012.^[2]

Children leave orphanages without community and with little or no knowledge of how to live an adult life: how to find a job, how to form relationships.

We work to change that. Our vision is that one day, in a Uganda free of orphanages, all children will belong and grow up in safe and loving families.

We work with the community at the grassroots level to address the causes of why children end up in orphanages, and we make sure that families have the ongoing support they need to keep the children with them.

We urgently need funds to make sure that we can keep our work going.

Without this support, we simply won't be able to reach the children we need to: we won't have enough trained volunteers, we won't be able to support as many families and more children will end up in orphanages.

We believe that all children deserve families. If you do too, please join us.

[1] The Lancet Commissions, A future for the world's children? A WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission, 2020.

[2] According to a study by the Government of Uganda: MGLSD baseline study M. Riley, 2012. This figure will be significantly higher now and the many unregistered orphanages also leave huge gaps in the data.



Allan's story

"I have always wanted to adopt, to provide a home to a child in need," James tells us when we visit him and his family. "I was abandoned when I was 6 years old and I grew up under someone's care. A family took care of me and I am forever grateful."

James is an agriculturalist and a pastor in his community and his wife, Norah is a preschool teacher. The couple expressed interest to adopt and after an assessment was carried out by the Child's i team in Tororo, the couple were approved to adopt by a Government panel.

After a couple of months, James and Norah were matched with Allan. "We received a lot of preparation and training from our social worker; they held our hands throughout the process," James told us.

It has been a couple of months since Allan found his forever family and his dad says he was bonded well with the family. "He has grown very close to his siblings and especially close to Joel, my second last-born. They are inseparable."

"When my daughter passed on, I sadly had to send my granddaughter to the babies' home because I did not have the means to care for her. Seeing her return to us today, I feel like a piece of my daughter is back!" Joy's grandmother told us, with tears in her eyes.

Baby Joy entered the world in March 2014. Sadly, just one month later, Joy's mother went to sleep one night and never woke up. Unsure of where to turn, and with hopes of getting newborn Joy the best care possible, her father decided to place Joy at Smile Africa Ministries orphanage. This is where Joy spent the first 2 and a half years of her life.

Joy was one of the first children who was eligible for reunification at Smile Africa Ministries. Our social workers, alongside the Smile Africa Ministries team, carried out a child and family assessment to ensure Joy's family could care for her. Joy's aunt, Janet, who had been visiting her at Smile agreed to care for Joy, as she was already looking after Joy's three older siblings.

Janet continued visiting Joy more regularly at Smile and shortly after, Joy went to live with her family. Janet noted that now Joy is friendlier, more outgoing, she welcomes visitors and she wants to help with chores around the home even though she is still young.



Joy's story



The story so far

Our founder, Lucy Buck, established Child's i Foundation in 2009 after volunteering in orphanages across Uganda. She had seen how easy it was for children to get caught up in the system and forgotten. In Uganda, Lucy founded Malaika Babies' Home to prove that children could leave an orphanage and be reunited with their families. Through Malaika, Child's i supported and reunited families, and found adoptive families for hundreds of children.

But as soon as one child left us, their bed was filled with another. The cycle did not end. It became clear: orphanages – even “good” orphanages, even while children wait for new families – are not the answer. In 2017, we completely pivoted our organisation. We closed Malaika and started working on the reasons children end up in orphanages in the first place.

Orphanages can feel like the obvious solution to a problem – if you can't care for your child because of poverty, or lack of support, or a medical issue, why not send them somewhere they will be fed and clothed and educated?

Voluntourism is another problem. Many Westerners visit countries like Uganda, volunteer in orphanages and continue to support them. Orphanages have many major donors internationally, which lends them respectability.

And yet it is more cost effective to keep the children at home. It costs £1.5m to care for just one child in an orphanage over 15 years; that same £1.5m could keep an astonishing ten thousand children with their families, with all the benefits that would bring.



No child has entered an orphanage in Tororo district since 2018.

With our support, 3 of the 5 orphanages closed and currently focus their services on community support, including foster care. The remaining 2 have agreed to repurpose into community hubs. We worked with Smile Africa Ministries to move 62 children out of the orphanage back to their families. They now support over 1,000 families in their community, including the children that have gone home. We are in the process of supporting the last home to repurpose after we move 23 children back into their families.

Following consultation with the community, Smile Africa Ministries is now focused on reducing gender-based violence, as well as providing vocational training to young women and early childhood support to families and children.

How does it work?

We harness the power of community. We train and manage a network of professionally-trained community volunteers, who identify vulnerable families that need support.

This support can be as simple as a mattress, so that the child has a place to sleep; it can be money for medical supplies or food; we might help them pay their rent if they cannot work. We could provide bereavement counselling or hands-on support for a struggling single parent. We might give a grant to start a business, plus training to make sure that the business thrives. We make sure we follow up every family for six months to ensure that each child is happy, settled and healthy.

Our volunteers come from these communities and know the families.

In 2020:

858

children have been supported with essentials during this pandemic, such as food and medical care through our network of community volunteers

425

community volunteers have been trained and supported to make sure their communities are safe and thriving.

3,779

children have been helped through our established community networks

They know what will genuinely make a difference. And their reach is impressive: community development networks consist of around 6 individuals, but address the needs of about 13,000 children in their community.

For those children who have no family, we identify and train foster carers from within the community, to provide an alternative to orphanages. And for those children who are already in orphanages, we provide a way out.

But we don't stop there. Our vision is for a Uganda with no orphanages, where no child leaves their family unnecessarily.

We work with the government to influence policies and to make sure that funding is directed to the work that is in the best interest of the children and their childhoods. We need to reach a tipping point, where the government is committed to eliminating orphanage-based care and where the local communities have the right training and resources to provide the alternative.

"Most children with disabilities are neglected in my community and are not cared for. As a community volunteer, I sensitise parents to care for them," Amina tells us.

Amina has been a youth volunteer in her community for the last five years, and at just 28 years old she tells us that this is just the beginning for her. "I am passionate about fighting for the rights of children with disabilities."

Amina





Why now?

We are making a difference but pressures are increasing, and the situation is going to get worse for vulnerable children.

Many families are facing a severely heightened risk, thanks to the pandemic, which is expected to drive an estimated 2.6 million people in Uganda into poverty.

Poverty is one of the biggest risk factors for children being placed in orphanages. Containment measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are impacting on small businesses and families' incomes. As always, the most vulnerable have been hit the hardest. We need to be there for these families.

Ultimately, we want to enable Uganda to reimagine the way it cares for vulnerable children and young people. We will provide a blueprint for sustainable alternatives to orphanages: truly social services run by and for communities to strengthen families and support them to raise their children, plus new foster and adoptive families for those who need them.

We have a real vision for the future and a plan to get there, but we need your support.

By 2023, we will transform two entire districts and a division of Kampala.

By 2023, we will...

Prove that family-based care is possible by closing all orphanages in Tororo

Recruit, train and support 550 foster families to provide care to 900 children.

Provide a blueprint to influence policy both nationally and internationally, with our partners in Transform Alliance Africa and secure Government commitment to eliminate all Uganda's orphanages.

Provide support service for 14,000 families at risk and directly support 1,800 families to prevent separation from their children

Reintegrate 600 children from orphanages into safe and loving families.



Train 2,800 community volunteers, 75 government officials and 100 local organisations to provide alternative family-based care.





We need you

We are uniquely positioned to deliver our aims. Ugandan himself, our Chief Executive Christopher Muwanguzi has over 15 years' experience working with children at risk. We have a strong, female-led Ugandan team, and out of our 42 staff, 38 are based in the country.

We work from the ground up, take a holistic and pragmatic approach, and can demonstrate our success: we have long experience of responding to the needs of these families. Our strong connections with the Ugandan Government have already prompted changes to the national policy.

But we need supporters so that we can continue to realise our ambitions.

We urgently need additional funding for 2021. Without this income we will have to drastically reduce our programme: this means reaching fewer families, training fewer volunteers, and ultimately more children ending up in orphanages. This takes us further and further away from the tipping point that will make our vision a reality.

What we do is working, but we can't afford to lose impetus. If you share our vision and feel you could help, please get in touch.



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Our Values

WE COLLABORATE

We work in partnership and harness the collective wisdom that emerges when individuals work together.

WE INNOVATE

We reimagine solutions and alternatives to orphanages.

WE DON'T COMPROMISE

Children come first in everything we do. We only do what's in their best interest.

WE ARE FEARLESS

We stand up for children and we're fearless in challenging practices that are harmful to them.