Sharing the journey of philanthropy in Africa: reaching out as a family

By Caitriona Fay
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Chris Lavers has traded the laid-back lifestyle of Sydney's northern beaches for a home in Africa, and is giving his children first-hand experience of what giving - and empowerment - really means.

Working with some of Africa's poorest communities, Chris supports micro-enterprises that allow people to become self-sustaining.

He explains, "Unemployment is very high in Africa with rates in rural areas exceeding 50%. There is little or no social support, and without jobs or another source of income people either starve or depend on family for support."

The majority of people Chris works with need loans of as little as US$15 - seldom more than $500. It is small change for many Australians but can have a big impact on people's livelihoods.

Chris has shared his philanthropic journey to Africa with his wife Margaret and two young sons. Chris notes, "We wanted to plant a seed of social consciousness in our children. On Sydney's northern beaches, a typical kid's hardship is when their electronic device malfunctions. My wife and I are keen to help our children put their "hardships" in perspective and realise that for many people hardships include not eating or not having clean water to drink."

Adapting to life in Africa

Chris says his boys have adapted well to life in Kenya, though he has noticed a major change in their expectations. “The boys simply stopped asking for things like a trip to the movies or a new skateboard as they would in Australia,” notes Chris. “Witnessing the hardships being endured by the people they met helped the boys put their perceived needs into perspective and they forgot about their own interests.”

Not surprisingly, living in Africa has proven enormously thought-provoking for Chris’s children. “Despite the poverty and hardships the local people all seem very happy,” says Chris. “We have had many family discussions about how someone without food on their table or shoes on their feet, let alone no TV, could still be happy.”

The experience has translated into action, and Chris’s boys have begun embracing ways they too can help – from holding pint-sized fundraisers to using pocket money to sponsor local school children.

Looking to the future, Chris hopes the endowment he has established within the Perpetual Foundation will help African communities enjoy improved incomes and quality of life. “With greater incomes people have more choices, and that should put them one step ahead of the daily challenge to put food on their tables.”

Passing on family values through philanthropy

For his family, Chris has modest, but profound, hopes. “It’s my goal that as a family we can acknowledge all the blessings and opportunities we have been given in life and to reach out, albeit in a very small way, to people less fortunate than us.”

Philanthropy is a wonderful way to bring a family together. Many of our clients utilise their family endowment or private foundation to engage their children and grandchildren with community and social values. Making annual decisions around who and where to direct funds can also be an ideal way of sharing and passing on family values and social responsibility to the next generation.

Create your own family legacy

Some clients can be unsure of how and where they would like to focus their giving. Our team of philanthropy experts can assist in developing giving strategies and provide recommendations to help your charitable investments achieve greater community impact.

To find out how you can create your own philanthropic legacy, contact Perpetual Private on 1800 501 227.