



SARASIN

Oak Tree

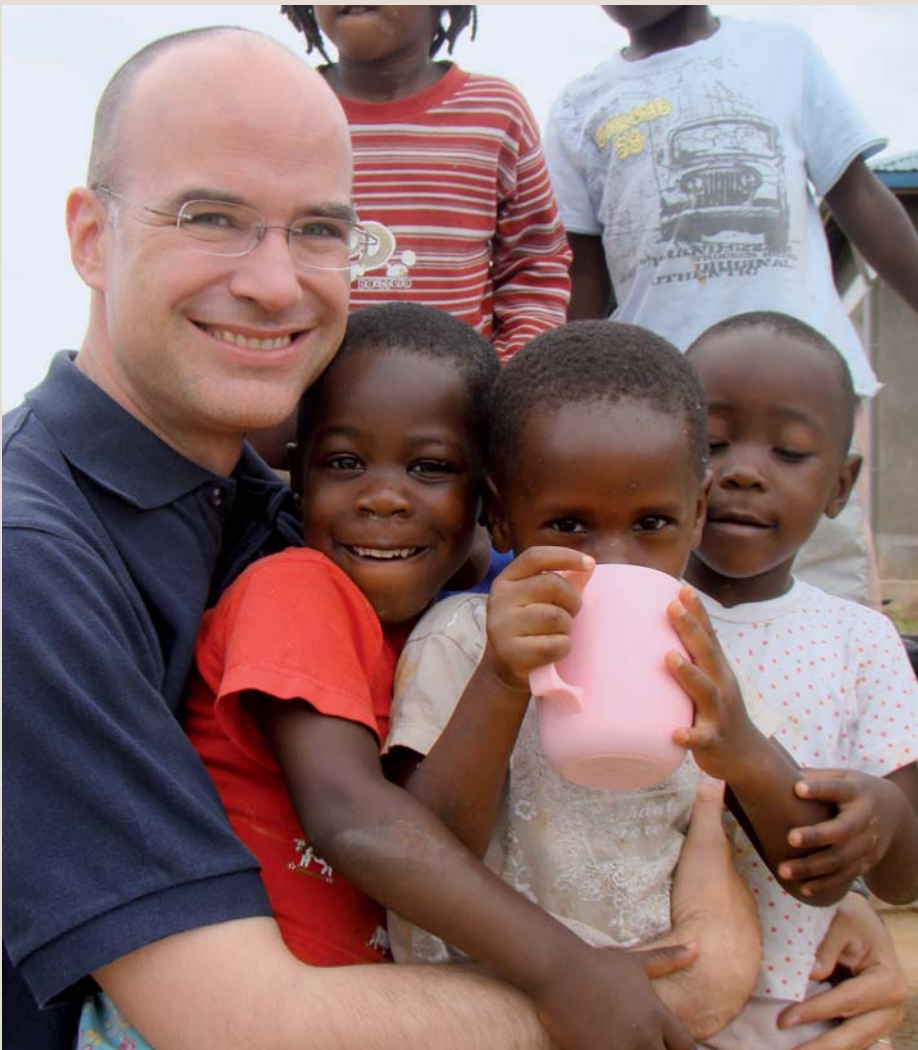
Group Employee Newsletter

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Kids of Africa – a village for orphans in Uganda

“Our motto is: We are family”

“Kids of Africa” is a very personal story. Around five years ago, Burkhard Varnholt set up a village for orphaned children in Uganda, East Africa. The project shows how individuals can make a sustainable commitment. This aid organisation gives the poorest Ugandan children the chance of a successful future and creates jobs at the same time. When Sarasin employees are directly involved in social projects on a personal level, it makes the Bank’s sustainability label even more credible.



Mr Varnholt, can you tell us a little bit about the background to “Kids of Africa”?

About 10 years ago I received a letter from a child in Uganda asking for financial support for the education of himself and his siblings. After sending a donation I received a thank you letter, which I found very touching. We started writing to each other and I was very keen to get to know the family that I was supporting. So I flew to Uganda and spent an unforgettable weekend in the bosom of this family. When the young adults found it hard to find jobs after completing their education, I came up with the idea of establishing a village for children, in which they could acquire professional experience. The actual village then sprung up in no time at all near Lake Victoria, on a site that had no water or electricity supply. Now the village already has 10 houses.

“Kids of Africa” is a charity incorporated under Swiss law and listed in the Commercial Register.

Which children receive support from “Kids of Africa”?

We take in orphans who cannot be placed with relatives or with a local

foster family. We often accept newborn or sick children who have already been rejected by other aid organisations because the risk of death is too high. We are therefore even more proud of the fact that every child who has come to us so far is now flourishing.

“Children need to be raised in the heart of a village community”.
(African saying)

How many children live in the village?

We currently have 10 infants, another 50 of crèche or kindergarten age, plus 20 who are old enough to attend school. That makes 80 in total. We actually have space for a hundred children in all, but we want to keep the project manageable. Not least because our financial resources are limited as well. Our size gives us enormous advantages in terms of efficiency: we can ensure that any donations are channelled directly into the project rather than being wasted on administration overheads. And it's easier to change children's behaviour if the project is kept to a manageable size. The following example illustrates how important this is: although the village is located within a malaria zone, no cases of malaria have been recorded for more than 18 months now. This can only be achieved by changing people's attitudes.

What about the links between the village and the immediate environment?

Our village is part of a normal village community. Our kids visit the kindergarten in our village and then attend the local school. Our next task is to improve the sanitation facilities at this missionary school. In the village itself we help to create jobs by purchasing food there and by recruiting all our foster mothers from there. These foster mothers earn a good wage by local standards, which helps them to support their own families. Staff turnover is very low, which is very important because continuity is essential in child care. Our motto is: We are family. A foster mother lives in each of the ten houses, and looks after a maximum of 10 children. Our philosophy is to lay down a foundation for the long term: later on our children should be able to stand on

Uganda's total surface area is 241,000 km², and it is home to 32 million people with an average age of fifty.



their own two feet and make their own contribution to the development of their community.

How do you collaborate with the Ugandan authorities?

Uganda has a reputation for being Africa's friendliest country – and I fully endorse that view. We have never had to pay any bribes. Bureaucracy was only slow right at the start of the project when we first set up the village. The Ugandan government inspects “Kids of Africa” once a year, and does so in a highly professional way.

How do you manage to cope with both your daily workload and the “Kids of Africa” project?

I can complete a lot of tasks via SMS and can do this at times when I would otherwise be unproductive. In addition, we have a very strong local management team in place capable of making its own decisions which reports regularly to me. I generally visit the village about six times a year, sometimes just for the weekend. That's quite feasible, as Africa is located in the same time zone as Europe. Occasionally my wife and children come along as well. We've also

spent some wonderful Christmases in Uganda, which is a brilliant experience.

Go to www.kidsof africa.com for more information and photos.

What projects are running at the moment?

Recently we have started selling local honey made in the village through gourmet food outlets in Switzerland. We want to build a workshop in the village, on the one hand for those children in the village who are old enough to do DIY, and on the other so that we can complete our own repairs in the village as well. This in turn creates jobs.

Are any other friends and relatives involved in “Kids of Africa”?

Of course. And that's exactly what makes us so efficient. My brother and my wife are both heavily involved in the orphans' village. Unfortunately this means that “Kids of Africa” is not certified to ZEWO standard, because this effectively bars other family members from sitting on the board of a foundation. But it's vital that my own family shares the same strong level of commitment: without their support, I couldn't devote so much time and energy in the long run.