



Good hearts bring good changes

Jenny Caldwell, Ed'10, and her husband Dion are helping make life better for some Kenyan children.

BY HEATHER GRACE STEWART ARTSCI'95



Jenny with her husband Dion (back row, centre) and their young Kenyan friends.

Jenny Caldwell, Ed'10, and Dion Brash aren't your typical newlyweds. Married last summer, they didn't go on their honeymoon until December. And when they did they didn't visit a romantic hideaway, but rather they traveled to rural Kenya, where they volunteered at a home for abused and orphaned children.

Jenny and Dion, both of whom are Kingston natives, run Hearts for Change, a small Canadian registered charity that supports Hosanna Children's Home. Dion first visited there as a volunteer in 2008. "My initial thought was I'd be the one to have an impact on the children, but in the end, it was the children who had a greater impact on me, changing my life forever," he says.

Some children were AIDS orphans; others had been removed from abusive homes. As many as four children were sleeping on a single worn-out mattress, not knowing if they would get a decent meal the next day. Dion was amazed that in spite of this, the home was filled with the sounds of laughter, singing, and playing.

When he returned to Canada, he and Jenny started dating. And when Dion decided to start a charity to help Kenyan children, Jenny became his partner in that venture, too.

"I've traveled a lot and volunteered, but I'd never thought of taking it to the next level, as Dion did," says Jenny, who's now

the v-p of Hearts for Change.

The couple's journey has been a challenging one. When he was in Kenya for the first time, Dion used his savings to pay off back rent the home owed and to make some upgrades, such as new toilets. However, upon his return to Canada, he learned that he'd lost his job.

Karma seemed to kick in, as it so often has since Jenny and Dion founded Hearts for Change in 2010. "Dion's severance pay was the exact amount he'd donated to the home, and then the company was taken over by another firm, and they rehired him," Jenny explains.

Dion continues to work in the IT sector, while Jenny teaches part-time, but they're most passionate about their charity work. "It's such a big part of our lives. Hearts for Change is always on our minds. We're always trying to figure out how to improve it," says Jenny.

Their greatest challenge has been raising enough money to assure the older children at the home can attend high school. Since Hearts for Change has been involved with Hosanna, they've sent about 25 students to high school. "Not many kids in Kenya get to attend high school, so if we can get these kids there, that's an achievement, and anything after that is a bonus," says Jenny. "We want them to be healthy, safe, and educated."

The pair raised \$10,000 for Hosanna through their fundraising golf tournament in the fall, but they are still looking to raise another \$10,000 to pay for first-term school fees and January necessities for all of the children.

While in Kenya, Dion and Jenny assessed the home's needs, and collected photos and stories about the children for their sponsors back home. "It's great being here," says Jenny. "The new home is so much better and safer than the old one."

The Catch-22 is that the better the home gets, the more children the government sends to live there. There were only 32 children when Jenny and Dion first became involved; there are now about 70, as well as some needy children living in the area that the home supports.

Jenny and Dion are looking for more sponsors, but say even small donations are appreciated. "We'll take whatever people can offer. Even five dollars can help."

The couple hopes one day to expand Hearts for Change and to help more children in Kenya. They also want to visit local schools to spread the word. "We want to visit more, to teach children about Kenya; to show them that one person really can make a difference."

To support Hearts for Change, visit www.heartsforchange.ca. Donations can be made through the Canada Helps link. ■