



Impact

The effects of golf on people's lives can be difficult to anticipate, as **Tony Smart** discovered when he spoke with the people at Glad's House charity. As they revealed, for a group of street children in Kenya the sport is much more than a game—it's a way out of hell

The only thing Victoria Ferguson ever wanted to be was an actress. "I just wanted to be on stage at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) or the Old Vic," she tells me, sipping her cappuccino as we talk in a Waterloo coffee shop, just a few yards from the storied Old Vic Theatre in London.

Instead she founded, with the aid of her parents, an important charity in Mombasa, Kenya, that takes street kids condemned to a life of hellish poverty, drugs and prostitution and gives them a second chance through golf. The charity, Glad's House, does offer other opportunities for a fresh start in life but golf, specifically caddying, was where the project began when it realized that it needed to offer more than just food and shelter if it really was to save these abandoned children.

The dramatic change in Ferguson's destiny occurred when she went to Mombasa during an educational break in 2005 after finishing an acting course at the Oxford School of Drama. She was just 20 years old. After time in South Africa and Zambia, she arrived in Mombasa and started working with street kids in the filthy slums of the Kenyan coastal city. It was here that she had two "defining moments," as she calls them, and all thoughts of an acting career disappeared.

The first moment came when she went on her first night patrol of the Maboxini slum with a local social worker named Bokey, who wouldn't let go of her hand because the area was so dangerous. The slum was filled with more than 1,000 kids and adults, all high on whatever drugs they could find.

"I'd never been so frightened in my life," she says. "I was almost shell-shocked by the experience."

Her second defining moment came at the end of that night patrol when another local social worker, Abdul, happened to remark that "we should start our own center" to help the street kids. Immediately, Ferguson says, "I felt like that was what I really wanted to do."

It wasn't that easy, of course, and as the only European in Mombasa over the remainder of her initial four-month stay there, her challenges began with simply being accepted by the locals.

When she returned to England, Ferguson immediately corralled her parents into helping her set up the Glad's House charity, which eventually created the center for street kids in Mombasa. Her father and now Chairman of Glad's House, Dr. Clifford Ferguson, paid for the initial administration costs and used his business acumen (he's a management consultant) to deal with the numbers side



Participants in the Glad's House caddy program

After seeing the state of the street kids in Kenya, all thoughts of an acting career disappeared; she knew she had to help the children

of creating the charity. Vicky's mother, a secretary and bookkeeper, dealt with the administration. All three of them set about cold-calling people and organizations to try and raise money and support.

The charity was called Glad's House after Ferguson's grandmother Gladys, who had many fine qualities, three of which have become the core values of Glad's House. These were that her door was always open to all; that when anyone arrived she would produce a meal for them and a bed for the night if needed; and that she always had time for any child.

Thus Glad's House in Mombasa will always be open to any and all street children that come to them; food and shelter will always be available; and Glad's House will always be a happy and welcoming place where children can truly be children.

Early on in the Glad's House project Dr. Ferguson heard about a new golf resort, the Vipingo Ridge Resort, being built 30 miles north of Mombasa. He realized the resort would need caddies and so he pestered the property's administration until they agreed to accept Glad's House street kids for half of the jobs, with the remaining positions going to local Vipingo kids.

To begin with, all of the kids were trained in the art of caddying by the two caddy masters at Vipingo Ridge, Promise and John. But greater things were on the horizon: One of the people at Vipingo Ridge that Dr. Ferguson had been pestering was David Jones, the golf course architect and a member of the Board of the European Tour. Jones' advocacy of Glad's House to the European Tour's newly renamed charitable foundation, the Tour Players Foundation (TPF), resulted in the TPF awarding its first grant to Glad's House, a sum of just over \$11,000.

Almost immediately the European Tour Caddie Association (ETCA) added its support and three ETCA caddies—Paul Cast, Ken Herring and Brian McConnell—arrived in Mombasa in August 2010 to help with the Glad's House Caddie Programme.

Although they were meant to go straight to the golf course to begin training the kids, the three ETCA caddies first demanded to see the slum the kids called home. When they got there they were soon greeted by two young kids, both no more than six years old, who had glue bottles hanging from their necks from which they took regular sniffs. Glue sniffing is popular there because glue is readily available, it's the cheapest drug to buy and, as Paul Cast says, "it suppresses their appetites, because their chance of

eating anything is less than zero [babies are also given glue to sniff to stop them crying when they are hungry], and the effects of the glue help them to escape the reality of the hell in which they live.

"I have never ever been so appalled at the abject squalor, filth and stench that attacked our senses," continues Cast, speaking of their visit to the Maboxini slum. "Most of the children—through no fault of their own—are deprived of the food, water, shoes, clothes, sanitation, comfortable housing, parents, love, guidance and security which most of us in the Western world take for granted."

Prior to Glad's House the only source of income for these children, apart from drug-dealing and prostitution, was collecting rubbish from the city—plastic bottles, old food wrappers, tin cans, plastic containers, etc.—and stacking it into six-foot cubes for a recycling company that pays the kids 56 cents per cube. This pittance is then used to buy food, glue or anything else they can use to survive. It usually takes one whole day to gather together one six-foot cube.

Mercifully Glad's House has begun to provide a way out. At present the charity has a block of land in the Maboxini slum, which cost them \$24,000 to buy, with a

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Philip Archer (left) and Chris Lloyd (right) with Glad's House caddies



temporary shelter that provides care. Their current goal is to raise \$240,000 to build a permanent rehabilitation center that will house up to 60 street children at a time.

In addition to the food, shelter and love provided at the temporary center, where the kids arriving range from newborns to those aged 26 (hardly children but still in need of help), the 60 kids currently on the Caddie Programme get paid roughly \$5.65 per round. They immediately give this



to Glad's House, which in turn pays them 8,000 Kenyan shillings a month (approximately \$97). This is done not through any profiteering motive but rather to try and teach the kids to manage their money and use it for a better future. Otherwise, as Glad's House found out, when a kid who's used to getting 56 cents a day collecting garbage suddenly gets 10 times that amount for caddying, he or she is likely to waste the money on better drugs, alcohol or gambling. Anything earned above \$97 in a month by a caddy is saved for them by Glad's House.

The kids are now so proficient at caddying that two of them carried the bags of Chris Lloyd and Phillip Archer of the European Challenge Tour during the pro-am preceding the 2012 Barclays Kenya Open. Glad's House had been scheduled to send four caddies to England last July to help at the Challenge Tour's English Challenge but they were refused visas, a problem which is currently being addressed for future events.

Golf, according to Bokey (Fred Bokey Achola, to give his full name), has proven a perfect mechanism for helping kids in Kenya to steer clear of crime and drugs and instead to pursue a career that provides a real future.

"Golf is something even I could never have experienced before because it's quite exclusive," says Achola, a former Kenyan Olympic athlete, founder of the Mombasa Olympic Youth Organisation (MOYO) and the Glad's House Director in Mombasa. "However, as an intervention strategy it is extremely effective. If I talk to the street boys, it's very hard to put them in skilled training because they are usually very impatient. But working as a golf caddy, the results are there and then. You carry a bag, you come back and you get paid so it's very straightforward, not like putting a street boy in as a carpenter or as a mechanic. That will take a long period of time and they are impatient. They embrace caddying."

Such is the magic worked by Glad's House that many of their caddies are now keen golfers (one boasts an 8 handicap) and are allowed to play at Vipingo Ridge every Tuesday, though they lack the equipment to play their best.

Caddying is not the only enterprise Ferguson and the Glad's House team have started. As that old proverb says: "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," and the Glad's House team have taken this to heart. They currently have 17 street kids working through various enterprise schemes, including a bead shop, a shoe-shine business, a cybercafe, a bicycle shop, as cobblers, in food service, and in carpentry.

These enterprises are likely to be joined by a golf club repair business as the Tour Van manager of Wilson Staff is expected to join more caddies from the ETCA on another trip to Mombasa soon. He will be teaching the kids how to repair, make and modify golf clubs. Additionally, Glad's House now has three caddies working at another golf club, the Nyali Golf & Country Club near Mombasa, and six Glad's House kids caddied in the European Challenge Tour's first event in 2014, the Barclays Kenya Open.

With an estimated 250,000 street children in Kenya—35,000 in Mombasa alone—Ferguson hopes eventually to open Glad's House centers throughout the country. Additionally, he'd like to see a Glad's Girls programme, a girls-only refuge that would incorporate a nursery for children that have been born to young mothers living on the street. It's an ambitious plan, but with the track record Glad's House is establishing there's little doubt it can be achieved. Consider that the huge impact made thus far in so many children's lives began with the determination of an aspiring actress and the game of golf.

To find out more about Glad's House visit their website www.gladshouse.com.

[Ed's note: Great works done by organizations like Glad's House require champions, and writer Tony Smart was one of those. Sadly, we lost Tony shortly before this issue went to press; but we hope that his friends and family will take some consolation from the fact that his heart lives on in his work and in the lives of those touched by Glad's House.]