

How one couple spent £100,000 of their own money to save a village

Submitted by: Caroline Ratner Communications

Tuesday, 29 April 2008

The holiday that turned into a vocation

Two retired Northern Irish entrepreneurs went on holiday two years ago to The Gambia and not only changed their lives but the lives of hundreds of local people.

What was supposed to be relaxing beach holiday, lazing about in the African sun turned into a huge charitable endeavour that has ended up not only changing the lives of the people of a small, impoverished village but also that of entrepreneurs Brian Harrold and his partner, Pamela Morgan.

Fiftysomethings, Harrold and Morgan (former N. Ireland Businesswoman of the Year) have both spent their careers building up successful businesses which they have recently sold and have spent the last five years enjoying the fruits of their labours leading enviable lives, golfing and holidaying around the world, dividing their time between Belfast, Dublin and Marbella.

Two year ago they discovered The Gambia and in particular the village of Bafaluto (<http://www.pingcharity.co.uk>), where the only supply of drinking water was from a shallow well, often contaminated, leading to a relentless cycle of ill health & disease. A story repeated throughout West Africa, where many villages are without clean water and every day is a struggle to stay alive and keep disease at bay.

The opportunity for these communities to create self-supporting economic infrastructures is virtually non-existent. As a result, each year, thousands of West Africans go to Europe as both legal and illegal immigrants, in some cases with whole villages raising funds to send one or two young men to Europe in order to earn money to send back home to their extended families and communities. Tragically, some of these illegal immigrants do not even make it alive, as the journey is often perilous and every year the bodies of many young African men are washed up on Spanish beaches.

Brian and Pamela have spoken to many of these West African men who travel to Spain for work and have found that without exception, they would all prefer to be back home if the opportunities existed there for them to provide for their families and get their children educated.

While in The Gambia they realised that they wanted to help but wanted to make sure their contribution looked at a much "bigger picture" than just giving funds to pay for clean water supplies and fresh food. They felt strongly that they wanted to help this community make sustainable changes.

"The EU and the USA are spending so much money devising and poorly implementing schemes to keep people out, denying them any access to our wasteful abundance rather than helping them build sustainable economic infrastructures in their own countries", says Harrold.

Using £100,000 of their own money they have set up PING Charity (<http://www.pingcharity.co.uk>) and put their entrepreneurial expertise and experience to help the people of Bafaluto to become economically self-sufficient in order to create long-term opportunities for the prosperity of the area. As a result,

these two “holiday makers” have transformed an entire village of six hundred people by stimulating business ventures to allow the area to prosper and their good work to grow.

Pamela and Brian, who have just started working in a second village believe that the continued investment of effort, funds and entrepreneurial expertise at a local level, will provide opportunities for lasting economic growth, better health and better education for the children in the region.

“We are well organised to replicate the Bafaluto model, funds are our only limitation. We have identified and costed similar jobs in another nine villages and need donations totally £1 million to continue and replicate this work”, explains Morgan. Every penny goes directly to the charity, there are no admin costs and all funds donated are put to work immediately – it’s the best £100,000 we’ve ever spent.”

“I believe that for relatively small money we are making a huge long-term difference to people's lives in "our" village of Bafaluto and can continue to do so if we can raise the necessary funds. We hope we've helped to improve their lot and reduce the chances of some of their young men being washed up on the southern beaches of Spain in an illegal attempt to make it to Europe”, comments Harrold.

- Ends -

Their charity is <http://www.pingcharity.co.uk>

For further information please contact:

pingcharity@yahoo.co.uk or telephone: 00353862556107

Photos at:

Clean Water: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/22671329@N08/sets/72157603686803843/>

Garden Project:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/22671329@N08/sets/72157603682792566/>