



Raise the roof in Kenya

When you're out and about on location you may have spotted the increasingly common sight of a crew member sporting an eye-catching 'Raise the Roof' T-shirt. If you've ever wondered what these are all about, GTC member Holly Bantleman explains. At only 24, 3D specialist Holly, who works as a stereographer and camera operator at Telegenic, founded the charity Raise the Roof Kenya. With the charity going from strength to strength, she manages to juggle her TV work with frequent trips to Kenya.



▲ Work progresses on one of the projects in Kenya



◀ It was seeing children like this living on a dumpsite that motivated me to start Raise the Roof Kenya

I started my career as a runner at 18 and began work experience in cameras, then gradually worked my way through the camera department as a permanent member of staff at The London Studios. I made the transition to freelance and am now permanent again at Telegenic, specialising in 3D.

A life-changing trip

Aged 22, during my freelance stint, I took a break from television to travel the world and do some charity volunteer work, eventually finding myself on a life-changing trip to Kenya. While I was there, I witnessed a community living on a dumpsite in extreme poverty, relying on the daily rubbish drop for survival. Although the conditions were absolutely horrific, I was totally bowled over by the warm welcome I received and became friends with the people living there. I had only ever seen images like this on television or in photographs, but these destitute situations were a reality for the people of the 'London landfill' and local slums.

I returned to the UK, slightly nervous about sharing the pictures I had taken and all too aware of the controversy associated with media

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exploitation. So, I went back to my busy camera career, but gradually started to share my stories and realise that I was in the perfect position and industry to be able to raise both awareness and money.

I was soon pleased to be able to keep a promise I had made to the people living on the landfill site by raising funds to provide roofing for the families of the dumpsite community. This was just the start.

I enlisted the support of numerous friends and colleagues in the industry, and companies such as Telegenic, Sky, S32 and Lammo Ltd contributed. I started by organising small fundraising events and through this was able to offer help to children desperately needing medical treatment, school fees and housing.

When I was 24, I founded Raise the Roof Kenya, battling through the red tape to register it as a recognised charity in the UK, Wales and Kenya.

Why do I do this?

People often ask why I keep going with this and why doubling my work load has become worthwhile. The answer to this question is simple; it lies with Judison, an 8-year-old boy that I was able to support through Raise the Roof Kenya. When I was introduced to Judison, I felt an instant connection.

So many children like him can become just a number, a statistic representing other similar children. In this case though, the number had a face, a personality and a need for love. Judison was severely malnourished, dehydrated and suffering from TB as well as being HIV positive. He was in desperate need of medical attention and his plight instantly pulled at my heartstrings. It was the first time I had looked a child in the eyes and known that without help he would die. So how could I at least not try?

We became inseparable. The first time I washed Judison will stay with





▲ Raise the Roof Kenya supporters are doing fantastic work publicising the charity

me forever. His body was skin and bone, and it was almost painful to carry him as his sharp edges rubbed against me; but even more painful was to see him in this state. His ribs protruded from his chest and the inners of his legs were hollow. He felt the cold more than others, so we always dressed him in lots of layers and woolly hats.

All clean and warm, he looked adorable in his 'onesey' as we settled in for a cuddle and a movie. Bolstered by three meals a day and lots of love, Judison's health improved and he began to call me 'Muzungu Mumma'

(white mum). Much fitter, he was able to return home and could be seen riding his bicycle and ringing its bell, smiling with pride. Over the course of six months and several trips to Kenya, I watched him go from weakness to strength... but then back again.

Unfortunately, Judison took a turn for the worse and never made a full recovery. He added to the number of children dying from AIDS and poverty every day, and by the time you have finished reading this, many more similar children will have added to that statistic. Judison's story is a reminder that there is not always a

happy ending but every child deserves a chance. Without continued support for Raise the Roof Kenya, this story may have ended a lot earlier and his final months, playing on his bike and enjoying life with the other children, might not have been as memorable.

Work-charity balance

At the moment I am still working as a stereographer and camera operator at Telegenic and I juggle my 3D glasses with trips to Kenya, where I work with the local government and the communities living in extreme poverty. My two worlds are polar opposites - from slums to 3D outside broadcast scanners - and yet somehow they complement each other. My experiences in Kenya help me to gain perspective on my television work and make me a more rounded, less stressed individual. On the other hand, the TV environment is a perfect arena in which to present the plight of developing communities and to enlist support.

With ongoing help, the amount the charity can achieve is increasing and we are really beginning to see the

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difference the work of our volunteers and our donors' hard-earned cash can make. These days you are more and more likely to spot crew members wearing Raise the Roof T-shirts on location or a celeb donning one of our wristbands to help raise the charity's profile. Some, like Adele, Olly Murs, Joss Stone, Boy George and Jools Holland, have pledged to donate self-portrait doodles to the 'Chariteatowel' project.

The Barut Development Centre

With every trip I make, I notice the lack of support for older children, which has led me to my next project: The Barut Development Centre.

The Barut project will offer a lifeline in the form of a trade school, community centre and sports ground for the people of Barut and further afield, who have never had such an opportunity before. The unique focus will be on older children who will be able to learn vocational skills to enable

them to live sustainably in the future. It will also provide a critical hub for an entire community to come together and enjoy events, receive medical treatment and attend evening classes.

I have managed to convince the Kenyan Government to support the project (we are told this is a first for children who are not formally educated, making this a groundbreaking venture). So, with the land secured and the Kenyan Government offering highly qualified teachers and operational costs Raise the Roof Kenya has to raise £100,000 in the next year to make this a reality.

I will be calling upon friends, colleagues and members of the GTC to use their skills and talents for a greater good, enlisting some to come and shoot the development of the project and raise awareness of the plight of this community.

The keen athletes in the area also make an interesting story, living in very rural conditions, yet becoming



▲ Raise the Roof goes to Wimbledon!

international athletes who excel in marathon running. Part of the reason we are building a running track is to support their progression. Benson Barus for example, currently 11th in

the world at marathon running, is from this community and supports the project. We are even hoping to fly some of the athletes over to the UK to compete in running events in 2013.



Team 1000: get involved

Our major fundraiser for 2012 is Team 1000. We are hoping to recruit 1000 people to each raise £100 over 100 days - and what better way to reach 1000 people than through the media! Registration is now open. Team 1000 - No ordinary team, no ordinary challenge!

To join Team 1000 or for more information about Raise the Roof Kenya please visit www.raisetherooftenya.com, or you can contact Holly at: holly@raisetherooftenya.com



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