

# RAFIKI

ORPHAN CARE HOME FRIEND

## A home & beacon of hope for Tanzanian orphans

For many, visiting parts of Africa can be shocking and distressing. There is so much suffering and need it is often overwhelming for those living in the comforts of North America. Extreme poverty, the AIDS epidemic and social injustices have left deep, penetrating scars on the continent.

The spirit of the people, however, is incredible. There are endless stories of joy and hope. Countless people with undying courage and endless compassion are doing extraordinary work to help others.

Last summer, Catherine Mulvale spent time with children whose lives were shattered by the AIDS epidemic and extreme poverty. Many of the children were HIV positive, hungry, lost to extended family and discarded by their communities. Catherine came home knowing she had to do something in response to what she had seen and heard.

She decided to launch an initiative that would connect children who share our global community. She hoped Canadian children would discover their ability -- and take on the responsibility -- to help those in need. She wanted to empower children to change the world they would inherit for the better.

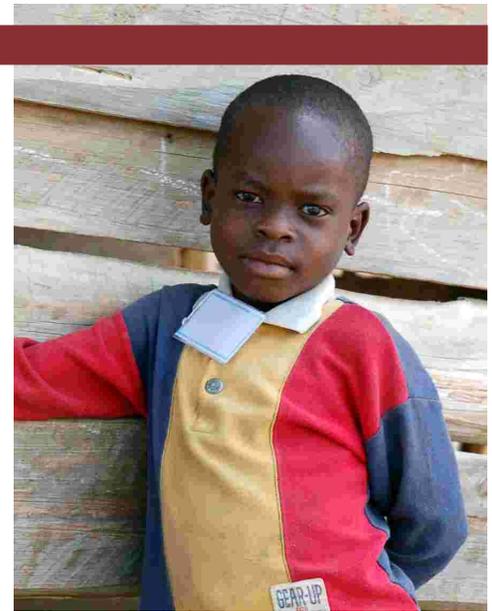
That "something" developed into rewarding initiatives that involve thousands of children in Ontario raising funds to build a safe and nurturing place for orphaned children in Tanzania, East Africa.

About one year ago, with the help of the Orphans Foundation Fund -- a Tanzanian organization run by a small but powerful and passionate administration -- Catherine discovered the Rafiki Orphan Care Home. Rafiki, which means friend, is a humble dwelling in the Simanjiro District of Tanzania that is in desperate need of help. Rafiki is home to 35 orphans who are taught and cared for by a remarkable teacher, John Malembo and his wife, Maxima.

This winter, through a series of high-energy, interactive assemblies, Ontario children learned about the children of Tanzania. At the end of each assembly, the children were asked if they would help a stranger in need. The answer was a resounding "Hakuna Matata" -- no problem! Rafiki has been adopted wholeheartedly by Ontario children who have raised over \$14,000 for the project.

On November 1st, Tina Giustizia, Pauline Flanagan and Bentley Springer left the comforts of their Canadian homes and joined Catherine at Rafiki. The team wanted to confirm that money raised in Canada was being used appropriately and meet the children who are the life blood of Rafiki.

Although the Canadians had seen photos and heard much about Rafiki, the group was shocked to see that the living conditions were much worse than anticipated. The current dwelling is not much more than a shed (shown at right). One host called Rafiki a "Kichuguu" -- an anthill. It is small and ill-equipped with almost no physical possessions. The walls and floors of the two tiny rooms are



The children of Rafiki have each suffered losses far beyond anything that few in North America can even pretend to understand. Neema, a 13 year old girl and the first orphan to stay at Rafiki tells her story...

"I was told I had a normal family with a father and mother. My father was a secondary school teacher. He fell sick and was admitted to the hospital where he died. My mum then left us and went to Mwanza. She lived there for so long while practicing prostitution. She later came back in poor health but died after a short time. I did not bury her because I wasn't living with her. A relative who was taking care of me, could no longer help me because he was over-burdened with his own children and many other orphans. I

was thrown away. I consider being at Rafiki as being with my family because they saved my life."





John Malembo (pictured above with Catherine), along with his wife, Maxima, have cared for over 1,100 orphans since 1995. John explains how the Rafiki Orphan Care Home evolved...

"I am a primary teacher by profession. I started a nursery school and became an early childhood educator. I had started this so that I could promote early learning and at the same time try to help support my family with the fees collected from the nursery.

"I soon learned that I had a different role, a role that I had not sensed before. During the first term, I realized that most of the children did not have enough food and were unable to pay the small fee I was charging.

"After class, these kids never wanted to go back home. They used to follow me up to my small house (this house now is the where the children sleep – see right). They asked for water to drink and food. When this persisted I realized there were more problems. I went to visit some of their homes. What I saw caused me to shed tears. So much was lacking.

"I preferred to change my ideas and make my home their home – to become their next parents. I agreed with my wife to bring them in my small house (it is still a muddy cramped house, even now). It wasn't the best for them but it was a better option for these lovely kids who were yearning for the love of their parents. They needed people with good and loving hearts to come to their rescue -- to make them feel loved and create a smile on their faces.

"I really feel blessed that I am among them. They call me Mwalimu (teacher). The younger ones call me, dad. I spend sleepless nights thinking of what these kids will eat and wear and where they will sleep."

cracked and uneven. 18 girls between the ages of 4 – 17 years sleep on a cold, hard, uneven concrete floor in a tiny room that is no more than 9 x 9 feet. 17 boys sleep in a similar space. The roof is not reliable. Food is often scarce. There are few essentials for school work and no desks in the classroom. There were no toys in sight.

And yet, despite all of this, the children are dazzling. They share joyous laughter; they are polite and thoughtful; they walk with confidence; they seem to be thriving as individuals and as a family. The children of Rafiki demonstrate the qualities of youth who live not in an kichiguu but in a home full of encouragement, respect and love. She credits this to the recent support of the Orphans Foundation Fund and to John and Maxima, who have cared selflessly for these and more than 1,100 orphans since 1995.

The photo (L-R) right shows John, Messia, Catherine, Karosi and Maxima.



When asked why she has chosen to help the children in Tanzania, Catherine's answer is simple and honest, "there is no choice. When I think of all that needs to be done -- for the children of Rafiki and the millions that share their unbearable situation -- I have to confess that I am often overwhelmed. Through no fault of their own, these young souls have endured devastating injustices that we cannot even pretend to imagine. They need to know that they have not been discarded. They need, as our children do, to play with light hearts. They need to be educated so that their minds are stimulated and their futures will include choice.

...more ▶▶▶▶



The photo to the left shows the foundation of the new building in the forefront of the current school.

To the right is the new Rafiki home several weeks later with the walls partially erected.



These orphans need to be fed, clothed and housed in a safe and nurturing environment -- to feel safe and loved in their own home. And, above all else, they need to believe in who they are and all that they can be."

Catherine goes on to say, "these are beautiful, vibrant, loving kids. Each child is unique and remarkable. I have witnessed their brave efforts to overcome fear and disappointment. I have heard their laughter, wiped away their tears, felt their warm breath on my cheeks as they whispered in my ear, felt their hearts beating as I hugged them. My decision to help is not about choice -- it is simply about doing what needs to be done."

Part of the commitment to the children includes finding the money to build a new facility. Rafiki, Catherine quickly notes, is much more than a building. It has been designed as a multi-purpose center that will be a resource for opportunity in the community.

To date, \$14,000 has been raised for Rafiki. Every dollar has been applied to the construction of the building. Another \$18,000 is required to complete the new structure.

Construction of the new Rafiki facility began in September of this year. The foundation has been laid. The floors and outside walls have been erected. The iron windows and roof joists are at the site and will soon be in place.

The new building is, by our standards, humble. It is small and modest. But, to listen to John, Maxima, the children and community members speak of it, it is a colossal beacon of hope.

The primary purpose was – and is – to provide the children with a home. Rafiki does that...and so much more. The blueprint below shows that there are two small dorms – one for 18 girls and another for 18 boys. For the first time, the children will have their own beds with sheets, mattresses, pillows and mosquito net veils. The new home will have clean, running water and electricity – also firsts for Rafiki. An open space will serve as classroom as well as a Town Hall, store, work room and adult teaching center. There is an indoor kitchen to replace the open fire currently used. After twelve years, John and Maxima will have their own living space. There is a small lounge for consultations or visitors. And, a space has been reserved for visiting medical staff to serve the children and community. ▶▶▶▶

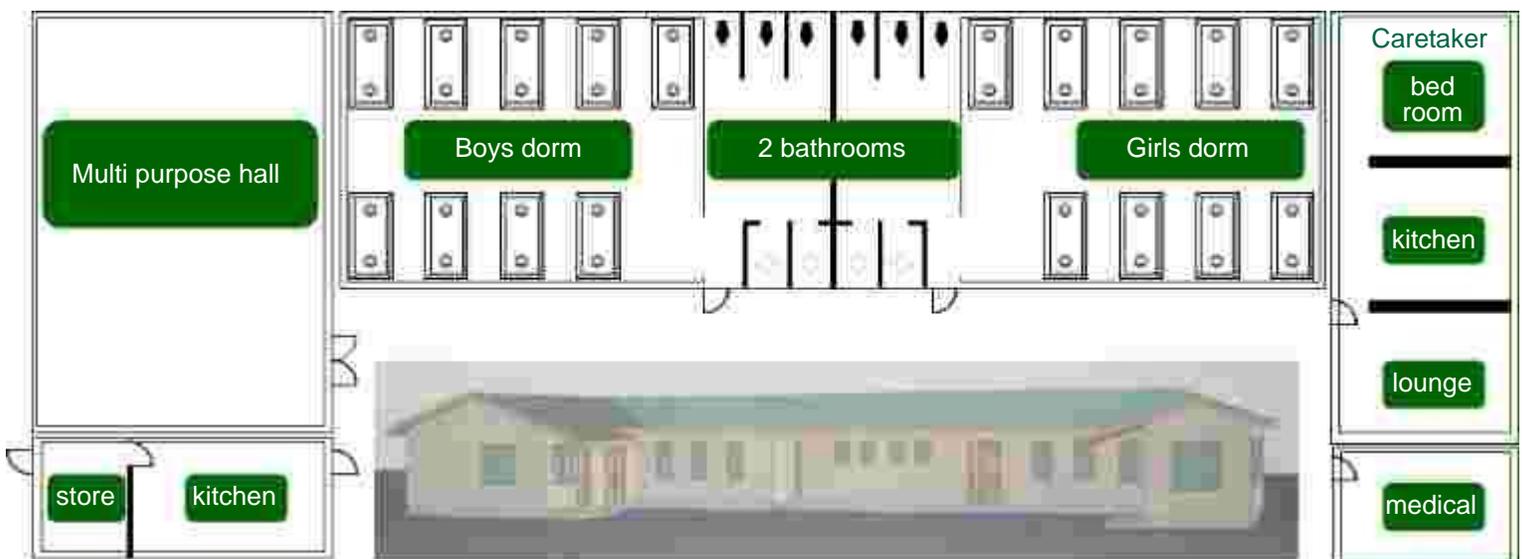


There is no end to the sad stories of loss but the spirits of the children are strong and hopeful. Miriam, aged 10 years, shares her story and plans for the future...

"I have no parents, they both died. My dad died first and after some time my mum followed.

I started living with my grand-mother who I love much. She loved me but in most cases we would go to sleep without food. When this persisted, I was brought to this center (Rafiki).

I want to become a doctor and immediately be employed. I would like to help my caretakers who have shown me love, care and protection. I want to help my grandmother and siblings".



To complete Rafiki and provide ongoing support for this new and vital component of the community, financial support is needed. There are many ways you can help. Here are a few ...

### We are looking for Rafiki Buddies...

The Rafiki kids want to connect with other children and we want them to know that they are not forgotten. If your child (or grandchild, godchild, niece, nephew, cousin, neighbour or friend...) would like to become a Rafiki Buddy, we can make the introduction ...complete with photos!

There are 35 children at Rafiki who can read and write in English. They are all eager to reach across the ocean to make new friends.

### We need to finish building Rafiki...

The most important objective right now is to complete the building. We've made a great start -- we are now over 50% to our \$32,000 goal. Contributions of any amount are needed and very much appreciated.

### Rafiki watoto (children) need more than a building...

In addition to the cost of the physical structure, ongoing costs to support the kids exist...

The children need food and clean water to grow, learn and fight off illness.

The cost to feed a child is about \$1.25 per day which translates into about \$38 a month or \$450 per year.

Rafiki needs a library, note books and student learning supplies.

We need \$3,500 to fill book shelves and back packs.

If you would like to give Rafiki as a gift to someone else, a beautiful card to explain the project in words and photos can be sent out.

If you would like to help Rafiki with a financial contribution, cheques can be made payable to Strategies for LIFE Rafiki and will be gratefully received at:  
2511 Scotch Pine Drive, Oakville, ON L6M 4C3.

All expenses associated with the project have been paid for by organizers and Catherine manages the project using her own time and resources so every dollar from you goes directly to Rafiki.

If you'd like to follow the children and activities of Rafiki, please send Catherine an email at [RafikiFriends@Yahoo.ca](mailto:RafikiFriends@Yahoo.ca) with

### Jambo Rafiki -- let's be friends!

in the subject line and you will receive the Jambo Rafiki e-newsletter. You can also visit: [www.DynamiteDesign.ca](http://www.DynamiteDesign.ca) for updates.

If you need more information, please call Catherine at 905-827-9633

Asante sans (thank you very much) for your interest in the children of...

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