



Hi There!

As always I would like to thank everyone for the kindness and support that enables us to provide comfort and education to so many little people. Being at this end I have toughened a little to some of the horrors I see on a daily basis but I never fail to be blown away by the generosity of the people that give us support, without which we would not be able to continue our work. Thank you, thank you, thank you x

A huge thank you also goes to all our child sponsors. It is my intention to write to each sponsor personally in the next few weeks. Keeping up with all the children is a full-time job as they all go to different schools so my sincere apologies if you have not received any news for a while but I will be in touch very soon.

There are so many new ventures in the air for Love Shack I had been putting off this letter until I could fill it with lots of exciting breakthroughs. However, few things in Kenya rarely appear on time and our good intentions are often fulfilled by serendipity rather than good planning. We are however on the cusp of lots of exciting changes and growth within Love Shack, of which I will go into more detail later.

On a personal level I too have undergone a number of changes. A total of seven years of my life have been spent in higher education but no one has ever taught me as much as my beautiful babies, Millie (2½ years) and Ethan (13 months). To them I am a hero and their loyalty and innocence is so precious. Their love is boundless and my desire to be the best person I can be is fuelled by their love and happiness.

On a professional level I have met parents that abuse, neglect and abandon their children and the children still love their parents. Nevertheless, there is a devastating sadness in the eyes of children that feel their love is not reciprocated and a palpable disappointment and confusion in those children that may love their parents but don't particularly like them.

Our children's love is pretty much a given thing,

Having them like us when they realise we are only human requires a bit more effort.

We owe it to our children to be the best we can be.

As you may know I had an unexpected trip to the UK and Ireland at the beginning of this year. Security in Kenya was a bit shaky following a rigged election. Were it just me I could have stuck it out but I could not remain in such an unpredictable situation with my small children, especially when there was talk of civil war. A big thank you to everyone that got in touch to know how we were.

I had left my lovely husband, David, running love shack and travelled alone with two babies. I thought I was going home to safety but once there I realised that Kenya is now my home and it felt quite unsettling not knowing when I would be able to return. My feelings cannot however compare to those that still remain homeless and are living without, food, sanitation, housing and healthcare.

***What if, we lived in a world where education & healthcare were free to all citizens
and Politicians had to fund-raise for their salaries!***

I am so sorry if I didn't get to see you but I can assure you I wouldn't have been much fun. I would however like to thank everyone that made me feel a part of their family and allowed my children to feel at home.

In order to save money on my return to Kenya I took a flight from Ireland that meant a 7 hour wait at Heathrow. I had prepared for this by packing 12 kg of activities for my babies in our hand luggage; books, pens, play dough, jigsaws, snacks, puzzles. I felt like super mum, ready for any entertainment request. As it was Millie found a piece of chewing gum under a seat and played with that for almost two hours. Grim but effective!

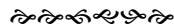
The entire journey took 24 hours. On arrival I handed the babies over to their Baba and went straight to bed for the first time in three months without nappies or feet or fists or hair in my face. I was finished and woke up a couple of hours later feeling like the mattress was on top of me. (My sincere admiration goes out to single parents that manage to find time to take a shower let alone turn out well adjusted children).

My family and I have all since had a lovely holiday in Mombassa to reunite and relax. It was the best holiday I have ever had and really recharged us all. Now it's back to work.

Each time I leave Kenya it's something different that hits me on my return. I watched a variety of animal programmes with Millie and Ethan while away. We love animals. However, seeing animals with a life expectancy of a few years have operations costing thousands, in state of the art theatres, when humans are dying for need of food, anti-malarial drugs, mosquito nets and ART that cost pence left me feeling devastated.

I took full advantage of the NHS while I was away and was so impressed. I also made enquires about social welfare benefits as I was not sure how long I would be away. How can it be that in places where housing and healthcare is free people get given money for doing nothing and yet where people are dying and homeless everything needs to be paid for. What a crazy world!!!

They say you can't tell if someone has HIV by looking at them. I was only away 3 months and the transformation in so many people I know was alarming. So many of the friendly faces that once smiled at me as I went about my business in the slums, are now looking gaunt and exhausted. The stigma around the disease is still prevalent in Kenya so people miss out of treatment as a result of their denial. The treatment that is available causes an increase in appetite so those that can't afford to eat don't take their medication for fear of feeling hungry. As a result of this the numbers of orphans are increasing every day.



The children at our house are all thriving. For many we seem to have turned a corner. Some of the younger children were having behavioural problems but now that they realise Love Shack is for life they are doing well in school and are developing into beautiful, responsible and charming little people. We are all going camping this weekend.

We are now assisting over 120 students to go to school and college and they all got new shoes and school bags at Christmas. A huge 'thank you' to everyone that responded to this appeal. I felt so blessed to be the one receiving all the smiles on your behalf. Special thanks to Laura Merrill and Jean Gray for footing a large part of the bill x

I will have lived here for 5 years in November and will be eligible for Kenyan residency. The time as flown and when you're in the middle of this never ending poverty it's easy to feel you don't do much. But when children I met years ago are now finishing secondary school, or are no longer babies but instead running towards me in primary school uniform I do get a warm fuzzy feeling. It's taken this time for me to truly understand that the children we help really wouldn't have been in school today without our support. And, although we may not be moving mountains one by one we are making a difference.

'It's not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love we put into them that matters'
Mother Teresa

By being based in the slum and having that grassroots contact with our students we are able to provide one to one support. I strongly believe that if children know they are loved and are shown respect they flourish. If they feel no one cares then they have nothing to lose. Thanks to our Outreach office in the slum, Love Shack is in a position to provide encouragement for children that feel alone and unmotivated, and this level of understanding seems to work for students that may have otherwise felt no one cared. Now, nearly all the children we assist are in the top 5 of their classes.

Our busiest times of the year are at the beginning of each term when David is banking school fees and I am collecting letters for sponsors and issuing books, uniforms & toiletries for boarding school etc. When the terms are underway we work through our list of students to see what problems they may be facing in addition to lack of school fees or ill health. Here are a few examples of the problems we need support for.

Patricia's Family: Mama, Pella 24, Patricia 15, Charlene 12 plus 3 Brothers

Patricia was attending a City Council Primary in Kibera, the largest slum in East Africa. She was in a class of more than 100 pupils with few resources. Nevertheless, through her own determination she obtained excellent marks in her Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and was offered a place at a good Secondary school. Sadly, there was no money in the family for the fees, uniform and educational materials that she required, so like two of her Brothers before her she was unable to go to secondary school.

At the beginning of the year Patricia and her sister, Pella, came to Love Shack to ask if we could assist. We had little money at the time but Patricia had performed so well in her KCPE I couldn't say no.

Since then I have visited the family and in the 5 years I have been here it is the worst house I have ever seen. It is only one room so the brothers live elsewhere. The house is made of mud and the three sisters live, cook and bathe all in the same cramped, smoky space. The girls all sleep on the floor. On one visit they told me that two men had been killed outside the night before.

I later learnt that Pella had completed a two-year catering course, funded by her church, but was unable to find work. So, I asked her to come and cook for me a few hours a week so I could get to know her for the purpose of GIVING her a reference. During that time she told me her mum has mental health problems. Just lately I noticed Pella had become weak and thin. When I asked what was wrong she said 'I am fasting until God answers my prayers because my life is so miserable'.

I have since visited the family with a mental health nurse and we agreed that the mother has schizophrenia. If Pella becomes ill Patricia will have to drop out of school to care for the family but will be too young to work. For unemployed females living in a slum the avenues for obtaining money are extremely bleak and dangerous. Following a family meeting we have agreed the following are needed.

Bunk beds for the girls	€80/£63
Food & Toiletries	€30/£25 a month
New House with Water & Electricity	€30/£25 a month
Medication for Mum	€10/£8 a month
School for Patricia	€20/£16 a month
School for Charlene	€15/£12 a month
Business capital for Pella to support Family	€200/£158

Pella is now eating.

Violet's Family: Baba, Violet, Cynthia, Olivia, Yvonne & Richard

Violet lives with her disabled Father and 3 younger sisters. Last year she gave birth to Richard who was conceived when Violet was only 14 years old. Violet's father is unable to work and they have little food for themselves or milk for the baby. Violet's 10 year-old sister was being kept out of primary school to care for Richard so that Violet could return to secondary school.

In recent weeks their Landlord has been disturbing the family late at night with threats to have gangsters cut the father's throat if he does not clear his rent arrears.

In prioritising this situation Baby Richard, now 11 months old, came first. He now lives at our home and is cared for by our family. Violet goes there at the weekends when Dorcus, our House Mother, is off duty.

We hope to clear the rent arrears and move the family to safe and more affordable accommodation. We also hope to be able to provide food each month to prevent the girls looking for food by other means.

New House with Water & Electricity	€30/£25 a month
Food & Toiletries	€30/£25 a month
Care for Richard	€30/£25 a month
School for Violet	€20/£15 a month
School for Cynthia	€15/£12 a month
School for Olivia	€15/£12 a month
School for Yvonne	€15/£12 a month

Florence's Family: Grandmother Florence, Alex, Oscar, Kevin and twins Cynzia and Kerivin.

Following the deaths of two of her daughters Florence has been left to raise five grandchildren, Alex 3, Oscar 7, Kevin 8 and twins Cynzia and Kerivin 9. She became sick herself at the beginning of the year and has not been able to pay her rent of €20/£15 a month since January. She is now facing eviction and has nowhere to go with the children.

We are currently working towards opening a charity shop here in Kenya. From the donations I have already received I have been able to set Florence up in business selling the clothes that are not suitable FOR the shop and she is doing well. This will not however provide enough income for all 5 children to go to school. If the children get sick any money currently set aside for food has to be sacrificed for medicine. These situations are desperate but not unusual.

If everyone that reads this commits to find one child sponsor, by the end of this year we could double the number of children we can assist.

If you know anyone that would be interested in sponsoring a child please give them a ring and set the ball rolling. One of the hardest things I have to do is tell a child I can't buy them food or medicine or help them go to school. All the information you need is on our website. Alternatively, if you would like to make a one off payment to cover any of the expenses listed above or wish organise a fund-raising event please contact myself or Sam and we would be happy to assist you. If you have any problems making your donation please let me know.

www.loveshackkenya.ie / loveshackkenya@yahoo.com

We are doing our bit to raise funds too. Big thanks to all the lovely ladies that did marathons this year. Jenny and Amy in Ireland and Fran and Carol in Leeds. Well done ladies x

Thank you also to all the Irish sponsors that filled in their tax relief forms. Sam was able to claim back a whopping €7,500 for Love Shack. It is my wish that within the next year we will be registered as a charity in the UK and will be able to make similar claims on support received from there too.

The post election riots have left thousands homeless and, along with heightened fuel costs, caused a huge growth in inflation that we are struggling to keep up with. Earlier this year The Mountain Club of Kenya gave us a much-appreciated donation for food, as did a number of individuals for which we were very grateful. This enabled us to at least provide meals for the Internally Displaced People that came to our outreach office seeking assistance.

Eoghan and Aideen, teachers from Ireland and friends of Love Shack, have been here for two months playing in schools, visiting families and doing the odd bit of DIY. They came with a very generous donation which we are using to buy books and food as well as support a number of children and their families. Thanks to everyone that participated in their fund-raising events and a big thank you to Eoghan and Aideen for all their help x

In March this year Sam (Love Shack Ireland Founder) and our friend Emma opened the most beautiful charity shop you have ever seen. It is called Chic & Cheerful Charity Store and is currently run by a lovely team of volunteers (Sam, Emma, Jacinta, Catherine, Ann, Gerry, Georgina, and Trish). So, if you are ever in Carlow please pop in and be prepared to say Wow! This is the best charity shop I have ever been in!



Emma volunteers with a project for women and children in Ethiopia, run by the Vincentian Lay Missionaries (VLM) and was keen to raise funds for them. Thus, the profits from the shop will be split equally between the two charities. Thank you to everyone that helped Sam and Emma get things going. Please visit our website for more information and photos.

But that's not all; we will soon be an international chain. I am opening The Love Shack Charity Store in Kenya, the first of its kind. I have very kindly been given a great spot at a busy shopping centre and all that remains is for us to build a semi-permanent shop on that spot. There's nothing there yet but I am confident that by the beginning of September we will be open for business.

And, Hazel Gosling is making sure that everyone in my home town of Boston, Lincolnshire has not only heard of Love Shack but made a donation as well. So a big thank you to my family and everyone giving Hazel a hand, especially Julie x

I also want to acknowledge the men that live with women that fund-raise (Gary, Fergal, David, etc). Thank you for all the time you have tripped over a bag in the hallway or been unable to get in the spare room but instead of complaining just accept us for who we are – we love you x

Finally, we are still in search of land but have a dilemma regarding where to buy. If we go out of town we can get a bigger plot cheaper but it would need to be residential immediately due to the remote location. If we buy in the slum it is expensive but would immediately serve the children we currently cater for. It's a tough decision but when I see it I will know.

I wish I could bottle the impact your support has here. Although my work may keep me from writing as often as I would like please don't ever feel that I am not grateful. With everyone's contributions there are children here that are loved, happy, healthy and have the chance of a future they deserve. Thank you so much.

Love Karen

*Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle,
and the life of the candle will not be shortened.
Happiness never decreases by being shared
~ Buddha*