



Where there's a will

The combination of one young woman's determination and the sport of

The only thing Victoria Ferguson ever wanted to be was an actress. She had a burning ambition to be on stage at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) or the Old Vic.

However, that was before she went to Mombasa in Kenya on her gap year in 2005 after completing an acting course at the Oxford School of Drama. Suddenly a new career path, one involving golf, opened up.

Ferguson was just 20 when she arrived in Mombasa where she commenced working with street kids in the filthy slums of the Kenyan coastal city. It was here she had her two defining moments, as she calls them, when all thoughts of an acting career disappeared.

The first defining moment came when she embarked on her first night patrol of the Maboxini slum with local social worker, Bokey. This is an area where more than 1000 adults and children regularly get high on whatever drugs they can lay their hands on.

Ferguson admits she had never been so frightened in her life. "I was almost shell shocked by the experience," she says.

Her second defining moment came at the end of that night patrol when another local social worker, Abdul, suggested they should start their own centre to help the street kids. Immediately, Ferguson knew this was what she wanted to do.

When she returned to England four months later Ferguson corralled her parents into helping her set up the Glad's House charity to create that centre for street kids in Mombasa.

Her father Dr Clifford Ferguson, now chairman of Glad's House, paid for the initial administration costs and used his experience – he's a management consultant – to deal with the business side of the charity. Vicky's mother, a secretary and bookkeeper, dealt with the admin side of things. The three of them set about cold-calling individuals and organisations

in an effort to raise money and support.

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

Thus Glad's House in Mombasa is always open to the street children; food and shelter is offered to all who go there; and Glad's House is a happy and welcoming place where children can truly be children.

At present, Glad's House operates on a block of land in the Maboxini slum. It cost £15,000 to buy and is a temporary shelter able to fulfil the requirements of Glad's House. The current goal is to raise £150,000 to build a permanent rehabilitation centre that can house up to 60 street children at a time.

golf is providing disadvantaged youngsters in Mombasa with hope

You may be forgiven for wondering what any of this has to do with golf. The answer is... everything. Glad's House is a shining example of how golf can help the ultra-poor, like the street kids of Mombasa.

Early on in the Glad's House project, Dr Ferguson learnt of a new golf retreat, the Vipingo Ridge Resort, being built close to Mombasa. Knowing they would need caddies, he kept pestering the resort until they agreed to accept caddies from Glad's House. There was a compromise involved – no more than 50 per cent of the caddies would be from Glad's House; the others would be Vipingo locals.

Both sets of 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 individuals at Vipingo Ridge Dr Ferguson had been pestering was David Jones, a 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 it making its first grant to Glad's House, a sum of £7000.

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

Although they were meant to go straight to the golf course, the trio insisted on visiting the slums the children came from. Upon arrival, they were greeted by two young children, each no older than six, with glue bottles hanging from their necks. From these the children took regular sniffs.

The reason for the glue sniffing is that it is the cheapest drug and readily available. And, as Cast explains, "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 glue helps 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," says Cast of their visit to the Maboxini slum.

"Then we met Wycliffe, a teenage boy who was missing his right arm. It had been broken then improperly set by the hospital. It turned gangrenous and had to be amputated. Yet, in spite of his handicap he greeted us with the widest and warmest of smiles and stayed with us on our journey through hell as our bodyguard."

And it is a hell. What homes there are consist of wooden shacks no more than 10sq ft covered in corrugated tin. Dirt floors, no sanitation or running water and little furniture are other shocking features. People without a home curl up on the ground and



get what glue-induced sleep they can.

"Most of the children, through no fault of their own, are deprived of food, water, shoes, clothes, sanitation, comfortable housing, parents, love, guidance and security which most of us in the western world take for granted," says Cast.

Prior to Glad's House's opening, the only source of income for the street kids, apart from drug dealing and prostitution, was collecting rubbish from the city. Plastic bottles, old food wrappers, tin cans, plastic containers etc are stacked into 6ft cubes for a recycling company which pays £0.35 (\$NZ0.72) per cube. It usually takes kids one whole day to gather together one 6ft cube.

Mercifully, Glad's House has begun to provide a way out of hell for these kids. In addition to the food, shelter and love provided at the temporary centre, where the ages of the kids range from a newborn baby to 26 (a little old to be a kid but still desperately in need of help).

The 24 children currently on the Caddie Programme get paid £3.50 (\$7 approx) per round. This amount goes

to Glad's House who then pay the youthful caddies 8000 Kenyan shillings a month (about £61.23 or \$NZ120).

Future plans involve several of the Glad's House caddies travelling to the UK where they will be given the chance to caddy for professional golfers in a European Tour event. They may even get to play some golf. All the Glad's House caddies know how to play golf even if they don't yet own their own sets of clubs.

Caddying is not the only enterprise Ferguson and the Glad's House team have initiated. They currently have 17 street kids in work through various enterprise schemes including a bead shop, shoe shine business, a cobblers, cyber cafe, bicycle shop, fish and chip shop and a carpentry business.

These enterprises are likely to be joined soon by a golf club repair business. The Tour Van manager of Wilson Staff is to accompany other caddies from the ETCA on the next trip to Mombasa. He will be teaching kids how to repair, make and modify golf clubs.

Glad's House now has three caddies

Glad's House is a shining example of how golf can help the ultra-poor, like the street kids of Mombasa

working at another golf club, the Nyali Golf & Country Club, near Mombasa.

Ferguson's long-term objective is to open up self-sufficient Glad's House centres throughout Kenya and to begin a Glad's Girls programme, a girls-only refuge incorporating a creche for children born to young mothers living on the street.

She hopes to be able to spend at least two years living fulltime in Kenya from 2012. At present she is based in the UK where she is a youth worker dealing with drug abuse among 11 to 19 year olds.

Every spare hour is spent raising funds for the Glad's House centre in Maboxini where there are now seven full-time local staff. Ferguson goes to Mombasa during her annual leave.

In November 2010, Ferguson's achievements were recognised when she received the Ultimate International Angel award at the *Cosmopolitan* Ultimate Women of the Year Awards ceremony. ●

For more information about Glad's House, visit the website www.gladshouse.com.