

BALDO CHILDREN'S HOME (Casa Maria)



Casa Maria

Baldo Children's Home (Casa Maria in Italy) is a reception facility for orphans and street children located in Ndaragwa, a village in Kenya, located on the equator, 211 km north-west of Nairobi.

Let's listen to the story of the Casa Maria project, as told by its founder Sebastiano Cocuzza, Head of Pediatrics Emeritus and Past Governor of the Rotary District 2030.

The history of Baldo Children's Home (Casa Maria)

In this period, which makes me sad for the future of all our children, I feel the desire and, in part, the obligation to revisit my Rotary project.

It's been 50 years since Martin Luther King opened his speech with "I have a dream". My story actually starts from this message; in my opinion there are two types of dreams: the nocturnal one, which we mostly forget, and the daydream, which we can realize because we remember it. My daydream in favor of the poorest is called Baldo Children's Home (Casa Maria in Italy) and was born in 2004.

I consider myself a lucky man: I was born and raised in a family of sound principles, I chose the profession of pediatrician and I married an exceptional woman who gave me three children: today I can count on ten grandchildren. I

was also lucky to have met so many dear people, who supported me, encouraged me and helped me in every way.



This whole story of mine comes true thanks to various fortuitous occasions (which the nuns rightly call Providence) and begins in 1984, when I won the competition announced by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a position as Professor of Pediatrics at the Italian-Somali University of Mogadishu and as Director of a Pediatric Department of the Benadir Children's Hospital in Mogadishu. Eight splendid months that changed my life both from a human and professional point of view.



Upon my return to Italy with some friends I founded the association, ABA (“Associazione Bambini Africani”, that is African Children's Association), which aimed to raise funds to transfer children to Italy who could not be operated on in Somalia. We successfully carried

out 17 interventions and the children were able to return to their home in Somalia. Unfortunately this wonderful experience ended in 1991 due to the civil war which destroyed a fascinating country.

In 1986, presented by Bebetto Zunino, I joined Rotary: here's a new stroke of luck.

For two years I missed Africa, until a new lucky opportunity: during a meeting of volunteer doctors I met a doctor who was planning the construction of an eye clinic at the Mathari Hospital in Nyeri. Time to pack my bags and I left for Kenya, where, for two years, I collaborated in the Pediatrics department.

It was the occasion of another lucky encounter: I was with friends on the veranda of a bar in Naivasha, when a young man got out of a jeep with a parrot on a perch. We recognized each other and called each other by the same name: “Sebastiano!”. He was a young doctor who had done his internship under my guidance at the University of Medicine for the specialization in Pediatrics.



He wanted to show me where he worked in North Kinangop, in a reference hospital for all African missions, of a level perhaps higher than many of our hospitals. It was an opportunity to get to know “my nuns”. The Rector provided me with unexpected horizons, an instinctive and sincere friendship was born which led to a collaboration with notable results.

With the contribution of Rotary we organized an infusion laboratory, we installed solar panels for the hospital; 4 incubators, 2 ultrasound machines and an image intensifier were purchased, but above all the Surgical Ophthalmology Clinic was built, which is still in operation today.

The opportunity provided yet another stroke of luck, which, in this case, I would definitely define as “Providence”. I met Sister Teresa Kairu, a nurse who belonged to the Congregation of Italian-African Sisters, the little daughters of Saint Joseph of Verona. She was full of dreams and hopes, she continued to tell me about her plans, which, unfortunately, proved to be beyond my resources and, for this reason, remained in the state of dreams.

Those dreams remained dreams until 2002, when I had another lucky break. I was elected Governor of Rotary District 2030, including Piedmont, Liguria and

Valle d'Aosta. The assignment involved numerous protocol tasks, but placed considerable personal and financial resources at my disposal. I proposed to my staff and the clubs in the district to save on expenses and I managed to raise 450,000 euros, which we donated to Sister Teresa to build a dormitory for "street" children. She was joined by Sister Peris, Sister Mary and Sister Margaret and, later, the young Sister Regina.

My right-hand man was, at the time, the District Secretary Giancarlo Burdese, of the Rotary Club of Bra, who worked with total commitment to the realization of the project and who founded the [Ruota Amica OdV](#) for the management of the available resources.

The orphanage was inaugurated in 2004 thanks to the funds made available by the District 2030 of Rotary International. Considerable financial support was also provided by the young people of the Rotaract clubs, who indicated "Casa Maria" as the Association's National Project. I want to mention a few: Andrea



Contini, who provided the funds for the construction of the Nursery; Jacopo Grillo who took care of the retirement home for the students; Guglielmo Pepoli who financed the purchase of a respirator for the hospital. Other notable

contributions were made by the Governors of Rotary District 2030 in the following ten years. Today the complex consists of four pavilions: two for boys and girls, two for boys and girls and a nursery. It hosts on average around 100 abandoned children, orphans from extremely poor families, who are cared for by the nuns and some employees of the facility. Children aged between three and five years benefit from a nursery school set up inside, while the older ones attend state schools located nearby.

The headquarters are also equipped with an electric oven for the production of bread, a large agricultural field, a stable with cows, areas where rabbits and chickens are raised which contribute largely to food needs. All the rooms, including the nuns' accommodation and the Guest House for visitors and



volunteers, are comfortable and equipped with hot and cold running water.

To favor the economic aspects of the local population, we proposed the application of “microcredit”.

Sister Peris was entrusted with its direction. That ingenious economic development tool allowed us to encourage the launch of small productive activities by the local population who lived in conditions of extreme poverty and marginalization. The women of the community were lent sums of money to set up agricultural and craft activities.



The loan lasted for three years and had to be repaid after that date in minimal installments. If the sum was returned it was possible to access a new microcredit loan. Thanks to Sister Peris, the idea has had a notable development, with great satisfaction of the community. To date, 32

microcredits have been granted, all successful, except for one case. The growth of the structure has not stopped. At the Ndithini Mission, directed by Sister Nadia, two pieces of equipment for AIDS control were purchased; in 2014 a scholarship project was established, funded largely by Rotarian members, but also by friends and acquaintances. To date, they have been delivered to 14 young people who, having obtained their high school diploma,

use them to cover the cost of advanced training courses. In the same year, with the contribution of the Rotary Clubs of District 2031 and the grant from the Rotary Foundation, the structure was equipped with photovoltaic panels and rebuilt the irrigation system of the agricultural land. In 2020, the Rotary clubs of Turin Castello, Auxerre and Alzenau, with the contribution of the Italian non-profit “Insiemeperdonare”, financed the purchase of a new minibus to connect with local schools.



It cannot be denied that the result of this initiative depends on the significant commitment of Rotary International, which has always been committed to solving the problems that afflict humanity. It is the same global organization that launched the PolioPlus project, which is ensuring the eradication of polio. Its founder,

Paul Harris, like Martin Luther King, dreamed of a world in which injustices and poverty are resolved and friendly relations between men are widespread and cemented.

For all these strokes of luck I can only thank those who helped me realize my dream: the little daughters of Saint Joseph of Verona, the volunteer doctors who work in Africa, the Rotarians and all the friends who accompanied me in this great adventure that transformed my dream of offering those who didn't have it a life without hunger, disease and poverty, in peace, friendship and work, into reality.

What more do we need? Perhaps of a new stroke of luck or perhaps of "Providence"...





Baldo Children's Home in Ndaragwa - Satellite photo - June 2014



ndaragwa



Google earth



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Giuba

Kapoeta

Turmi

Javello Yabêlo



Melkadida Refugee camp

Bulo Burti

Gialalass

Somalia

Mogadiscio

Uganda

Kenya

Ndaragwa

Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust

Coriolei

Merca

Brava

Gelib

Giamame

Chisimaio

Nairobi

Athi River

Google

Documents:

- 16 September 2015 - “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Video
- 18 December 2013 - “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Video Christmas Greetings
- 16 February 2012 - “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Video
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Years 2015 and 2018
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Year 2014 (part 1)
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Year 2014 (part 2)
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Year 2014 (part 3)
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Years 2012 and 2013
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Year 2010 (part 1)
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Year 2010 (part 2)
- “Baldo Children’s Home in Ndaragwa (Kenya)” project - Photographs collection - Years 2006, 2008 and 2009

References for donations to the “Baldo Children’s Home (Casa Maria)” project:

- Ruota Amica OdV (link to web site: <https://www.ruotamica.it>; email: info@ruotamica.it)