

KEFA

PROJECT



years

and counting

LET'S BE HONEST IN THE BEGINNING NONE OF THIS WAS PLANNED

(OR HOW A NONPROFIT WAS SEMI-ACCIDENTALLY CREATED)

This story starts on a razor's edge. I don't revisit it often anymore, but it will always be a part of me: the moment when the world turned dark and every part of me wanted to die. But when the time came, I just sat there. It seemed I was "too much of a coward" to even take my life. I felt the world would be a better place without me, that people would be happier, and the greatest gift I could give the world would be to take myself out of it. "Am I too selfish for even that?" I wondered.

A month after I came within an inch of killing myself, I received a life-changing phone call. It was a friend of a friend asking if I wanted to go to Africa to work with kids. They knew nothing about me or my past. I was fresh out of college, working a job I did not love. So I just decided, "Why not?" The next summer, I went to Africa for two months, with no idea what I was doing.

In Africa, something completely unexpected happened to me. God retaught me what love was. That I was completely loved, completely accepted right where I was, but I also had been created for so much more. Where I had expected judgment, I found only grace.

As this was happening I was meeting kids who were living on the streets. I wanted each and everyone of these special kids to experience this same love and acceptance. They were each created to do something exceptional.

I came back to America with no intention of starting a nonprofit. But I was able to recruit a group of friends - also fresh out of college - to go back to Rwanda to put on soccer clinics for at-risk kids.

The following summer eight of us (including a one-year old!) flew out to Rwanda. We met up with a group of Rwandans and worked together to put on the clinics and tournaments for kids all over Kigali. It was madness, but a blast. We interacted with thousands of kids.

We were young and we didn't do everything perfectly. But a few core tenets were born that would guide our work to today. The first was that we needed to first listen to Rwandans -



Walking through
Rwanda on our first
trip 10 years ago.

to hear what was truly needed and not to just come in and offer solutions. The second was that we needed mentors from the nonprofit world to guide us and learn from their wisdom. We were fortunate to start under several established nonprofits who provided valuable insight on how to avoid mistakes and have a lasting impact.

Finally and most importantly, I realized that if this was ever to be successful, we needed those we worked with to be empowered to do greater things than we could ever do by ourselves. That is to say that children who had been homeless would be the ones to change child homelessness in Rwanda more than us.

To have this type of sustained change though we had to do more than one-time soccer clinics. We needed sustained work that involved communities and locals. And with that realization I decided that what I had intended to be a one-off trip would become a nonprofit.

We started the nonprofit in 2009. It was the height of the recession and a time when nonprofits were laying people off. I was either too young, dumb, or stubborn to care. (Let's be honest I was all three.) So after I burned through my life savings, I slept on floors, couches, and spare beds of anyone that would have me.

It was not easy, but so many good things have come from it. While the nonprofit was started (semi) accidentally, we have done our best to take each step after with care that we listen, that every human is valued, and that we never strip dignity or autonomy from those with whom we work. And above all that when we fail to do one of these things, we seek forgiveness and to learn.

We are beyond grateful you have taken this journey with us. Whether you have been with us for ten years or are just hearing about us. We are delighted you are with us. We hope the next pages are an encouragement to you.

11.2010 A group of Americans and Rwandans partnered together to **train local coaches** to run high-level practices and effective outreach for at-risk youth. These coaches would become the backbone of everything we would do for the next ten years.

12.2010 Coaches started **teams in their communities** for boys and girls. Teams focused on keeping kids in school, off of drugs, from going on the streets, and experiencing the love of God. The goal for each child was to find their passions and talents and to pursue them.

08.2011 Coaches **traveled to Burundi** with the Love Burundi Festival. Coaches put on 17 soccer clinics for a total of 3,300 community children. Coaches declared themselves international coaches and brought a deeper confidence and passion to their work.

12.2011 Kefa coaches started a soccer team predominately for **kids who were homeless**. This was a shift from only doing prevention work to working directly with kids for whom prevention work would no longer be effective, but rather needed a larger intervention.

07.2012 Through your generosity, we were able to **open the doors to Kefa Academy**. The boarding academy created a safe place for our most at-risk boys to train in football, go to school, rejoin society, and experience love and acceptance.

18.2012 Coaches **traveled to Tanzania** with the Love Tanzania Festival. Coaches put on 22 soccer clinics for a total of 1,500 community children. For many coaches it was the farthest they had traveled in their lives and their first time to see the ocean.

06.2013 A team from the US and our Rwandan coaches put on a girls' soccer camp. This was the first major initiative to empower females on Kefa teams. The camp would lead to several girls returning to school and set the framework for future growth.

07.2013 The Kefa Project launched a **film mentorship program** for five older athletes on Kefa community teams. This marked Kefa's first work in job skill and business training as Kefa recognized the need to train beyond sports.



Ev
Act of
Love

Ripp

a decade in



n the blink
of an eye

12.2013 Sixteen boys from the academy approached us and **asked to be baptized**. Our staff agreed to their request and began a Bible study with the boys so that they could learn more. In a hotel pool, the boys were baptized.

08.2014 Kefa staff began more intentional meetings with parents of academy athletes to partner together for their kids' futures. This led to the creation of a parent committee to advise the academy and sparked the beginning of partnering with families not just kids.

01.2015 Community coaches continued to grow in skill and compassion. Coaches began **visiting children and their families at home** to check on issues at home and to encourage the families. This program led to multiple kids reconciling with their families.

12.2016 The first class graduated from the academy. Thirteen boys men graduated from the academy. Seven from **vocational training** programs - who would go through a business training with Kefa and five from high school who would go to **college**.

08.2016 Quite by surprise Kefa was introduced to a new group of kids who were homeless. After training the kids on a newly formed soccer team, Kefa went and met each of their families to find out why they were on the street. From this, **eight new athletes joined the academy**.

09.2017 The new kids settled into our academy and many became top in their class in school. Kefa met six new kids who were homeless. At our office they **turned in their drugs for uniforms to train**. After investigating their backgrounds, they too joined the academy.

03.2018 Kefa **launched its women's co-op** for mothers of academy athletes. The co-op taught women to make totes, the love of God, and hosted parenting classes. The co-op became a focal point to ensure that athlete's younger siblings did not become homeless.

08.2011 Kefa Academy athletes and their friends in the neighborhood began a monthly **community service program** to help single mothers and elderly women. The boys rebuilt houses, made bricks and cleaned yards for the **women**.

08.2011 Kefa opens **HBIII community library and starts community dance classes at its academy**. The goal of each program is for the academy to be part of the entire community where Kefa is based to empower as many kids as possible to grow in their talents.



**Our goal never changed:
That our kids would do
greater things
than us.**

Greater >

There is a passage in the Bible about greatness. It is not the one most people quote or think of immediately. In it Jesus says that those who trust in him will do even greater things than what he has done.

There is a profound beauty in this - that a true leader empowers those around the leader to do greater things than the leader. Now we would never claim to be Jesus - though we hope our actions mirror the mercy and grace he embodied. However, this passage has stuck with our organization and become a prayer that those we work with would do far greater things we ever could do or could imagine.

This is where Etienne's story collides with ours.

Etienne entered our soccer academy when it opened in 2012. He was a quiet kid. In fact, it is hard to find pictures of him in the beginning because he was most often in

the background. When he joined, he was our second best goalkeeper and an average student.

But he had a goal.

"When I entered the academy," Etienne said, "I took everything very seriously. Whether I studied or trained, I worked with all of my power."

Etienne dreamed of becoming a professional goal keeper. And through his hard work, he blossomed.

Etienne began to attract attention from professional teams and was on the verge of accomplishing all he had worked for

when he got news from his family: his mother was extremely sick.

At the time, Etienne's mother was raising his two younger sisters alone. Etienne does not know who his father is. She made what money she could by selling fruit to the markets, which she carried each day. It was taxing work.

When she was diagnosed with stomach cancer, it became apparent that she could no longer provide for her two youngest daughters.

At the same time, Etienne was offered a professional contract in Rwanda's top division. However, in Rwanda professional soccer does not pay enough to support a family.

Etienne mulled his options. Would he follow his dreams or give up all he had worked for and take care of his family? His mother's decline was rapid. In a few short months after being diagnosed, while in route to receive treatment in a different part of the country, she passed away.

There was no one to take care of the two girls. Etienne approached us with an idea. He would quit



(Top): Etienne with his two younger sisters.

(Bottom): Etienne on his first night at the academy.



school and soccer to start a vocational training program. After a year of training, he would look for work. His plan came with a major problem - the vocational program required students to board at the school. There would be no one to watch his sisters.

We sat down with Etienne and discussed his options - with the understanding that whatever decision he made would have to be his.

We came to a realization. We needed a goal keeper coach. If Etienne, would agree to finish school, he could become our goalkeeper coach and receive a stipend to care for his family. Etienne struggled through the decision. His dreams of professional greatness were disappearing.

After several weeks, he accepted the position. Etienne has excelled at the position. The young goal keepers on our team have

grown under his mentorship. But even better, Etienne has been able to rent a small house near the academy, where he lives with his sisters. He provides food and school fees for them and is able to watch them grow. And they adore him.

His dream changed. He found something greater than his own personal success. He found that what he had been given he could give to others.

His sisters are safe.

"When I look at my sisters, I know I made the right decision," he says.

Etienne, like so many other athletes in Kefa has been an answer to our prayer. And we know he will go on to do even greater things.

A short documentary of Etienne's story in his own words will release online December 3rd, 2019.

2019

No longer homeless
Jean Claude,
academy athlete,
with his younger
sister.

**Our dream is to partner together with
the community, Masoro, to see child
homelessness ended and families restored.**

WILL YOU JOIN US?

2029

The last ten years are worthy of celebration. But there are so many kids like Etienne who are still homeless. Will you partner with us to make the next ten years even more successful to impact kids on a larger scale.

Here is How:

We are working together with a school in Masoro to use their facilities on the weekends to run a catch-up school. The school will serve kids who have been living on the streets and out of school for a long time. Our goal is to get these kids back into school, to work alongside their families to see relationships restored, and of course training together on the soccer pitch. (Soccer is the buy-in for the kids to come back!)

This pilot program will host an initial 20 kids and serve as an opportunity to learn how to bring our unique programming to under-resourced schools in Rwanda, impacting countless more kids who are homeless.

Will you join us in empowering the next generation of Etiennes by donating to our year-end goal of raising **\$35,000**. This amount will allow us to fully launch our catch-up school for twenty kids, as well as provide funding for two months of programs for 500 kids on our community teams and 20 kids in our academy.

You Can Make a Donation in one of three ways:



Text 'Kefa' to (503) 217-6983



Go to www.kefaproject.org/donate



Mail the card in this magazine with check to
8311 Brier Creek Pkwy Ste 105-206,
Raleigh, NC 27617

1. Our first ever community team which was started in 2009.
2. Academy athlete Jean Claude dancing with his mom at our academy Christmas party. Family reconciliation is key to our work.
3. Academy graduate Theoneste with the motorcycle he purchased to make money as a motorcycle taxi.
4. Kids at the outreach our coaches put on in Burundi in 2011.
5. Co-op mother Safi and her newborn son.
6. Children from our co-op sassing it up for the camera. Many children who were out of school before the co-op are now in school.
7. Academy athlete Etienne enjoying his bed the night the academy opened in 2012.
8. A beautiful sunflare at our community team in Kagugu.
9. Olivier showing off a waiter carry during our infamous jerrycan workouts.
10. Kimisagara community team athlete, Eric, with his mother after leaving the streets and being reconciled back into his family.
11. Community dance class at the academy. Our academy has an impact beyond just the kids that live there.
12. Academy athletes flying in our Love Is Strength shirts.
13. HBIII library at our academy which allows children to have a quiet, safe place to study and learn.
14. Our community team in Kimisagara praying after training.
15. Board member, Rodney, teaching basketball at a community camp on our first ever trip in 2009.
16. A community soccer outreach in Tanzania that our coaches put on in 2012.
17. Co-op member Domarice weaving a tote.
18. Vama and Claude celebrating the night our academy opened in 2012.
19. Academy athlete and now coach Etienne walking his two younger sisters to school. Etienne provided for his sisters after his mother passed away.
20. Kids playing soccer at our community team in Karembure.
21. Our academy athletes diving into the pool following their baptisms.



10 Years - in - 50 Photos

22. Our girls team at Jabana training hard.
23. Academy graduate Billgates coming back and training his younger academy brothers in computer science.
24. Art class during the holiday camp that we help put on for at-risk children in Kimisagara.
25. Founder Brian with academy athlete Vama.
26. Noah with his academy brothers on the day of our first academy graduation.
27. Coach Center speaking to his athletes at a devotion after training at Karembure.
28. Jali community athlete, Remy showing off the bike that he uses to carry jerry cans up a mountain every morning to sell. His coach helped him leave the streets.

29. Billgates with his mother during his graduation.
30. Coach Pascal speaking with is girls team at Jabana.
31. Academy athlete Eric prior to entering the academy.
32. Academy athlete Eric welcoming new kids to the academy.
33. Co-op member Leocadie showing off the totes to the co-op makes.
34. Academy (now) graduates Gatari and Focus reading through their Bibles.
35. Our coaches are at the crux of all of our programs. They gather together every Monday for a devotion and to discuss how their sites are doing.
36. A group of Kefa athletes learning how make films during our film training program.
37. Our amazing videographer MJ being lifted up by our Kefa staff.
38. Coach Valentine performing traditional dance at our Kefa graduation.
39. Running with parachutes at our female empowerment camp.
40. Quinton Fortune visiting our academy athletes on behalf of Manchester United in 2013.
41. Our academy athletes and their teammates repairing a house for a single mother in their community.
42. A beautiful action shot at our training center Karembure.
43. Catch-up school at our academy for kids who had been out of school for several years.
44. Kabuga community team member Eric showing off the bananas that he sells to pay for his school fees and to help with family medical bills.
45. Vama enjoying our one year celebration at the academy.
46. Celebrating academy athlete Dieudonne's birthday with a hug from staff member Mama Beatrice.
47. Our friend Seth at our first coach training in 2010. We love having people come so that we can learn from one another.
48. Academy athlete Etienne showing off his leaping ability.
49. Community kids performing acrobatics at our holiday camp in Kimisagara.
50. Girls team members dancing at a Kefa banquet in 2011.