

Feature

Giving back after getting some life-changing help

In 2005, students from Victoria College's Diarmid House raised enough money to pay Kenyan student James Mwangi's secondary-school fees. Fifteen years later **Lily Carter** spoke to him about how the donation changed his life and how he now wants to thank the fundraisers in person

'If it were not for Diarmid, I would not be here!' read part of the message, its sense of excitement plain to see from the many exclamation marks. It's author, teacher James Mwangi, had sent it to Victoria College using the social media platform Instagram to thank the school, in particular Diarmid House, for a charitable donation they had made in 2005.

After several fundraisers throughout that year, the house presented a cheque of £1,600 to the Loldia School Fund, a charity founded by four Islanders designed to improve education standards at Loldia Primary School in Kenya. The fund used this

money to award a scholarship to James – then a pupil at the school – so he could afford to continue his education at Solai Boys' Secondary School after passing their entrance exam with flying colours.

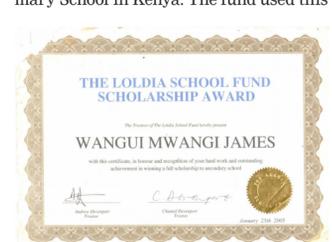
'It was at this point that they told me that my fees had been paid in full – four years of my high school – by Diarmid House at Victoria College,' said James, who explained that he was given an envelope that included a letter from Peter Germain, former housemaster of Diarmid. James was also sent a copy of The Victorian, the school's magazine and a purple Victoria College polo shirt.



James Mwangi is a teacher at Loldia Primary School in Kenya. He was supported by fundraisers from Victoria College's Diarmid House 15 years ago and recently sent a message to the school to say how the donation had changed his life

You paid my high school fees 2005-2008 thanks so much Diarmid. Am James Mwangi from Kenya. Currently am a teacher and running this soccer academy! This far I must stay if it were not for Diarmid, I would not be here! Please say hi to everyone on my behalf. And if possible can follow us on our page to see how am raising others to be where I am just like you did. Following on your footsteps 🙌

Kind regards,
James Mwangi



The Loldia School Fund Scholarship certificate presented to James

'I was very excited and I remember spending a lot of time at night going through the magazine,' he said.

'The purple polo shirt was always my best on Sundays. Amazingly they sent me every edition of The Victorian for the four years I was at secondary school.'

'The money raised by the pupils of Victoria College was so important to me. My mother used to be a casual worker at a flower farm, where she earned a meagre salary that could not even afford food for the whole month. So if putting food on the table was a problem, school fees – especially a boarding school – was impossible.'

'At the time, the village did not have any close day schools. Diarmid gave me

an opportunity to go outside my village when travelling was very rare for us. They gave me an opportunity to have a boarding-school life that I would not otherwise have had. To be sincere, if it were not for them my school life would have ended at primary school.'

James attended Solai Boys' Secondary School between 2005 and 2008, and went on to become its head boy.

'I wish the Victoria College boys had a chance to visit me, but it's never too late,' said James. 'Most importantly I wish I had an opportunity to say thank you to them face to face in a hall. I always pictured myself in a hall with a microphone and pouring out my heart and saying a big

thank you.' During his time at secondary school, James was visited every year by Jersey residents Andrew and Chantal Devenport, founders of the Loldia School Fund.

'I am absolutely delighted to hear that James is doing well,' said Andrew. 'I think there are several Loldia Primary School scholars who have returned to work at the school and give back to their community. It's great news.'

He added that his team were inspired to set up the charity after visiting the area as tourists. 'Our guest host, Peter Njoroge, invited us to see a local school. He helped many people fall in love with the school and the area. In setting up the fund we



James (pictured in red jacket second from the right) and the boys from the Tafa Soccer Academy he set up

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James Mwangi

had two objectives: firstly, to improve the conditions of the school, and secondly to provide scholarships to young people who were graduating from the primary school to carry on their education at secondary school.

'One thing that really concerned us with starting up the charity to help the school was its sustainability – we worried about creating a dependency that couldn't be continued. What is nice about the outcome of Loldia Primary School is that the local farming businesses took over the support for the fund, which is managed internally now. It is primarily from local farms that they receive support.'

James now teaches Swahili and social studies at Loldia Primary School. 'I was so lucky to have an opportunity to work here

and become a member of staff where I was a pupil. I always wished I would teach at my old school, even for a term, so it was a dream come true.'

As well as teaching, James set up the Tafa Soccer Academy, where he works as a football coach to bring people together from the village. He explained that drug abuse was becoming a problem in the community, with chronic absenteeism from school becoming the norm.

'My three colleagues and I decided to use football as a tool to fight this vice,' said James. 'So far the academy has brought several children back to school. We have a saying here: "no school, no football."

The academy still struggles because of lack of equipment and training facilities, as well as difficulties attending matches

due to limited transportation.

'Life has changed a little bit here, but still most parents struggle to provide anything meaningful to enable their children to train,' said James. 'Most of them work at the flower farms. Pay has increased from my mother's time, but it's still little by current standards.'

After James got in touch with Victoria College, the school's sport's department offered to give him two of their first-team's football shirts. In addition, the Friends of Prep PTA group have second-hand sports kit and boots that they are planning to send to Kenya to show James their support.

James added: 'My final word to the pupils of Diarmid, for all of their help, I want to say thank you very much. I would not have become a teacher if not for them; I would not be helping others in my village today if it were not for them.'

'I would also like to say that the impact they created on me has not gone to waste. I began Tafa Soccer Academy as one way of giving back to the community I grew up in. I am hoping one day the boys will visit and have a one-on-one experience with the children we teach and train. If they visit their homes – which are single rooms – they will realise how such a donation can help uplift a life and change it completely. Most of them live in a deplorable state and

when I remember that that's where I came from it encourages me to continue doing what I am doing.'

Loldia Primary School

LOLDIA Primary School is situated on the shores of Lake Naivasha, a rural and poverty-stricken area in central Kenya. It is 25km from the nearest town.

The Loldia School Fund was set up in 2001 by Islanders Andrew Devenport, Chantal Devenport, Mary Devenport, and Mary Martin to improve standards of education at Loldia Primary School.

The founders of the trust had visited the school and saw the need to improve its facilities and provide a better standard of learning for the children there.

Between 2001-2011 the fund supported the school and helped in a number of ways. It provided books and desks, built classrooms and toilets, and built houses for teachers to live on site. The fund also subsidised some of the wages to increase staffing levels and improve the staff-to-pupil ratio at the school.

The original founders have wound down their activities, and the fund is now internally managed in Kenya, with most support coming from local businesses there.



James (back right) wearing his Victoria College polo shirt, which he considered his Sunday best



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James (left) became head boy at Solai Boys' Secondary School

Dear James,

Congratulations on your excellent examination results. Mr Devenport has sent me your name as the student which our 'House' here at Victoria College will sponsor.

As you will see from the college magazine enclosed, we are an all boys school. We will send you a copy of the College magazine every year so that you can see what we are up to on the other side of the world! (I am the gentleman with little hair stood behind the lady in blue on the front row!!!)

We hope that you will write to us and let us know how you are getting on at school. Who knows, with a bit of luck we will meet one day!!

On behalf of Diarmid House, we wish you all the very best for your future education.

Yours faithfully

A letter from Peter Germain, who was Diarmid housemaster at Victoria College when funds were raised for James by students