You can give a kid a chance at life

An orphanage in war-torn Sierra Leone is desperate for funds to help thousands of kids unlikely to live past five years of age.

If you happened to be situated in the middle of an orphanage in Africa and saw tiny little babies with AIDS struggling for their lives, and children under five being left abandoned in graveyards and on the streets, what would you do?

Probably the same as Matthew Morgan-Jones has done. Matthew through his work with the Body Shop in 2001, found himself partaking in community involvement work with orphans in Sierra Leone and what he saw there prompted him to take further moves to help the suffering children be encountered.

He set out to adopt two children.

"I had always thought of adopting, my partner and I. It is a situation which is relatively peaceful - but in December 2005 these troops finally left Sierra Leone. In the meantime, the burden of over one million returning refugees, large numbers of discharged child soldiers, tens of thousands of children living on the street has overwhelmed existing government welfare programmes. The country is in chaos, with no health services and no social welfare. Only five out of five babies survive past the age of five years old, and of these children that do survive, their life expectancy is only until 34 years. There is something in the range of 15,000 to 20,000 street children scavenging the streets for food in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone alone."

"In Freetown I was horrified. So many things, but one that stands out was seeing a little eight-year-old boy cleaning out human excrement from the street drains as his job to survive. No gloves, no protective clothing, just a bucket which carried the excrement. We gave him some food. He was blank, completely expressionless. Like he had lost the will to live. He was only eight-years-old."

"Most kids in orphanages in Sierra Leone have suffered either abuse backgrounds or other tremendous hardships. Their chance of survival is slim and their chance of a happy existence is very short space of time they do live is even shorter."

The All As One orphanage in Sierra Leone gives a flicker of light to a few children, but it is running out of money. It means they deal with day-to-day events in crisis management, because of lack of funds and this situation is not conducive to proper planning and giving the best potential care they can offer.

What All As One needs is to find corporates or individuals to commit to sponsoring a portion of the orphanage's monthly budget. Commitment of any portion of the budget would be extremely helpful and ensure that children like Danita and Magda get the food, healthcare and attention and love they need and deserve.

CHARITY BALL

The Charity Ball for the All As One orphanage in Sierra Leone takes place on 30 March at the Shangri-La Hotel in Dubai. The theme is black tie with a hint of Africa. For tickets and further information, contact Matthew Morgan-Jones on 050 651 128 or matthew@alliance.org
Off the Streets

Orphanage battling to save Sierra Leone’s 20,000 street kids

Three-year-old Duada and one-and-a-half year old Magda (right) are two happily adopted children living amongst the fancy yachts and skyscrapers of metropolitan Dubai.

It is a far cry from their homeland, Sierra Leone in Africa. Before coming to Dubai, Duada and Magda were orphaned children living at the All As One orphanage in Sierra Leone, a country where only three of every five babies survive past the age of five.

After a spell of community work in orphanages in South Africa, their adopted father, Matthew felt a compelling urge to help the orphaned children of Africa, so he adopted Duada and Magda. He describes his time in Sierra Leone as emotionally draining, which opened his eyes.

In Sierra Leone, the situation is dire. Eleven years of violent civil war has left the country in turmoil, with up to 20,000 homeless street-children roaming Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. Many of the street-children have no hands, because rebel gangs cut them off if they refuse to join them.

Some children - like Duada and Magda - miraculous find themselves at the All As One orphanage. With 15 children crammed into a room and a constant shortage of food, funds, supplies, good healthcare and staff - it is no holiday home, but it is a safer refuge for children than the streets.

But with no governmental support, All As One is in a serious financial crisis. Unless it receives immediate funding to pay rent and staff salaries, and buy food, clothing, vitamins and drugs for the children, it will be forced to close down and the children will be turned onto the street.