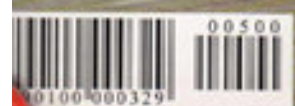
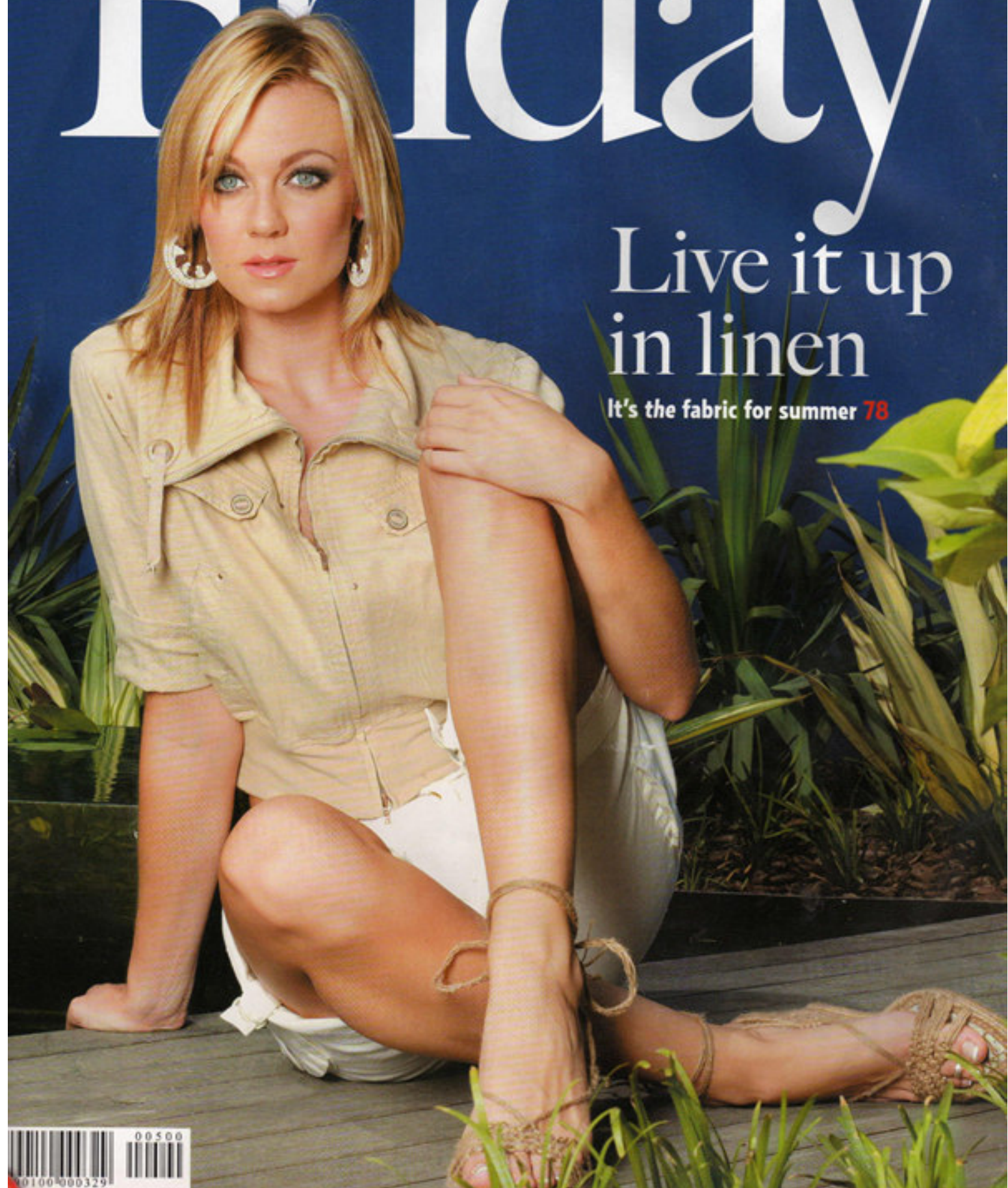


Friday

JUNE 23-29, 2006

Live it up
in linen

It's the fabric for summer **78**



REMEMBER THESE ADORABLE FACES? *Friday* carried a feature on Matthew Morgan-Jones and his two adoptive children from Sierra Leone in its issue of May 5-11. The response was overwhelming. To help keep All As One, the charity he founded which supports an orphanage in Sierra Leone, Jones is having a charity dinner on June 28.

By **Lorraine Chandler**



All for many

It's not every day that you get two or three marriage proposals by e-mail, but that's what happened to Matthew Morgan-Jones after he was featured in *Friday* (May 5-11).

It's true he's not a bad-looking guy, but which woman can resist a man who not only adopts two children single-handedly, but also sets up a charity for orphans?

Luckily, these weren't the only responses he got. In the week after the article appeared, he received over 120 e-mails offering assistance for the

All As One charity, which supports the orphanage of the same name in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Founded by American Deanna Wallace in 1997, the orphanage houses 70 children in a city that has been ravaged by a 10-year civil war, where there are over 15,000 street children and 300,000 children who have had no education. Many have been pressured into becoming child soldiers or commercial sex workers.

A large number of the children who arrive at the orphanage are

malnourished and some have been abused, but they are able to make a dramatic turnaround in a short time with the help of nutritious food, medical attention and loving care.

Wallace spends half the year at the orphanage and the remainder trying to raise funds in the United States, leaving Steven Amara to manage the orphanage. In Dubai, Morgan-Jones spearheads fund-raising for the orphanage, where his two children – Dauda, 3, and Magda, 2 – were cared for prior to adoption.



DEVADASAN/GULF NEWS

"The article [in *Friday*] raised a lot of awareness about the charity," Morgan-Jones says. "We had a donation drive after that, and managed to accumulate 250 kg of cloth nappies, medicine supplies, educational toys and children's mattresses. At one stage, my living room looked like a regional warehouse for the UN!"

"We've since received photos of the children receiving the first DHL shipment with joy on their faces. People have been so generous and my thanks go out to all who helped."

A number of children in Dubai heard about the charity and decided to do their bit to help, asking their teachers to help coordinate fundraising and collection of donations. Maureen Cullen, a teacher at the American School of Dubai, helped Year 5 hold a collection drive for

folders, pens and other stationery, while Catrin Barber at the Dubai American Academy helped students organise a donation drive, collecting more than 60 boxes.

Year 9 students at the English College raised Dh3,500 for All As One at their school charity day and are thinking of doing more next academic year. Kings School also ran a donation drive recently.

"The article had a very big impact across Dubai," says Morgan-Jones. "We've been contacted by people from all walks of life and nationalities, although we would also love to hear from some UAE nationals and Arabs to broaden our base."

"The response from schools has been brilliant. We can sometimes live in a bubble in Dubai and it's easy to forget about poverty elsewhere. I would like to educate and inform the

Matthew Morgan-Jones' adopted children Dauda (left) and Magda share a special moment. After their story appeared in *Friday*, students from various school were inspired to help the orphanage they came from.

children about Sierra Leone, and many schools are keen to get involved. One Year 9 class raised Dh3,500. If 10 classes could do that, [it] would [cover] the running costs for the orphanage for over a month.

"I think education of the community is so important," he adds. "When children help other children, then that teaches them to be compassionate, and that's a wonderful thing."

A number of people who read the article have considered adopting children from Sierra Leone and eight couples have joined the Dubai Adoption Support Group.

Ongoing need for help

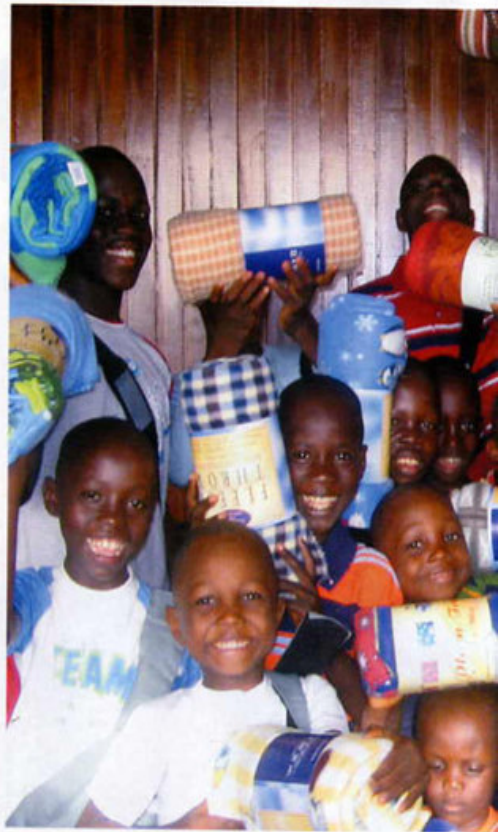
While there has been a tremendous outpouring of support from readers and others, Morgan-Jones is keen to point out that ongoing help is needed and that the orphanage could still face closure if it doesn't receive sufficient funds. And getting the charity

established in the UAE is one of his priorities.

"We're at a critical point now of setting the charity up in the UAE," he says. "To complete the registration process, Dubai Aid and Humanitarian City requires us to have a small office or hot desk. While we have been granted temporary space there for a few months, we are still desperately looking for help from an organisation that either owns that space or whereby we can get a non-objection letter from the landlord to use it, even if it is for a temporary period, like a year."

He says a couple of desks and computers have been donated for the office, so the charity just requires a central administrative point with phone/fax access.

Registration will open a number of doors for the organisation and Morgan-Jones is looking for committed volunteers who can help him run the charity.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Items needed at the All as One orphanage:

Baby items: Crib sheets, cloth diapers, baby formula, diaper safety pins, plastic pants, plastic baby bottles with extra nipples, baby cream, baby clothing and blankets.

Children's items: Clothing for children aged 2-12 (older children's clothes particularly required), children's shoes, socks and underwear. Combs, brushes, headbands, ponytail wraps, toothbrushes and toothpaste, etc.

Household items: Towels, sheets, blankets, plastic sheets, rugs, carpets, window screening material and metal bunk beds.

Educational items: Books, pens, water-based markers, pencils, pencil erasers, colouring books, crayons, blackboards (small and large), blackboard erasers, chalk, children's desks and chairs

Medical supplies: All types of medical supplies and medicines. Remember, in Sierra Leone, a bottle of Calpol can save a baby's life!

Office equipment:

Computers, children's software programs and filing cabinets.

Toys: Jumping ropes, soccer balls and educational toys (no guns, or toys requiring batteries or water).

FUTURE PLANS

Depending on funding, the orphanage is planning to provide the following facilities in the future.

Vocational school: This will offer programmes to help young people become self-reliant and employable. It will include accommodation and will provide training in:

- Fast-track literacy
- Computers
- Agriculture

- Auto mechanics
- Road and building construction (including carpentry and masonry)
- Catering
- Clothing manufacture
- Hairdressing

Medical clinic: This will provide medical care for infants, children and adolescents who otherwise might not have access to adequate health care. Doctors from developed countries will be asked to volunteer their services on a short-term basis.

Children's centre: A new improved children's centre will provide interim care for abandoned, orphaned and destitute children, providing them with food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care.



"I'm going to set up a committee with representatives from different areas of expertise, so I'd love to be contacted by people with experience in marketing, sponsorship, finance, events and administration, among others. We also always need volunteers who can help us organise donation drives."

Morgan-Jones, 34, is running the show almost entirely single-handedly, with the help of occasional volunteers and two house staff. For the organisation to develop the way it needs to, he needs as much help as possible.

"We have accomplished a lot, but there is still so much to do. The centre requires \$8,700 (approx. Dh32,000) just to function each month. This funding ensures the children can have three meals a day, clothing and shelter, education and medical care. Right now, we only have funds to run

Help is on the way ...

People can help the All As One orphanage by making cash donations or by sending food, blankets, clothing and other essential items.



PHOTOS COURTESY, ALL AS ONE

the centre until August or September. There would be nowhere else for the children to go if it closed down."

All As One is running a charity dinner on June 28, to help keep the orphanage open.

Sponsored by Jebel Ali Hotels International, the dinner will take place aboard the five-star Bateaux Dubai, sailing from Dubai Creek. Tickets cost Dh250 and include a gourmet dinner and entertainment.

The charity also intends to set up a sponsorship programme in which people sponsor a child by making a donation every month.

How fund-raising has helped the orphanage

The last charity dinner raised \$30,000

Happy days ...

Children at the All As One centre in Freetown are overjoyed to receive donations from the UAE.

(about Dh110,340), enabling conditions at the orphanage to improve substantially. The money raised helped fix a long-standing problem with its water tank and the orphanage was able to purchase a larger additional tank that can store water for up to three days, a necessity in a city where running water is never guaranteed. The children are now able to wash twice a day, reducing the amount of skin conditions and improving their well-being.

The orphanage has also been able to rid itself of an infestation of rats, using cats and preventive measures. An extra improvement is the creation of an additional outdoor kitchen, which gives the cooks more room to work, as well as making it safer.

It has also been able to take in five more babies in a time of critical need. With the rainy season in full swing, All As One has been asked to take in a number of babies and children, but is not yet able to commit to this, as it must first secure additional funding.

The recent donation drive saw



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ISSUES

Packed and bound for Freetown ... Matthew Morgan-Jones, Magda and Dauda with some of the donations earmarked for the All As One centre.



DEVADASAN/GULF NEWS

a number of vital items making their way to the orphanage, thanks to the sponsorship of DHL.

"I got in contact with DHL when my children were still in Sierra Leone waiting for the adoption process to go through," Morgan-Jones says. "I had been trying to send a first birthday present to Magda but it never arrived. DHL managed to deliver it door-to-door for me and they've been very supportive since then. Paul Dowling, of DHL, is in fact going to volunteer for the charity as our head of logistics.

"We're now trying to get a company to sponsor the shipping costs of sending a container of goods as we will need to send larger items, such as cots and school chairs, which can't be sent by air. We've already had storage space donated by the Wels company in Ras Al Khor.

"Once we get a shipping company or sponsor aboard, we can do a specific donation drive to help furnish the bedrooms, schoolrooms and nursery/toddler room."

Looking to the future

"There is so much to do that I wish I could concentrate purely on the charity for two years," says Morgan-Jones.

Instead, he has to develop his newly-created training company, Retail People Consultancy, as well as look after his toddlers. Another son, David, is on the way, pending Sierra Leone's resumption of adoption.

Morgan-Jones wistfully says he would like to give up his job to focus on developing All As One. He talks about giving up his house in The

Springs to live in Ajman or Umm Al Quwain and downgrading his car to cut costs.

"The need to maintain funding for the centre is ongoing," he says. "But we have a long-term goal of building a special compound that would house a larger orphanage, medical centre, school and training centre."

"If we had a pot of money, we could start talking to government agencies or buy land that we could build on. I'm really excited about this project, because for the first time, I believe it's going to happen. Barbara Castek at the Dubai Aid and Humanitarian City has been such a great support, while the charity is also touching people's hearts. The great thing about it all is that it is so tangible."

Four volunteers are going to the Sierra Leone orphanage this summer, including Dubai nursery school teacher, Suzanne Nicholls.

"In the future, we're hoping to expand an intern programme there," says Morgan-Jones. "As part of the development, we'd like to build guest quarters so that volunteers can go and help with painting or assist with the children.

"While it's great to help children out in the orphanage, we really want to take a proactive approach there. Most young people and teenagers have not had any education, so we want to teach them trades and skills to help them stand on their own two feet."

At first, you might not be able to fathom Morgan-Jones's passionate dedication to the cause, but if you



COURTESY: ALL AS ONE

Look who's smiling now ... Eric, one of the orphans who benefited from the All As One charity drive in Dubai.

hear some of the tragic stories of abuse and malnutrition, then discover how only a short time in the orphanage changes the children for the better, you too may feel an urge to reach out and help. **I**

To help All As One with donations, cash or as a volunteer, e-mail Morgan-Jones at matthew@allasone.org. To make a booking for the charity dinner, phone 04 399 4994.