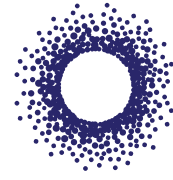


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Newsletter



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**How a Canadian Couple
Helps Empower Communities
in East Africa**

The Mia'Sarka Fund at Myriad Canada Spearheads Impactful Local Projects

Melvin Cohen and Carol Picart have a long history of giving, as individuals and as a married couple. Over the past three decades they have donated to dozens of causes, becoming active supporters of charities in Canada and Israel as well as community projects in Carol's birth country, Jamaica.

Their engagement took a new turn during a vacation in Uganda in 2006, their first trip to Africa. "It was wonderful and amazing," says Carol. "But then I saw the needs of individuals as we passed by." As the couple became more familiar with the challenges faced by the communities they encountered, they were compelled to take action.

In 2023 they decided to set up the Mia'Sarka Fund at Myriad Canada, maximizing their giving power and taking their philanthropic ambitions to the next level.



Uganda: Knowledge is Power

When Melvin and Carol first arrived in Uganda, they were welcomed by tour guide Andrew Ssentongo, who subsequently became a critical partner in their projects in Africa, coordinating activities with beneficiary organizations and supervising purchase and distribution of supplies. Andrew continues to play a key role by providing administrative assistance to the Fund's projects.

During a visit to the Kasubi Royal Tombs, Andrew connected them with tour guide Nicholas Ssewanyana, an extraordinarily bright young man whose grandmother had once served one of the kings buried at the tombs. After several years of interaction with Nicholas, Melvin and Carol decided to sponsor his university studies. It would be neither the first nor the last time that the couple helped pay for someone to go to school. They are fierce believers in empowering individuals through education: "If you give people education, you give them knowledge, power and independence," says Carol.

A New School for a Remote Community



The couple's support for Nicholas came full circle when he decided to fulfill his late grandfather's lifelong wish to build a school in his ancestral village of Malube – Nalubugo in Central Uganda. The remote community was located far from the closest school, making it difficult for local children to attend. "My ambition was to see everyone going to school," says Nicholas. By 2019 he had gathered the resources to build an affordable school for local children, named after his grandfather Dominic.

Today, Dominic Elementary School educates 155 primary school pupils. Since 2023, Melvin and Carol's Mia'Sarka Fund at Myriad Canada has supported the school with infrastructural improvements, helping to build more classrooms, a toilet bloc, a well and filtration system, water tanks and a vegetable garden to supplement the children's meals.

"Our school is one of its kind," says Nicholas, citing its idyllic setting as well as the quality of education, facilities and materials which put it on par with Kampala schools. "I want to make this school, this community great. I cannot work alone, I need to continue working with organizations like Myriad Canada supported by Melvin and Carol. We need to be guided also. Because they say if you want to be successful you can't walk alone, you must move with friends."

Serving Low-income Families

Dominic Elementary School is one of several schools and orphanages the couple has supported in Uganda. During one of their many trips to the country, they also came into contact with the KCCS Model School. This primary school was founded in 2020 in the town of Nansana in Central Uganda. Many local families are not able to afford the schools in the area, so KCCS was founded to fill the gap in education services for low-income children. More than 200 children currently attend the school, receiving two meals a day there on school days, because as Head Teacher Leticia Kagaba and Carol both emphasize, "You can't learn on an empty stomach."

While the new school was making great leaps in meeting local educational needs, its building was dilapidated and lacking basic facilities. When Carol visited the school, Leticia recounts, "She got to know the challenges we had and promised to stand with us." The Mia'Sarka Fund at Myriad Canada has supported the renovation of walls and floors as well as the construction of water tanks, toilets and a main hall for dining and gathering. "We are very pleased, we lack words to express how happy we are," says Leticia.

"This has helped me a great deal to meet my objectives. Now my work has been made easy, we can enroll more children in the school because everything is better."



Kenya: Essential Health Services

Carol and Melvin's time in Uganda sparked further travels in Africa and fueled their determination to respond to needs wherever they encounter them. Carol has a deep interest in medicine and healthcare, leading her to collaborate with organizations providing medical services to communities in need. Her volunteer work brought her to the small community of Emurototo, located on the escarpment that overlooks the Masai Mara Conservation Area, where lions and elephants roam free. On this open grassland dotted with acacia trees, the local Maasai community mainly lives off cattle herding and subsistence farming. During her conversations with community members and doctors, Carol learned that the community lacked its own healthcare facility, meaning that community members were forced to travel over 25 kilometers for health services, often on foot. "There was no clinic, the women were underneath trees until they were ready to have a baby," Carol recounts. "Those women are vulnerable, as is the whole community."

A Community Clinic to Facilitate Access to Healthcare

Through mutual contacts, Carol was connected with Wendy Wood, who heads Africa Foundation (USA), a partner organization to Africa Foundation based in South Africa that was founded to support impoverished communities bordering wildlife conservation areas. After discussing the need for a health facility in the Emurototo community, the Africa Foundation decided to initiate this project. It kicked off with a scoping and stakeholder consultation process to verify the needs of the community and how best to meet them, led by a program officer from the area. "We always want to do a project that is of the greatest need to the community," Wendy explains. "Carol and Melvin were really visionary in identifying the need for a clinic in this region."

Carol and Melvin's enthusiasm helped create more visibility for the project, attracting another donor to support funding the construction of a clinic, which the Kenyan government agreed to run and staff. During the first phase of the project, Carol and Melvin funded the construction of accommodations for doctors and nurses. Providing lodging for medical staff is crucial to keeping them on board over the long term, as well as ensuring 24/7 emergency response capacity.



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Carol was able to visit the completed clinic in 2023, and the Mia'Sarka Fund at Myriad Canada will fund a new maternity wing which will include four maternity wards, a labor ward, a delivery room, a nurse's station, laundry room, toilets and showers. The new facilities will allow women to deliver their babies at the clinic and receive postnatal care. The Mia'Sarka Fund is also funding a fence that will keep elephants and lions from entering the grounds and allow for a food garden to be established. "We have a long history of working with this community, and we are thrilled to see this kind of facility there," says Wendy. "It has completely changed the face of healthcare in that region."

What unites all of these projects is the strong conviction that providing people with essential needs is often enough to transform their lives. Whether it's by providing education, food or healthcare, "if you give individuals the basic things that they need, then they can elevate themselves and their families," says Carol. Thanks to the Mia'Sarka Fund at Myriad Canada, these engaged contributors look forward to supporting more communities in need.

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