

Pajama Party

November, 19th 2012

<http://www.pajamapartybooks.com/2012/11/an-interview-with-shoe4africa.html>

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An Interview with Shoe4Africa

Kato, the main character in Alma Fullerton and Karen Patkau's new picture book *A Good Trade*, is overwhelmed with gratitude when he receives a pair of shoes. Did you ever wonder why? What makes a pair of shoes so exciting? To answer that question, we're interviewing representatives from organizations that have devoted themselves to shoes, kids, and changing lives. Today our featured organization is Shoe4Africa.

What inspired Shoe4Africa to start bringing shoes to kids in need?

Seeing that something simple, and in large part unwanted/discarded, in my home could make a difference in someone's life.

Where do your shoes come from?

You & I. All people, every place.

Where do they go?

It used to be all over; Sri Lanka for Tamal Tigers, Morocco, the Ukraine and mainly East Africa. Today I hone in more and more just on East Africa. However I also am involved with charities elsewhere in the world with concentration on similar things hence the other year I delivered 1,000 pairs of new running shoes to some kids in my neighborhood, Harlem NYC.

Some people worry that an influx of donated shoes can disrupt local businesses and economies. Do you have any measures in place to protect or encourage sustainable economies in the places you work?

Yes, and the day you can buy a running shoe made in East Africa I'll stop importing and start fund raising to support sales. The truth of the matter is running shoes are a rare commodity in the places I work. The last few towns I have done shoe drops will probably never ever have a "place/local business" from where to be able to get running shoes. I work in places where food and water are hard to get, let's not even think about 'luxuries' like running shoes.

Do you have a favorite story or experience from your work with Shoe4Africa that you would like to share?

So, so many—but I think people often think that charity has to be big to be meaningful. Two quick examples; I started by giving one pair of shoes away; that was it. Secondly a grandmother won a healthwalk we organized. When she stood up on stage she hoisted up a pair of running shoes she won (we don't just hand out shoes, you have to earn them by completing a walk/run). Her granddaughter was in the audience cheering. The

granddaughter gets inspired to start running, and within one year she's earning money to support her family through running.



Kenyan school girls run for peace at a Shoe4Africa event

What is your organization's vision for the future?

Not a clue. Right now it is building the first public children's hospital in East Africa. That 'vision' is so big I can't see over the wall to see what the future will bring.

Toby Tanser is the founder and "Chief Beggar" of Shoe4Africa, which has been working for healthcare and education in Africa since 1995.

To learn more about Shoe4Africa, visit their website at www.shoe4africa.org.

To learn more about *A Good Trade*, visit [the Pajama Press website](http://thePajamaPress.com).

