



How Can a Water Bottling Plant Reach Orphans?

By Bethany DuVal

“Why don’t you have HIV?”

“Why do we have HIV if we haven’t had sex?”

“Why don’t we see our parents on holidays?”

These aren’t questions a typical engineer deals with during his work. But for Brett Richstone, nothing was typical about his time as a mid-term TEAM missionary and water bottling plant manager.

He started each day with maintenance, applying for licenses or filling orders for fresh spring water. But by the afternoon, he was leading a Bible study, buying groceries for an entire village and having heart-to-heart conversations with children affected by HIV and AIDS.

It all began when Brett and his wife, Kara, started praying about moving overseas.

A water bottling factory is giving jobs to orphaned teens — and funding their Christ-centered care until they reach adulthood.



An engineer and a marketer, respectively, they thought God would give them professional jobs abroad. But as they prayed, Kara kept thinking of Rehoboth Children’s Village in South Africa.

She had visited it on a short-term mission trip and was struck by the hope she saw there.

“Their whole goal is to give [HIV-affected children] a future, ... to give them a proper education, to let them be leaders and thought-changers in society,” Kara said.

Four years later, she decided to look up Rehoboth and was stunned at what she saw: They were opening a water bottling plant to help the ministry support itself. They needed an engineer to run the plant and a marketer to sell its product.

They needed Brett and Kara.

A Spirit of Abandonment

When the Richstones went to South Africa, they stepped into the biggest HIV epidemic in the world, with just over 2 million

children orphaned by the virus. Others aren’t orphaned, but simply abandoned or given up because their parents can’t care for them.

Rehoboth’s goal is to give these kids a stable upbringing through family-style homes, personalized health and education plans and spiritual guidance.

“Building relationships is one of the hardest things with our kids because they really have trouble with attachment. ... They have that spirit of abandonment,” Kara said in an interview on the field.

She saw this firsthand when she started a Bible study with the teenage girls.

For months, she got nothing but blank stares during discussion times. And when the girls did start opening up, Kara could see they were testing her.

“News in the village travels fast, so they would tell me things and see if they heard about it from someone else later. ... I needed to prove myself to them, essentially, that I was trustworthy,” Kara said.



Each day, the Richstones split their time between water plant duties and more relational activities that built up that trust, such as Bible studies, one-on-one counseling, homework help and organized sports.

So many people have come in and out of the children's lives that they learn to keep relationships on a surface level. But with persistent friendship-building, Kara and Brett saw walls come down.

Some of the deepest moments for Brett came simply while driving boys to running club or doctor appointments.

That's when the boys felt safe to ask about HIV or why they never see their families.

"They're hard questions I don't have good answers to most of the time," Brett said, "but it does make me glad I'm here, that I can at least help them talk through it. ... Tell them that God loves them and I love them."

As the kids opened up and matured, Brett and Kara watched the water bottling plant become a tool that helped them grow even more.

In addition to working at the water bottling plant, Kara and Brett Richstone (with son, Cole, on left) have built relationships with kids through Bible studies and other activities.

A Hopeful Future

The water bottling plant is not just about money.

In South Africa's economy, with a 27 percent unemployment rate, finding a job can be incredibly difficult for aged-out orphans. But if teenagers can work at the plant, they'll enter adulthood with a resume.

"If they want to leave Rehoboth and go somewhere else to find a job, they can use that as a reference," Brett said. "And that holds a lot of value in this economy."

The factory's first big order was for a Christmas market, so Brett decided to ask the teenage boys from his Bible study to help.

The boys started out hastily, trying to set records for how fast they could go. But as Brett taught them about quality control, the boys took ownership of the project.

"It was cool just to see the excitement grow, ... like, 'This is our business, and we're gonna make this much money if we sell this many bottles,'" Brett said.

Each night, when Brett came back from the market, the boys would ask him about their profits.

"The best part of the experience was when the boys heard that over 900 bottles of water had been sold," Brett said. "The joy they expressed knowing they had produced something others wanted to buy ... was so exciting."

Through the plant, Brett and Kara hope many more orphans will experience that empowerment and see they have a Father who never leaves and always provides. 📖

Working at the water bottling plant is a confidence builder for kids who will soon step into adulthood with few safety nets to catch them.

