

# THE SCOTSMAN

## Edinburgh restaurateur feeding 600 orphans in Ethiopia



**Virginie Brouard is sponsoring orphans in Ethiopia.**

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**As a successful restaurateur, in charge of two profitable Edinburgh businesses, Virginie Brouard knew she wanted to do more to give back.**

And after discovering that money she donated to a Vietnamese charity had been spent on entertainment rather than much-needed school supplies, the entrepreneur decided to explore how she could better support some of the world's poorest children.

Now nearly six years later, Brouard, who owns La P'tite Folie restaurant and Le Di-Vin wine bar in Edinburgh, is personally sponsoring 600 orphans in Ethiopia in Africa, ensuring they have at least one full meal a day.

In 2010, Brouard travelled to Vietnam in East Asia to see what impact money she had donated was making. "The trip was very interesting but I didn't like the way our money was used", the 45-year-old explained.

“We had to raise something like £4,000 and when I asked what they bought with our money, they said they had bought a karaoke machine. I was not pleased at all because the school needed toilets, there was no water or books on the shelves. I thought, if I have the money to give away, I want to see bigger improvements.”

Undeterred, she set her sights elsewhere and after some investigation, decided on Ethiopia. She travelled to Africa to see first hand the work of the Daughters of Charity and where her money would be going.

“They showed me what they’re doing. They work with street children, run women’s projects, a clinic and kindergarten.” Following her visit, she decided to become the sponsor for a feeding programme for 600 orphans, providing them with one meal a day. “Since 2010 I have been giving around £2,000 or £3,000 every few months which I can do thanks to the business. When I go over there they show me what they’ve bought with my money. We also make orders, buy the food, vitamins and medicine. Everything is extortionate for them.”

Brouard, who lives in Dalkeith, has raised around £30,000 and will be sending more before her latest trip at the end of February to help with the current famine.

According to the UN, Ethiopia is experiencing its worst drought in 30 years. It has been reported that in some areas, the poorest and most vulnerable infants are dying at a rate of two per day.

“I got news last week that children and elderly people have been dying so I’m going over for three weeks”, she explains. Virginie also plans to spend time at the refugee camp which is home to over 250,000 South Sudanese refugees.

In 2011, the then mother-of-two and her husband Ghislain adopted Ethiopian orphan Genat, after she had been abandoned by her mother at just three-weeks old.

Following a long and complicated adoption process, Genat was able to come home to Scotland in 2012 to live with her new parents and brothers Milan, 20 and Pierre, 14. “I feel like I’m attached to there for life now”, she said. “Genat knows where she’s from and she knows she comes from Africa but when she’s old enough she’ll come back with me to learn all about it.

The bulk of the money she donates comes directly from her businesses - although she would like to start her own charity.

“You need to see for yourself” Brouard says of others who might want to travel abroad to give back. “There’s nothing better than to just go see. There is always a need for volunteers. For example, the refugee crisis is very bad but the conditions, people are crossing the sea and risking their lives - it’s not for nothing. You need to go and see.”