

*Real life inspiration*

# "I DITCHED CORPORATE FOR CHARITY"

*Lucy Bruce went from high-flying advertising exec to founder of her own NGO overnight. She tells Louisa Wilkins her story.*

**T**hree years ago, Lucy Bruce, now 32, was working as the director of an advertising company, which she had co-founded. Eighteen months later, she was a married, stay-at-home mother battling against Indian bureaucracy to launch a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

**Before...** "I was working in Abu Dhabi as a primary teacher and volunteering at a special needs centre in the afternoons. I had a yearning to set up my own company. In early 2003, I met my current business partner Gaurav Sinha and later that year we set up our own advertising agency. In 2007 Gaurav and I got married in Udaipur, India."

**It all changed when...** "In 2006, Gaurav and I heard about a school in India for blind children from poor families. We started sending donations and encouraged friends to donate. After a while, we felt we couldn't trust where the money was going - I felt awful that I had taken money from friends and couldn't account for it.

"We started thinking about setting up our own project - a family-style orphanage for just six children. But, understandably, the Indian government said: 'We

prove that you are a certified functioning NGO first'.

"My husband's family is from Delhi, so we started looking at launching the project there. I could not be on the board of trustees as I'm not an Indian national. My mother-in-law and brother-in-law stepped in, which was great of them. I was pregnant at the time, so my husband ended up flying back and forth to organise the paperwork, while I stayed in Dubai and worked on fundraising."

**As a result...** "Eight months ago we opened Harmony House, near Delhi. We are a day shelter, offering clothing, food and education to 75 slum children. The facilities are comfortable, and clean, but basic. I had difficulty being realistic about our needs at first - I was looking at air

conditioning, water purifiers and pretty wall murals, but our manager and my husband kept saying to me, 'We are not trying to build a Dubai school - we just want to get them off the streets and open their eyes to their world'.

"Our doors open at 8.30am and close at 6pm. We have



children can drop off their baby siblings. We also have an activity room for music, dancing, art and yoga, shower facilities, three cooked meals a day and a doctor who comes once every two weeks.

"All the teaching staff are qualified locals and we partly follow the British education programme - teaching in English in the mornings and in Hindi in the afternoons. Also, we have employed some children's mothers as assistants and try to fund older children's college education

Although, it was difficult at times convincing some people that our intentions were honest as some supposed 'NGOs' have been used to launder money. I have been busy raising funds through donations, flea markets, and recently a charity auction. We have volunteers from India, the UK and Dubai going over to run workshops for children and parents."

**Moving on...** "We are putting our accounts online, so people can see exactly where our money goes - I feel very strongly about this - and we are planning to open a second Harmony House in Delhi.

"On a personal level, it has made me feel fulfilled and very appreciative. Before I felt like I was stumbling through life, but now I feel like I am doing exactly what I should be doing. And it is a great feeling." ■

and vocational training, too.

"It costs us about Dh180 per month per child, which covers everything from food to villa rental, bills and staff."

**Since then...** "I have had my second child and Harmony House is going well. The