

**By Marga Cretton, April 2018**

Ambassador for International Relations at "César Ritz" Colleges Switzerland for 28 years.

## **River of Hope** - a success story and a lesson in humanity.

During my 28 years with César Ritz Colleges I have written hundreds of success stories of our alumni: for the Alphorn, for the Connection and for many publications which reflected their success. This story is different and this is why I would like to share it with my alumni friends and others who are in contact with me. It is my personal "homage" to Claudia Doron-Zahner who came in April to her "old School" to talk about her career in the hospitality industry and to inform what one can realize with passion and perseverance, starting with nothing but an idea. Claudia's idea is **to help others to help themselves**.

Claudia was one of our first Swiss students and looks back to a successful career in 5 star Hotels. Today she is self-employed as Relocation Consultant and certified Coach and Trainer. Together with her husband Jake and her father, she registered "River of Hope" as a non-profit organization in 2010. She was motivated and inspired by the work of her father in law, Dr. Nathaniel Doron, a former UN Official and Diplomat. There was no money, no project, but the very strong wish to assist needy and willing communities and other target groups to help themselves and others to improve their standard of living for future generations. Poverty can be found everywhere, but how can you find people to trust. Having no money seemed for Claudia the best way to start.

Through an unforeseen contact she found partners for her first project. A football coach in Kinshasa had for many years a project under his mattress and was looking for some support from Europe. His dream was to get street-children off the street by attracting them through the fascination of football. A few month later, they "kicked-off" this first project in Congo without a cent but two suitcases filled with 46 kg football-material.

In December 2012 they purchased 4 ha of land in Selo, outside Kinshasa, where in Spring 2013 they started the construction of the center "Tala Mosika", which means: look beyond. All bricks were man-made and dried in the sun. One building after the other was constructed and in fall 2015 the 7<sup>th</sup> house plus two converted containers were inaugurated. Today "Tala Mosika" is a State recognized school, offering primary and secondary education to 330 children, as well as a Football-School and Women Programs, incl. an illiterate Program, etc. So far it offers boarding facilities to 20 children. They created a health insurance for all children and staff, with the aim to include the people of the villages around.

The biggest challenges are the huge efforts, repetition, and patience to work with the local population, establish partnerships, and plan to create jobs through a micro-economical approach. They help them to get them out of the cycle of poverty, malnutrition and poor sanitation. Starting to understand that with a change of mind-set they can influence their own future. A vital part of this development is the education of their children. Since Tala Mosika recently received state recognition, the government will hopefully soon give them financial support for the teachers' salaries. Families struggle to survive on a daily basis, so gathering the necessary funds to afford an education and future perspectives for their children is a daunting task. The main goal is to ensure that all their children can attend school, while maintaining the parents' responsibility for paying tuition fees with different programs. Claudia also created a coaching team to empower the local team and enable them to take responsibilities for the center as basis for a sustainable project.

She managed to make contacts for a renewable energy project for the center (the nearest outlet is 17km away) to establish a training program for electricians in collaboration with the school EPROBA Kinshasa, which has been supported by Switzerland in the last 30 years. River of Hope works in collaboration with the Technical University of Buchs SG, and they have already secured 50% of the financing by Repic, a joint initiative of the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO. She has many more projects in the pipeline and waits for partners who believe in this kind of project.

But for the moment, Claudia is still very active to find funding for Tala Mosika as River of Hope wants this project to become an independent unit without depending too much on authorities for support.

They want to build two more classrooms, find partners for her solar project and financial support for the educational center to avoid that children whose parents cannot pay the schoolfees are rejected. 100 \$ cover school fees, uniform, books and the health insurance for one child over a year.

Should you be inspired to support Claudia's dedication and restless efforts, please feel welcome to help via:

Raiffeisenbank Werdenberg Genossenschaft,  
River of Hope (RoH),  
Bank Nr. 81251 / Swift: RAIFCH22  
IBAN: CH68 8125 1000 0046 9403 4  
Konto: 90-862-2

[www.ariverofhope.org](http://www.ariverofhope.org)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eNH2E\\_8XWk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eNH2E_8XWk)

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