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Summer 2022

WORKING  
TOWARD  
A WORLD  
WHERE NO  
CHILD IS  
ALONE





# IZA CORRELL: WORKING TOWARD A WORLD WHERE NO CHILD IS ALONE

By Hal Morris and Sally Scherer

Iza Correll does not hesitate to tell you she has always had big dreams and an empathetic heart.

She attributes her vision and compassion to a calling she has always felt and to an upbringing in which her mother made sure she and her siblings had a global perspective on life.

Add to that a strong work ethic – her father is a “motivated” businessman, she said — and it likely won’t surprise you that Correll, a UK 2018 graduate with a master’s in physician assistant studies from the College of Health Sciences, runs a hospital in Kenya where the most vulnerable children are cared for in transformative ways.

The journey from her studies at UK to her work in Migori, Kenya, a seven-hour drive from the capital of Nairobi, was filled with dreams and hard work and determination and one underlying goal: Correll wants to end suffering, specifically the suffering of abandoned orphaned children in the world.

“There’s nothing cute about orphanages,” said the Somerset, Kentucky, native referring to books and Broadway shows that fictionalize the residential institutions. “No one should have to grow up without a family.”



Iza Correll holding her youngest daughter Winter Rose who she first connected with when the child was a patient at OVI Healthcare.

Photos by Caleb Kingwara OVI Healthcare

Her UK education was a steppingstone to this goal. She was an undergraduate at Western Kentucky University Mahurin Honors College when she began dreaming of a career in medicine serving a vulnerable population.

One day she sat down at a computer.

“I literally typed in medical opportunities in Africa, and I stumbled upon a program that was run by some Kenyans over here,” says Correll, 30. “I was 20 years old. I just got on a plane and I went. I was an undergraduate at the time. And then, going there is really what inspired me to go the physician assistant path. And I was just so eager.”

Her eagerness grew and by the time she was working on her master’s, she was taking 20 hours a semester, working at a lot of jobs

(so she could afford to travel and pay for school, she said), and dreaming some more.

“I didn’t sleep,” she said. “I just worked and dreamed.”

While volunteering in Kenya she encountered a large number of abandoned children who had no access to healthcare. She dreamed of finding a way to care for them and others like them throughout the world. She dreamed of opening a hospital.

“My passion is just truly transforming the lives, the health and the happiness, the security of these kids. Not just curing the disease, but making sure when they go out of here, they have the best future they can possibly have,” she explained.

“As soon as I passed my boards, I just came over. This was kind of my home away from home,” she said of Kenya.





**Above:** The OVI Healthcare Children's Hospital in Migori, Kenya. **Left:** An OVI nurse providing care to a child in the acute care center at OVI Healthcare.

For Correll, who is a dually licensed U.S. physician assistant and Kenyan Clinical Officer, her biggest dream was raising a half million dollars to get the hospital opened.

"I needed 1,000 people to give me \$500," she said. "I just had a huge passion for it. I had all the energy in the world. When I first came here, I had an idea in my head of like, what the hospital would look like. And I drew it out on paper. That became the tangible goal. A couple of years later, I saw the building, the exact building that I had drawn. I thought, 'Oh my gosh, that's my building. That's the building I drew.' I definitely thought it was going to be a lot more years in the future," she says. "But because it was just so obvious — I drew this and it's manifested

— I thought now is the time. I just went home and wrote around 1,000 letters to start fundraising."

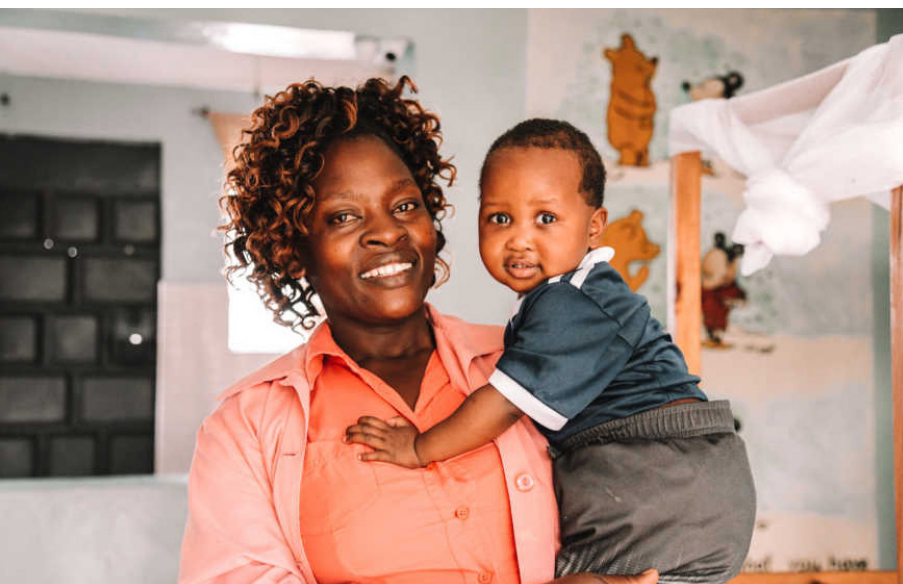
It wasn't easy. At first, no one seemed to care about the young woman with the dream of building a hospital in Africa, she said. Little by little the money came in. And then an anonymous donor made a sizable donation. She still doesn't know who that person is, she said.

Not many Kenyan agencies were willing to work with her at the beginning, but she persisted and met people in their homes and shared her dream. She credits the people of Migori with helping make her dream come true.

Twin sisters after receiving care at the OVI Healthcare critical care unit.







**Top:** OVI medical team carrying supplies to a remote medical outreach camp. **Middle:** Long-term care residents relaxing in the Paradise Falls unit inspired by the Disney Pixar movie "Up." **Bottom:** OVI caregiver holding a patient in the hospital nursery.

By December 2017, she opened a 60-bed hospital for children up to age 18 and her dream of transforming the health, happiness and security of vulnerable children became a reality. The non-profit hospital, which is locally staffed, provides free care.

She named her business OVI Healthcare after her late nephew Ovidio (known as Ovi) who died when he was 4. The Guatemalan orphan was in the process of being adopted by Correll's sister when he died.

"It's the legacy of no matter how long a child has to live, no matter what the prognosis is, we're treating that child like they're our own child and just fighting," she says. Care focuses not just on wellness, but on stabilizing children and then reintegrating them with their families when possible.

In addition to the hospital, OVI conducts remote medical camps around Kenya each week where up to 500 children can get treated at a time.

"Our mission is a world where no child is alone. We do treatment and 100% free medical care. Everything from life-saving care, ICU, neonatal intensive care to outpatient care," says Correll, who lives at the hospital with her two adopted daughters Lily and Winter. "We have like a holistic approach. We believe that education and play and all of these things have so much of an impact on the mindset of the children and bringing them out of the hospital in a place where they can thrive."

She had to understand why abandonment happens and then find ways to offer support that is needed. That means that a father may need stability and employment. Counseling and education play an important part in enabling parents to be able to raise their children with love and care.

In addition to providing care and compassion, she had to learn how to run a business, something she didn't learn in PA school.

"I think being an employee helps you be a good employer," she said, referring to the years of working in high school and college.

And she read a lot, from Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" to "Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business" by Gino Wickman and "E-Myth Mastery: The Seven Essential Disciplines for Building a World-Class Company," by Michael E. Gerber. And she studied Disney.

"I love Disney's customer service," she explained. "It's a magical time when you're at Disney. I wanted to infuse that feeling by being intentional about it."



All that reading encouraged her to empower her employees. The hospital's 50–60 employees — who all live locally — work in their “zone genius,” an area where skills, traits and experiences come together. She discovers these zones by asking potential employees what three things they'd do for no money, what they're passionate about. After she learns that, she said, she works to help them make their dreams come true.

It hasn't been easy, she said. And she found she had to be coachable to be a good leader. Rather than hire people to train the Migori workers, she has empowered the workers and watched them grow. She's teaching them how to fish, she said, citing the adage about empowering someone by teaching them to fish rather than giving them a fish.

For example, the person she originally hired as a hospital receptionist is now a social worker who has moved on to own a business. And an employee who wanted to learn how to use a professional camera to tell the stories of the hospital on its website is now managing the organization's social media.

“It was hard at first to buy a \$3,500 camera and send him off with it, but he learned how to use the camera and it's really amazing to see him put our stories together.

“The hospital is not a charity project. We offer people a job, a reputable job. It's amazing to see the impact it has had. I love to see our staff move on and start their own service,” she said.

Much of Correll's time is spent in an administrative role. She operates like a hospital CEO, she has said, concentrating on fund raising and networking.

Correll's hard work has been recognized around the world.

In October 2020, Correll became the youngest recipient of the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award for Global Citizenship. In 2021, she received the Champion in Global Humanitarian Service Award at the Prodigy Bureau Global Gala in Dubai. Earlier this year Correll was inducted into the University of Kentucky College of Health Sciences Hall of Fame.

“The people in Dubai, those people have the power and money to make a difference. The Ali Award, to be the youngest person to win that, was life changing. Mrs. Ali told me I reminded her a lot of her husband. That meant even more to me than the award itself. So every award has given me a new platform and connections,” she says.


Upon being selected for induction into the UK College of Health Sciences Hall of Fame she thanked her college advisor, Dr. Somu Chatterjee who she said always believed in her.

Chatterjee, senior clinical coordinator for the PA clinical experiences, says Correll's passion stood out during her interview to get into the program.

“We saw in her someone who really cared about people and really wanted to go out of their way to help others. And not only talked about it, but actually went through with it. She demonstrated a lot of compassion and honesty,” he says. “The program was soundly behind her and wanted her to be successful and be able to carry out her mission, which is true to our program's mission of reaching out to rural counties and serving the underserved.

“It was a good fit for her to be in the program and good for us to have her in the program. We really complemented each other.”

While in the United States to accept her UK honor in February, Correll shared her story with UK students and focused on speaking about OVI Healthcare.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a long, flowing orange dress, stands in profile, looking back over her shoulder. She is positioned in front of a traditional structure with a thatched roof made of dried grass or straw. The scene is set outdoors, with wooden poles and a bench visible in the background. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. A speech bubble graphic is overlaid on the image, containing the text 'I'M A DREAMER. I THINK YOU SHOULD TAKE YOUR DREAMS AND MAKE THEM GOALS.'

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Iza Correll always felt a calling to healthcare and children. She found her purpose and her home at OVI Healthcare.

Photo by Anastasiya Nasyrova

“Every award comes with new platforms, new opportunities to speak and share,” she says. “People want to support charities they trust. So, every award shows the confidence they have in us.”

Also, she shared her next dream: to expand her work to Bangladesh. She has found a building. Now she's raising funds and looking for corporate sponsorships.

“I'm a dreamer. I think you should take your dreams and make them goals. For me, I love what I'm doing. My goal is to use my voice to get on stages to inspire people with what's possible. I hate child suffering, seeing children become orphans. I see a lot of tragic things. But you take those things, and they motivate you,” she says.

“It warms my heart to see children overcoming deadly diseases and actual anguish. When you get to see those miracles. I just can't tell you what that is like. People think it's such a sad and scary thing to do what I do, but on the other side of that vulnerability is like the deepest joy in the world. ■