

People@KPMG

## Doing What Counts

**Kat Decelles in Tanzania**

8:30 AM ET, April 22, 2010

*Not everything that counts can be counted. – Einstein*

When it comes to charity, Boston Audit Senior Associate **Kat Decelles** doesn't believe in halfway measures – unless you mean traveling halfway around the world to spend a year volunteering at an African orphanage.

In February 2009, Decelles took a year-long leave of absence from KPMG to help put a Tanzanian orphanage for boys on solid financial footing. Four years earlier, during her junior year of college, Decelles had made her first trip to the orphanage at the request of her seventh-grade teacher and orphanage co-founder, Jim Arden.

"I was always acutely aware that people in most parts of the world do not enjoy our standard of living," she says. "I wanted to know what that other life was like."

After developing an almost-instant affection for "this beautiful, peaceful country, its wonderful people and warm weather," Decelles returned to the orphanage in 2006 and 2007 to help with various projects.

Her December 2008 visit, however, was different. This time, she realized she couldn't walk away.

"With donations falling off precipitously, the orphanage was forced to cut operating expenses to ensure enough funds would be available to pay the boys' tuition at a nearby school for the next eight to 12 years," Decelles explains. "At the same time, we wanted to institute a better accounting system to improve our eligibility for grants. That sounds easy enough until you've tried to get a receipt for anything in Tanzania! Since I'm an accountant and had enough savings to take a year off without pay, I realized I was probably the only person who could step in, and now was the time to do it."

### On a Mission

While in Tanzania, Decelles spent most of her time implementing and overseeing a new accounting and reporting system to provide timely and accurate information and control expenditures. Under her direction, the orphanage, which houses 11 boys ages 6 through 13, was able to keep expenses low and came in exactly on budget.

"Since we were under budget through October, I got permission to use the surplus for a visit to Arusha National Park," she says. "The boys couldn't stop talking about the animals they had seen and how much fun they had. Now they want to see Serengeti National Park."

Decelles also found time to have fun, playing soccer with the boys in the afternoons, teaching and helping with homework, doing some of the cooking, and taking field trips to local parks. Still, adapting to life at a more leisurely pace takes time. "Eventually you learn: 'There's no hurry in Africa,'" she says.

### Out of Africa

This year, Decelles was named to the board of the Jim Arden Foundation, which is the sole supporter of the orphanage. Her responsibilities include daily communications with the Tanzanian manager.

"I always send my best wishes to the boys," she says, "and I remind them I'll be visiting them again next year – and every year."

The Arden Foundation is supported solely from individual contributions. To learn more about the orphanage, [click here](#).



Decelles (top row, second from left) has visited the orphanage since 2005.



Approved By Pat Canning, Boston OMP