



Looking back over the last 10 years since our first Container Library & Learning Centre: Story 9

Tipping Points & Chance Encounters

I am nothing if not opened about pretty much everything I do: how I do it; why I do it; and who helped along the way. There are many different individuals and many organisations that helped, but there are a few pivotal moments and chance encounters that helped me and JBAC and that ensured that we are still here today. In no particular order, here are the main tipping points and the people behind our positive outcomes:

Dollimore and Christie: I know I've already told you that they are generous and kind to us. But I didn't tell you the extent of their kindness. When it was just me, they reorganised our storage for me, they send two guys in a lorry to collect books for me, they lend me their lorry at any time I need one, they listen and encourage me when I feel exhausted. They are patient with anyone who brings their donations and cannot find our container. They feed me. They don't blink an eye when a 40ft container arrives, blocks the yard whilst 40 or so volunteers load it and mingle around for hours. When I needed them to, they loaded our first 40ft container themselves. They really are one wonderful and amazing family business.

Jay's father: building Dzunga was challenging. Not only because the weather was not kind to us and the custom checks were gruelling, but mainly because it was the first one and it costed me all I had. Both financially and mentally. While pouring my heart to Jay's father over the best cup of tea I had ever tasted, he looks at me and says "I can't imagine how much hard work you've put into it, but I can see the changes in my people. I have never seen them work for nothing. I have never seen them come together to help themselves. You did this. It would be shame not to see it through." A few hours later, I am walking home on a path leading past Dzunga and I get surrounded by children who want nothing more from me than to read me a story. I sit down on a brightly painted tire and I listen as five exciting children read aloud. At the same time. Everyone reading their own stories. My head spins. And 20 minutes later I am determined to continue.

Rob Stewart and Joanne Smith: the two individuals who made Dzunga happen - they have their own story.

Simon Speller, Stevenage Mayor of 2019: Simon saw the challenges and the benefits we bring to the people of Stevenage. Not only we keep thousands of books out of the landfill, but we also connect people, form partnerships and always, always put our beneficiaries first. He named us as one of the three charities he supported in his mayoral year. He helped us through Covid.

Diane, my friend: everyone should have a friend that supports them even if they are not fully sure it is a good idea. Di is mine. She is the co-founder of JBAC and till this day is my sounding board.

Jay: finding a person you can trust with something as pressures as JBAC is to me doesn't happen every day. Jay who lives among the communities we work with keeps me grounded and 'real' (his words).

Angela from Phoenix Community Care: I was feeling pretty low. Yet again faced with financial gap, upcoming expenditures and no idea how to bridge them. Angela asked for a meeting which I came to thinking how I will be able to help them get stuff to Kenya. We talked for three hours, until the parking run out, and in the end Angela ended up helping me, rather than the other way around. We had since entered into a partnership with PCC who, lending us their name and power, will be able to bid for funding that is outside our remit and will appoint us as the project delivery partner.

Anonymous: our shipping partner. Well, no words can express my gratitude to them. I just wish I could shout their participation from the rooftops, but it is not my decision.

Wednesday Dolliboxers, Saturday Club, Art Club, Knitters and Sewers: without our volunteers and Trustees none of this would be possible. There would certainly be no growth, no expansion.

My mum: some of you will know that JBAC was born due to the legacy my mum left me. Without her influence and inheritance I could not have started any of this.

My family: patience, belief, trust and understanding. But also support physical, mental and financial. They are there when I am at the lowest of the lows, when I question my decisions and when I am lost.

Scott, my friend: he has more belief in me and what JBAC does than anyone else I know. I chat, he listens. I throw my toys out of the proverbial pram and he patiently picks them up and puts them in order.

Rebecca and Royston Fox Associates: the newest of my chance encounters. Rebecca allows me to see beyond today, beyond what is and toward what is possible. She understands that one person cannot be great at everything and she is to my abstract, the real and the practical. I really have real hope that JBAC will be able to strengthen its foundations, improve our operations and become financial resilient. I am also impressed with the entire company who not only helped us secure significant amount of funding,

but who are also lending their skills to help us move onto the next chapter of our existence.

Rotary: a global organisation with some incredibly awesome individuals. One of our Trustees, Alex, was the epiphany of their motto 'others above self'. I am so proud of being made Paul Harris Fellow and for having the privilege of working with several Rotary Clubs in the UK (Barton le-Clay, Stevenage RC, Biggleswade, Darlington and more) and in Kenya where there are just too many to name.

Trustees: life is busy. For all of us, so choosing to become a Trustee isn't easy. And I must thank all the Trustees, present and past, for their help, support and advice.

I am pretty sure there are so many more people I have met along the way that were instrumental and influential and I would like to both thank them and apologise for not naming them explicitly. I hope you can forgive me.