

# St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund Newsletter

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"A mother thinks about her children day and night, even if they are not with her, and will love them in a way they will never understand."

—Unknown



**"Why educate a daughter** when she'll just end up working for her husband's family? Educate your sons and they will support you." Such is conventional wisdom in an African village. Statistics that prove the positive effect educating girls has on society do not penetrate into the African bush.

**Safina** is twenty-six years old. Her life exemplifies the major barriers to a girl's education: early marriage, teenage pregnancy, poverty. Growing up in a remote village, she never had the opportunities that we provide to our Ugandan girls, and her education did not progress beyond third grade. At the age of thirteen, she was given to a man from her village as an informal wife. At fourteen she gave birth to a daughter, Angela. Safina was still a teen when her son, Amon, was born.

As so many villagers do, the family moved to Kampala seeking a better life. To supplement the household income, Safina became a hawker of women's clothes.



Though young and uneducated, she developed a keen eye for what women wanted and developed a clientele of regular customers. Every morning she would go early to the sprawling Owino marketplace and

replenish her stock with quality second-hand garments. The rest of the day was spent walking along the dusty paths of our neighborhood selling to old and new customers. One of those customers was our staff member, Agnes.

Things began to fall apart when her man abruptly abandoned the family. Safina was twenty. Without his income, she was unable to support the children in the city so she sent them back to her home village to stay with their blind grandmother. Safina returned to Kampala to work and earn money for Angela's school fees.

Dreaming of being reunited with her children, Safina continued working with determination until she was struck down by severe malaria and a recurring infection. She lost



her home and her business. There is no social safety net in Uganda; no government agencies to provide food, shelter, or medical care. Not knowing where to turn, Safina found Agnes at our office at a time when we were not in Uganda. Agnes and Frank, our office manager, recall that she was so thin and weak they thought she didn't have long to live. They provided soap and personal items, and some cash from their own pockets for food and medicine.

Driven by hope, faith, and love for her children, she eventually recovered. A local pastor allowed her to sleep in the church and Safina once again began walking the neighborhood with a meagre supply of clothes to sell. Now there was no money to send to the village for the children's schooling, and the children were beginning to suffer the effects of village life—chiggers, septicemia, enteric fever, malnutrition. Safina came back to Agnes, this time for advice. A woman from

another village offered to take Angela and enroll her in a local school. Agnes wisely discerned that the woman only wanted Angela as a household servant, and that this girl of twelve would soon unwillingly find herself repeating her mother's fate.

Agnes and Frank were greatly moved by Safina's struggles, her perseverance, and her devotion to her children. They told us her story and the four of us discussed how best we could help. Frank said that though friends "had been giving her fish to eat, now it was time to give her a hook." The only way to turn her life around and save her children was to deal with the root causes of her economic distress.

What impressed us most when we met Safina was that in spite of the vicissitudes of her life, she carried a sense of peace, hope, and faith in God. She would have been grateful for any small assistance; she was not expecting what she was about to receive. Extreme poverty is a multifaceted condition, and unless every contributing factor is addressed, the cycle will continue. Immediately, our capable team went to work.

Frank found a small flat and we paid three months' rent. Agnes bought food staples and a set of pots, pans, and cooking utensils. From our office storeroom, we provided mattresses, sheets, blankets, mosquito nets, and other household items. The children were brought back from the



village, sent to the hospital for checkups and treatment, and enrolled in school.



Safina was beside herself with joy. Now situated in her new home, she exclaimed to anyone and everyone, "I can't believe I'm here with my children, in my own house, and we had food to cook for supper!"

Now it was time to discuss her capital needs. We quickly recognized that she had a good understanding of her business and was confident she could succeed with a little boost from us, which we readily provided. Not a day later, we saw her making the rounds in the neighborhood with an expanded inventory—once again building up her network of customers.

After years of separation, homelessness, and illness, the family is reunited, safe, and healthy. Safina's childhood was stolen from her but she bears no resentment. Her children's future is bright and her happiness knows no bounds. We are blessed that Safina came into our lives and we are grateful for your support and prayers which make this work possible. All of our children and their families say, "Thank you!"

*Peter & Sharon*

We welcome your donations.  
Checks may be sent to:

**St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund**  
P.O. Box 285  
Chardon, OH 44024-0285

Or you can donate online at  
[www.ugandachildrensfund.org](http://www.ugandachildrensfund.org)

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