

St. NICHOLAS Uganda CHILDREN'S FUND

Newsletter

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"To love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless." – G. K. Chesterton



Vanessa and Patricia

"Too old and too big." We found Patricia and Vanessa outside of our office two years ago in January. Vanessa, ten years old, took the lead in explaining their situation. Patricia, somewhat plump and full-bodied at sixteen, stayed in the background. They were orphans and were living with an aunt who had little interest in the girls' education. The last time they had seen the inside of a classroom was three years earlier, the year their father died. Their parents had been estranged, and they didn't even know their mother's name. Relatives told them that the mother had died that same year.

Vanessa was tested and assigned to second grade, three years behind her age-mates. She adapted immediately and earned a spot on our Honor Roll with her very first report card. Patricia was placed in fourth grade, typically the domain of nine-year-olds. She struggled academically and we asked the school to provide special tutoring so that she could catch up and keep up.

Patricia began to show improvement and was promoted to fifth grade. Midway through the year, we were surprised when she told us she wanted to drop out of school. We pointed out her recent successes and told her that we were committed to supporting her education. "No," she said. "I'm too old and too big for primary school." We said that our door would always be open if she decided to return."

Another year passed before we saw Patricia again. "I want to learn hairdressing," she said. "Can you help me?" We knew just the place for her.

St. Padre Pio Integrated Skills and Training Centre is located about a mile from our home and offers one-year courses in a variety of vocational disciplines. Primary school drop-outs are welcome. While their emphasis is on hands-on practical training and theory, the curriculum also includes adult learning in Basic English, business math, and general life skills. Students wear uniforms and are provided with lunch. The workshops are well-equipped, and the teachers are experienced and caring. It seemed the perfect place for Patricia if she was truly serious.

How many times can you give someone a second chance? Ibrahim was nine years old when he began first grade in 2007. His younger brother Mahad began first grade the following year at the age of six. While Mahad progressed through the classes, Ibra had a hard time of it. He repeated second and fourth grades and was seventeen by the time he reached fifth grade. By now he and Mahad were in the same class, though four years apart in age.

The lure of collecting and selling scrap metal for pocket change resulted in spotty attendance and another year of failure. Yet Ibra begged to come back and try fifth

grade again. At this point, we were hoping just to push him through to complete primary school, but the next year he dropped out for good. Not a very big guy, Ibra was the same height as his classmates but he was also nineteen years old.



Ibra and Mahad, together in 4th Grade

Like Patricia, Ibra showed up a year later with a new request. He wanted to be a motor vehicle mechanic. Given his past track record, we were skeptical of his commitment to submit to the discipline of daily training.

We consulted with Padre Pio and they agreed to take Ibra on a conditional basis. We would pay partial tuition for 1st term and they would monitor his attendance. We made it very clear to Ibra: "This is your last chance. Don't blow it."

After one week of training, we could hardly believe the change in both Patricia and Ibra. Together they came to our office in their spiffy new uniforms, exuding a confidence they had never before



displayed. A visit to the school six weeks later confirmed the transformation. We were told that they were model students and had not missed a single day of training. We found Patricia in the salon room working on another student's hair, and Ibra was tinkering with his first engine.



Patricia (top center) braids a classmate's hair while Ibra (below) tries his hand with a spanner.



Patricia and Ibra are learning what they want to learn and it makes all the difference. Thank you for your support and your prayers.

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

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