

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund

Newsletter

September 2011

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"To love means loving the unlovable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless."

—G.K. Chesterton



A Wooden House

Saidati quietly appeared in our office on a morning when I was not scheduled to be in. She was wearing a threadbare uniform from a local primary school. She looked much younger than her thirteen years—more like the fourth-grader she was. Both bold and shy like so many African children, she asked for help with school fees. I asked the usual questions and told her that she must return with her mother for an interview. The next day, instead of her mother, Saidati's aunt showed up, pushy and demanding. She insisted that the girl's mother refused to come because she didn't care if Saidati was in school or not. It was time for Agnes, our Field Associate, to do some investigating.

Upon her return, I asked about Saidati's home situation. Agnes exclaimed, "She stays in a wooden house!" "Yes," I said, "but how are things at home?" "Peter," she replied, "It's a wooden house!!"



Saidati and her wooden house

Then the realization hit. Agnes was trying to tell me that the household income was so meager that Saidati's mother could not even afford to rent a single brick and cement room, the minimal living quarters for the very poor in our neighborhood. She was paying about eight dollars a month for half of a house made of scrap timber and iron sheets.

The home visit also turned up some other facts. Saidati's father had died when she was four and her mother was supporting the family by washing clothes for neighbors, cultivating their gardens, and looking for any other day labor she could find. In addition to Saidati and her mom, there are two younger brothers living in the shack.

The aunt, who lived nearby, had heard of Saidati's application for help and decided to insert herself into the equation. She even tried to divert Agnes from meeting the mother—maintaining that the mother was not interested. Saidati's mom was indeed interested, but beaten down and careworn. The aunt, on the other hand, had a regular job and her children were attending good schools.

Saidati is now enrolled in fifth grade at Namungoona Orthodox Primary School. She's so happy to be in school, to have a new uniform, and to be eating lunch every day that she doesn't mind living in a wooden house!



A New Beginning

At this time of year, American children begin a new school year. In Uganda, our children embark on the third and final term of the Ugandan school year. The candidates (Primary 7 and Senior 4 & 6) will spend most of the next three months preparing for their national exams. The results of these exams will determine the next phase of each student's education.

When we began this ministry in 2005, almost all of our children were in primary school. Over time, we expanded the secondary program and many of our younger students moved up to high school. Our high school enrollment (122) now exceeds the number of primary school kids (114).

Last year, twenty-six of our students completed high school. (Previously, we had had one or two graduates per year.) This presented a new challenge. One of our main goals is to equip each student with the education and skills to become a productive, wage-earning member of society. However, a high school diploma alone is not sufficient to guarantee a decent job in Uganda. So we took a leap of faith and decided we would send each graduate to university or vocational school, even though the cost per student is considerably more than secondary school. Including our continuing students, we now have nineteen in university and sixteen in vocational training.



Lugogo Vocational Training Institute

We carefully evaluated the students' academic performances and asked them about their interests in order to place them in courses of study conducive to success. We researched universities and vocational schools to find quality, affordable institutions of higher learning. Our university majors include engineering, law, clinical medicine, and education. The vocational programs include auto mechanics, tailoring, electrical installation, and accounting. We'd like to introduce a few of the students who are getting a level of education they never imagined possible a few years ago.



Fiona, 18, lost her mother when she was two and her father when she was nine. She is studying to be a Clinical Officer, similar to a Physician's Assistant in the U.S.

Faruk, 20, is the eldest member of one of our child-headed households and has cared for his four younger siblings for seven years. He is pursuing a career in electrical installation.



Joyce, 18, has no memory of her parents. Since their untimely deaths, she's been raised by her great-aunt in a one-room flat. Joyce is taking a course in secretarial studies.

Emmanuel's parents also died when he was a baby. The grandmother who cared for him and his sister died three years ago. He is going for a degree in banking and insurance.



Thank you for making it possible for them to fulfill their hopes and achieve their dreams.

With appreciation,

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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