

# St. NICHOLAS Uganda CHILDREN'S FUND Newsletter

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"All kids need is a little help, a little hope, and somebody who believes in them."

—Earvin Johnson



**Seven years ago** we made a decision that would have a major impact on the lives of our Ugandan children. At that time, 98% of our students were in primary and secondary school. Thirty-four secondary students were completing their final year. After five years of educating children, it had become clear to us that a high school diploma was not enough to obtain full-time employment in a stable job with a decent income.

It was at this time that a vision which had been growing in our minds and hearts began to take shape: To equip each of our young men and women with the education and skills necessary to become a self-supporting adult and to break the cycle of poverty into which they were born. With eyes of faith, we saw them eventually marrying and having children of their own—children who would have no need of a St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund.

Today we have seventy-one students enrolled in university, medical college, business school, and vocational training.



Shamirah's mom is a nursery school teacher.

More than sixty have graduated and are gainfully employed. And yes, a few have married and produced bright and beautiful children.

Having made the decision to expand our support to the tertiary level, we had to face another challenge. In Uganda, there are more

graduates each year than there are available jobs, and most positions are awarded on the basis of "who you know" and who you are related to. Our students are slum kids and orphans. They don't "know" anybody! We assumed we would have to personally solicit employers and begin to build a network as our students approached graduation. We were wrong.

We did not fully comprehend the power of hope in inspiring these young people to succeed. We demonstrated our faith in them by providing for their education, but our involvement in their lives went beyond schooling. Academic self-motivation is common in African students who are given a chance, but we hold our students to higher standards of behavior and morality as well. They live up to our expectations because they have learned self-worth. They have every confidence that they will be successful because they know that we believe in them. Armed with self-confidence and a positive self-image, each of our graduates has gone out into the world and found work.



Geoffrey, an engineering graduate, works with occupational health & safety products.

All tertiary students must complete an internship during their final year. We constantly emphasize the importance of this opportunity to secure future employment. Our mantra is: "Go early; stay late; ask for extra work." Many of our students have taken advantage of this path to success. Rosemary is one of them. While completing a



degree in Food Science and Technology, she was offered a job in her final semester. She is now working as a quality control officer for a company that produces and sells purified bottled water.

### **Paying it forward**

Sophia is another university graduate who leveraged her internship into a full-time job. Her degree is in Social Work and Social Administration and she interned with a non-profit organization that provides life-changing mental health services to low-income Ugandan women suffering from debilitating depression.

Depression is the silent killer among women in the slums. Uneducated, with no marketable skills, often trying to raise children, they lack any hope that their situation can improve. More Ugandan women are disabled by clinical depression than by AIDS, cancer, or heart disease. They lose interest in life, have no self-esteem, and develop an inability to concentrate or make decisions. Their physical health suffers, and if the woman is a mother, the negative impact extends to her children.

Sophia's job is to go into the slums and try to convince impoverished women to attend a series of twelve weekly meetings. There is initial resistance when they learn that they are not going to be given food, money, or school fees, but when they do come around, they find themselves participating in an interactive group where they can share their own problems and help others with theirs.



Sophia (in white blouse) organizes a new group.

The group model is well suited to African culture, and visual aids and role-playing are ideal for women who are typically illiterate. Just learning that they are not alone is significant. By the end of the program, they have developed into an active self-help group which continues to function long after Sophia has moved on to the next slum. By our helping one young woman with a university education, hundreds are now being helped through her work.



These women in the Katwe slum have successfully completed Sophia's program.

With your help, Sophia, Rosemary, and many others have been given courage and confidence. By believing in them, we've taught them to believe in themselves.

### *Peter & Sharon*

"When I needed parents, you became my parents.  
When I was hopeless, you gave me hope.  
You gave a hundred reasons to believe in tomorrow.  
We have come a long way; now I am a man because of  
your help." *—A poem by one of our graduates*

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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