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News from Bududa - June 2016

Greetings from Barbara

By Barbara Wybar, Executive Director, Bududa Learning Center

We are having another fundraising event through Global Giving on June 15, 2016, and we hope you will participate. More about this further down in this newsletter.

In Bududa things seem to come in twos – bad news, good news.

Before I arrived in mid-February this year, I knew that our sustainable soil blocks had been used to build the revolutionary new health clinic at FIMRC (Foundation for the International Medical Relief of Children) in Bududa. In fact, this had been a great contract for us. That was the good news. The bad news was that there were 600 blocks left over and they were sitting in a pile by our front gate blocking our entrance. FIMRC had agreed to pick them up in January, but this hadn't happened. So after many emails back and forth with FIMRC's headquarters in Philadelphia, we were told that the blocks would be donated to the Bududa Learning Center. We were thrilled. We will use these blocks to build a latrine for our girls' hostel. Presently, the girls have to walk a fair distance from their hostel to use the school's latrine.



Barbara Wybar

Every Friday we have an assembly and on one particular Friday in March, I decided to use our projector to show a video. Unfortunately, we had not done enough preparation and we found ourselves in front of the student body with the technology not in sync. We could show the video on the laptop, but we could not get it onto the screen. Three of us went about trying to solve this fiasco every which way while the students patiently waited. I was embarrassed and gradually became more so as we struggled. We never did get the video up but vowed to be ready for the next assembly.

Once the projector episode had floundered to a halt, I escaped and walked over to our new carpentry shed, attracted by a thunderous noise. I wandered meekly inside and to my delight found that our new expensive electric carpentry tools were in use. The power was there and our new carpentry assistant, James, was working with a few students planing wood and preparing it for furniture making. We had worked so hard to make this happen, by formulating a three pronged plan, for a building, electrical tools and three phase power and then raising money. It took time and there were hitches all along the way, but we did it and then all was ready but there was no power. Here was my first experience of the whole thing coming together, and it would not be my last.

February 11th we welcomed a wonderful new British volunteer, Louisa Spawls and before she came, we dared to ask her if she would bring out some expensive ink cartridges for our HP printer. She arrived with exactly what we had asked for and we promised to reimburse her, but to everybody's chagrin the cartridges did not fit the printer. The numbers were correct but it seems that maybe our printer was made for the third world and the UK version did not work. Kindly, Louisa offered to take them back to Britain and attempt to return them and get the money back.

I was looking for a silver lining to this cloud when I received an email from a dear old Montreal high school friend to say that she had wired us \$9,000. I was overjoyed and the ink cartridges episode was forgotten.

Shortly after I arrived in Bududa, the Children of Bududa administrative team advised me that we had to make important life altering decisions with respect to three of our most needy, hungry total orphans who were living in homes where they were not being cared for. Two were a brother and sister and one was a sweet young teenager who may well have been abused in the foster home where we had placed her. It is sad to see these children, whom I have known since they were little, struggling to find enough to eat and I know from sad experience that pretty young teenage girls succumb to eager young boys, if they are hungry and unloved at home. Then, we have an unwanted pregnancy and another mouth to feed belonging to a young teenager who cannot feed herself.

My job was to write their sponsors, to describe the situation to them as honestly as I could and ask them if they would be willing to pay school and boarding fees for these young teenagers to go to a good boarding school in the local town, Mbale.

The good news is that two families wrote back almost immediately and said they would pay the fees for their child. When I get this kind of news by email, it almost literally makes my heart skip a beat and then it leaves a warm fuzzy feeling that does not go away for a long time. In this case it was Canadians and Brits who responded so quickly to this request for help for these compelling young people.

These are a few of the issues and resolutions that make up my life in Bududa. I hope it illustrates why I embrace the challenges that face me there and how I am rewarded by the solutions.

Barbara Wybar

The Challenges for our Bududa Children

By Sheila Havard, Children of Bududa International Coordinator

Returning to Bududa after an absence of many months is always a joyous occasion for the regular volunteers. Much is familiar: the dust or the mud, depending on the season, the guesthouse with its fabulous view of the surrounding mountains, and the welcoming hug of Justine, our House Director.



Kuloba Ivan is a student at Bududa Vocational Academy.

But there are always surprises in store, good ones and bad ones. A sullen teenager in the program has metamorphosed into a charming young man. See the photo of Kuloba Ivan, the proud recipient of a new blanket. Ivan is now studying at the Bududa Vocational Academy. Undaunted by the fact that he did not yet have the mandatory pair of shoes, he attended school on the first day wearing a borrowed pair! On the other hand, to our consternation, we find that a pitifully sad looking youngster has been evicted from a temporary home and is being housed by yet another reluctant caregiver.

This article will give some idea of the multitude of problems over which Western volunteers and Bududa staff scratch their heads. One frequent issue is the unstable home life of many of our orphans and needy children. In addition, home visits sometimes reveal not just abject poverty but also abusive parents. Furthermore, in an area of tiny smallholdings, on which peasants scratch out a meagre living, land is a vital commodity and the frequent land disputes complicate matters. In all such seemingly intractable issues, the Western volunteers would be completely at sea for an answer were it not for the insightful advice of our Bududa staff, especially Social Worker Nanzala Martha and Program Director Namyeka Grace, who make sense of the cultural context for us.

Some concrete examples illustrate these dilemmas: Musosi John was a young primary school student when I first got to know him over 10 years ago. His mother was mentally deficient and his father drank. Luckily, he obtained caring sponsors. For the first time somebody paid attention to him. He was even fitted out with a brand-new outfit. The Children of Bududa program followed up on him over the years and he has now graduated from the program.

Being shunted around from household to household is unfortunately the common lot of many of our orphans and needy children. Such was the fate of Wakabona Wilson. At the beginning of this year, he was living with an 82-year-old granny on the hillside, who can hardly walk. She felt overwhelmed by the responsibility and did not have enough food for both of them. The sponsor was appealed to and was kind-hearted enough to provide the funds for Wilson to attend boarding school. We manage to send a number of our children to boarding schools. These schools vary enormously in academic quality and fees charged, but all provide the students with supervision and a regular schedule, as well as a Spartan lifestyle – cornmeal porridge three times a day and three-tiered bunks are the norm. A boarding school provides a better learning environment than a small crowded home, where students contend with the distractions of other siblings and assigned chores and have only a smoky paraffin “candle” by way of light.

Of course we ensure that we investigate the wishes of the potential boarding student before making a decision. That too can be difficult as local kids have been brought up to be obedient and submissive. It is hard for an adult in a position of authority to draw them out. What real feelings are hidden behind the downcast eyes and few mumbled words? Although sometimes a little gentle persuasion is in order, boarding school is often an option that is eagerly accepted by our children; for one thing it is a means of escaping from the drudgery of household and farm chores.



Kimono Harriet with the baskets that she sells.

Kimono Harriet (see photo) was lucky enough to go to boarding school. With the help of the program she has pulled herself up by her boot strings and started a small business selling baskets. It is always rewarding to see such initiative.

If the home situation is untenable, it is sometimes possible to find an alternative caregiver. This provides the child with a more settled home environment, but sometimes creates new problems. Careful monitoring by program staff is essential to ensure that the new and the existing children in the family are treated equally. On occasion the new caregiver will complain that the allowance paid to board and feed the foster child is insufficient. There has even been a case of abuse in a foster home and the young girl in question was removed from this unsatisfactory accommodation and placed in a boarding school. According to the latest news, she is doing well there.

Kutosi Isaac has the benefit of a stable home environment. His problems reside elsewhere. When I first got to know this cheerful youngster, he was living entirely alone in a tumbledown hut to which he had no legal title. In fact his brothers also had a claim to the house and “wrangles” took place between them and Isaac. Western

well-wishers pooled funds to build him a brand-new home. Isaac is now a proud home owner, who keeps his dwelling tidy and has even decorated it with CD tapes dangling from the ceiling. However, his neighbours encroach on the tiny parcel of land on which he tries to grow crops to support himself. The program has brought in the local authorities to mediate but there are still disputes. To ensure that he gets enough to eat, the program regularly provides him with cornmeal and sometimes beans.

Isaac would like to pass his Primary 7 examinations and graduate from elementary school, and Bududa Learning Centre Assistant Director Kimberly Beebe is spending many an evening on the guesthouse terrace tutoring him in the subjects he needs to master. His disadvantaged background has hitherto held him back at school, but he is nevertheless an eager pupil.

These then are some of the problems Children of Bududa staff and volunteers find themselves confronting. Some solutions are as simple and relatively inexpensive as supplying additional food; others may entail lengthy negotiations with multiple parties and even the involvement of the local authorities, not to mention considerable expense and hence an appeal for supplementary funding. In all cases it is the needs of the child in question that are paramount. But the rewards come as we see children grow up, progress from primary to secondary school, or perhaps enter and graduate from the Bududa Vocational Academy, and become established in life with a marketable skill.

Bududa shines with a visit from Catlin Gabel School

By Kimberly Beebe, Assistant Director, Bududa Learning Center

At the end of March, a group of high school juniors and seniors from Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon visited Bududa Learning Center. On an East African tour of Rwanda and Uganda, the students were here to apply their understanding of transitional justice, post-conflict peace, and economic success.



Vice Principal, Samali Nakhayenze, leading a discussion after Catlin Gabel's presentation on transitional justice to BVA students.

Having a group of ten American teenagers turned out to be quite the experience for our Children of Bududa children and Bududa Vocational Academy students. Sharing three days of dancing and singing, political debate, hiking, and English story-telling over Easter weekend proved to be a big change from the typical fare in Bududa. The CGS high school trip leader, Dave, asserted: "We had a very memorable time in the village and enjoyed seeing a very different part of the country." Dave was one of many who said that the CGS students and ours at the Bududa Learning Center learned a lot from each other. Their visit was special.

Arguably the most memorable part of the trip was the political debate between two teams co-captained and manned by CGS and BVA students from 17 to 22 years of age. The teams were split so that Ugandans and Americans worked together during the exercise. "Perpetrators of violence should be shown mercy" was the proposition argued for/against in light of the purpose of the transitional justice group observing Uganda and its post-conflict events. The arguments about the definitions of mercy, justice and peace were some of the political points covered.

The student exercise was valuable for both Bududa Learning Center and Catlin Gabel School not just as a political science lesson. Both sides discussed the importance of treating perpetrators and victims fairly. It was also a lesson in cultural awareness of the Ugandan and American perspective.

Sophie expressed the view that "Punishment should be used to validate the victims (of violence) but there are a lot of reasons to apply merciful punishments." Luca stated, "We have governments and systems that we must follow...to maintain peace. To keep the country afloat, (to keep it) from crumbling." These points were used to argue for a clear definition of the kinds of punishments, the ways in which to act in kindness while recognizing the crimes committed. While both the proposition and the argument against were asserted with force on both teams, the evidence for mercy was clearly articulated as an important piece of confronting injustice.

These arguments were only a small part of the discourse which took place. The differences of opinion were stark and the understanding of linguistic meanings of mercy, justice, and peace no less so. Both Ugandans and Americans knew the importance of these terms and understood them differently. By the end of the second day, a few of us had begun discussing the thought process behind these terms as there was confusion between the many perspectives. Regardless of the subjectivity of this exercise, CGS and BVA students learned from one another and listened attentively to the arguments. As an independent observer I was glad that dialogue began and an understanding continued to develop. Despite the cultural and academic differences, I am certain that both groups of students will remember the Catlin Gabel visit and its significance.

Despite the short duration of Catlin Gabel's visit, CGS students also were part of an Easter weekend with the Children of Bududa project. Almost 150 students crowded into our large assembly room after coursework in agriculture, basket weaving, and computer science. The students performed a dance for CGS and were part of a life skills lesson on water and sanitation. Afterwards, we held a story-telling session in Lumasaaba/Lugishu and English. These sessions were divided into three courses and led by 3 to 4 CGS high schoolers. While the language barrier proved to be difficult even with translators, by the end of the storytelling session, CoB children were volunteering to do show-and-tell with local fairy tales. It was an inspiring sight for me as CGS and CoB laughter echoed through the classrooms.

Finally, the Sunday following, we went on a morning hike through the stunning hills of Nametse and had a large spread for Easter lunch with vegetarian chili Ugandan-style, cream of corn and other holiday dishes. Though four students were in homestay accommodation while the remainder were lodged at the guest house, all were together in the afternoon for the meal and several rounds of card games. The dinner was even more delightful with a choice of meat and cabbage salad with corn and tomatoes. Emotions ran high the whole weekend, from the lows of hiking exhaustion to the highs of excitement for football and giggling local followers. "Muzungu, how are you?" rang from the hills and delighted most all the students as the greeting issued from the mouths of five-year olds with toothy grins.

Without waxing too effusively about the pride I feel for the students of Bududa Learning Center, I was reminded of the contrast between Westerners and Africans. The residents of Bududa are a humble people and sometimes when visitors come they are startled by the differences between us in cultural identity. This visit was a learning experience for many. My greatest hope is that those who come here can see that the true beauty of Uganda is its simplicity. Witnessing so much of the interaction on this visit I felt the strength of Bududa and her people. Watching filled me with pride and pleasure at the opportunities given to all at Bududa Learning Center, including myself.

The CGS trip blog commented often on how different people throughout Rwanda and Uganda were inspiring including our management team at Bududa Learning Center. This made my heart very full. If all we walk away with in moments like these is gratefulness, then that is enough.



Catlin Gabel School battles against Bududa Vocational Academy on the field.

Bruges Rotary Club treats almost 500 community patients in one day

By Barbara Wybar and Kimberly Beebe



Many mothers and grandmothers came to be seen and treated by doctors. They often wear very fine fabrics and in some cases, their very best 'Gomez' dress for their medical appointment.

February 12, 2016, was a big day for the Bududa Learning Center and the excitement on the campus was palpable. Long lines formed as people awaited the arrival of a team of health care workers from the Bruges, Belgium, chapter of Rotary International. During the course of the day, they would treat over 495 Bududa community members providing services in general medicine, dentistry, optometry and wound care, as well as distributing pharmaceuticals.

Barbara remembered some of the team from the 2010 Uganda visit, and the reunions for the Bruges and Uganda staff were special. One of the most poignant among these involved a nurse, Anne-Marie Vercruyssen, and a member of our staff. As she was climbing on to the bus to leave for Mbale six years ago, Anne-Marie pointed out Samali Nakhayenze saying that that she was worried about her. Samali, who has been a teacher at our school for many years, had acted as an interpreter for Anne-



Executive Director, Barbara Wybar, with the humanitarian team.

Marie during the day and the nurse discovered that she had a dangerous mass that the Belgian team was not equipped to treat. She implored the BLC team to follow up. Samali was taken to Mbale for surgery which was paid for by BLC with the help of a generous Canadian volunteer. She recovered and is now deputy principal II at our vocational academy. Fast forward to 2016 and Vercruyssen was simply delighted to know of Samali's good health.



Dr. Kristof Buyse with Interpreter Martha Nanzala (left) and Dr. Peter Vandendriessche with Interpreter Grace Namyeka (right).

Ms. Vercruyssen was one of many nurses, doctors and staff who provided dozens of Ugandans with more than medical help. They treated them with genuine humanity and good will. Two surgeons spent hours examining several community members and performing tooth extractions and providing other dental care. The team brought medications to make the procedures easier for people who had never experienced surgery or any procedure quite like this before.

Nurses who specialized in dialysis, midwifery and other specialties treated men and women with open wounds, broken or sprained legs and ankles, and provided vaccinations at the end of the day. In addition, a women's family planning conversation was led by nurse Hanne Van Haute to discuss reproductive health.

Optician Marc Buyse and the optometry assistant, Ann Tobback, examined dozens of patients who needed to get new eye glasses or go for follow-up doctor's appointments. At one point, Ms. Tobback expressed her distinct pleasure at protecting a young albino girl's eyes with a pair of new glasses. Her delicate face was wrapped in sun shades that matched her small, beautiful eyes and fair skin. "Those should protect her and hopefully make her feel happier," she asserted.

Isaac Namisi, working with the Financial Director, Frederic Penel expressed his appreciation:

Working with the doctors was actually fun but challenging. They all came prepared for the day and when we were here I felt the [medical treatment] should be done *again* and *again*. It was tremendous! It showed (that there is) a huge demand in Bududa. I hope they come again very soon.

The Rotary team shipped a container with medical supplies, as well as clothes, notebooks, pens and other needed items from Belgium to Uganda and retrieved them when they arrived. This allowed the doctors and staff to be prepared properly for their time here. On the Rotary team, there were two general surgeons and two eye-specialist surgeons also working at a local hospital.

At the very end of the day, the medical team decided to pay our volunteers and to the delight of everyone, all 19 Bududa volunteers were given 10,000 Uganda Shillings (\$3.00 US) for the day. This is more than a laborer would get for a daily wage in the village, and they were all very pleasantly surprised. In conclusion, this was a significant day of serving others and was personally rewarding to the management team, teachers, and students who volunteered to witness and participate in this event. Not only did this day affect our Bududa community, but our Bududa Learning Center staff. So many were touched by the initiative of this humanitarian medical team.

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Be Ready for Another Global Giving Bonus Day on June 15

Last June, Bududa Canada Foundation had a very successful fundraising day as part of the website Global Giving's Bonus Day. There's another Bonus Day coming up on June 15th and we'd like you to be part of it.

This time our goal is to raise \$10,000 to open a hairdressing department at Bududa Vocational Academy. We don't offer this course of instruction and we've had many requests from students who would like to pursue this career. We can house it in our facilities, but we need funding for equipment and for the salary for a teacher for a year.

On bonus days, Global Giving makes \$110,000 available in matching funds. All donations of \$25 and over up to \$1000 will be matched at 40%. Monies in excess of \$1,000 will not be matched. The key is to make your donation early in the day before the \$110,000 runs out. We're encouraging our donors to go online at 9 a.m. eastern standard time or soon thereafter.

One more thing - we are eligible for \$1,000 in prize money for the charity which raises the most money on this day, and then another \$1,000 for the charity which has the most donors. Last year we qualified in this last category, and we got third prize for the most donors. The prize money and the matching gifts offset the 15% commission to Global Giving. So if all our pals and donors and supporters sign in and donate \$25 each early on June 15th, we might qualify for another \$1,000 prize.

We will be able to issue Canadian tax receipts a month after the money has been deposited in our Canadian account by Global Giving.

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