

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund Newsletter

June 2019

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"The worst aspects of poverty are not the deplorable outward conditions but rather the erosion and eventual destruction of hope." —Wess Stafford



My name is Sandra and I am sixteen years old. Our mother left us four years ago and we live with our father. He can neither read nor write and he works at the market transporting food on his bicycle. My sister Betty and I are very sad because we want to study yet we will have to work as housemaids because our father has no money for our education.

The most difficult and heartbreaking aspect of our work in Uganda is deciding who we are going to admit into our program. For two months before each new school year, dozens of applicants arrive at our small office every week. We see single mothers surrounded by children in ragged clothes, and desperate teenagers who follow us with imploring eyes. Everyone in our slum neighborhood needs some help but we don't have the resources to help everyone. We prioritize the poorest of the poor—children who would not be in school without our support.

If a child has not been in school for a year or more, it's clear that there is true need. We see this most often with students whose education stopped in primary school. Secondary school tuition is three to six times that of primary school, and is beyond the reach of families earning one to two dollars per day. As these young people enter their vulnerable and formative teen years, they find themselves hopeless and adrift. Without education, their prospects are dim—petty crime and drug addiction for the boys, domestic servitude and early pregnancy for the girls. The very fact that

they have come to us shows that they have not yet given up hope. Here is where we can make a difference and replace despair with opportunity.

Since these students had not seen the inside of a classroom for over a year, we assumed that it would take time for them to get back in the flow of studying and exams. Having set modest expectations, we were happily surprised when we reviewed their report cards for the first school term. Here are some of their stories.

Godfrey was sixteen years old when he entered Senior 1, three years behind his classmates. His father had died shortly after he was born, and his mother neither took another man nor produced any more children.



She struggled to educate her son and to pay the rent on their single room by selling vegetables at a local market. Godfrey fell two years behind in primary school because of lack of funds for tuition. He managed to score fairly well on the national exams, but there his education stopped. Instead of feeling sorry for himself, he occupied himself last year working as a porter at various construction sites to supplement the family income.

Having been given this belated opportunity to enter secondary school, he applied himself with enthusiasm. Godfrey earned Distinctions in thirteen of seventeen subjects, including a 95% in Physics. His year of hard physical labor, rather than break his spirit, inspired him to strive for academic success.

Prossy lives with her aunt in a single room furnished only with a small stool and a hunk of foam to sleep on. After her mother abandoned the family five years ago, her life has been filled with tragedy. The

following year, her father died in a motorcycle accident. She was sent to live with her grandmother who paid her school fees at a village school. The year that Prossy completed primary school, her grandmother died. Returning to Kampala to stay with an aunt, she worked as a housemaid for a year because the aunt could not afford to send her to secondary school.



Like Godfrey, Prossy excelled in her first term in Senior 1, also earning thirteen Distinctions. Her best subject was Commerce (100%), and she received grades of 95% or better in Chemistry, Divinity, Literature, and Luganda (the local language). This was an outstanding performance, especially considering the challenges that she overcame in her young life.

Generational poverty was the future for three bright young girls, Suraina, Shamim, and Sauda. Their mother, Mariam, was sent from the village to Kampala to work as a housemaid when she was fourteen. The next year she gave birth to her first daughter. The man stayed around long enough to father two more girls and then disappeared. Mariam found housework with an East Indian family, working seven days a week and earning \$27/month.

Mariam struggled to keep the two older girls in school through 2017 until her meager resources failed her. During this time, their education was constantly

interrupted by being sent home from school until their mother could come up with another small payment. Sauda, age seven, had never been in school.



We had the girls tested for class placement and the older two scored well enough to move up to their next classes. Even without kindergarten, Sauda qualified to enter first grade. By the end of the first school term, all three were on our Honor Roll. Although new to the school, Shamim (on right) decided to compete for a class office and won the election!

Sandra's appeal that opened this newsletter was not in vain. Her sister Betty, having sat out a full year, is thriving in Senior 1. Sandra is attending a vocational school and realizing her dream of becoming a mobile phone repair technician.

Dear friends, we appreciate your support and prayers in restoring hope and dispelling despair!

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

The St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund is a registered non-profit 501(c)(3) organization eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions.