

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund Newsletter

June 2020

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"Orphans are easier to ignore before you know their names. They are easier to ignore before you see their faces. It is easier to pretend they're not real before you hold them in your arms; but once you do, everything changes."

—David Platt



Since the arrival of COVID-19 in Uganda, you don't hear much about HIV/AIDS these days. When we first arrived in Uganda in 2002, it was near the peak of the crisis. Although the country was one of the first African nations to address AIDS head-on, it was still a death sentence. Until the arrival of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), we lost many friends and acquaintances in those first few years. Now those of our parents and guardians who are HIV-positive are living healthy, productive lives.

In 2013, the Ugandan government decided to get serious about preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV. They rolled out a program whereby all pregnant women who tested HIV-positive were put on treatment immediately. As a result, 97% of women who tested positive received ARVs and new HIV infections among children has been greatly reduced.

As encouraging as those statistics are, they predominately represent women who live in or near the cities and towns. Rural areas are medically underserved, and HIV/AIDS often is not detected until it's too late. Also, there is still the tendency in remote villages to attribute the symptoms to witchcraft or other supernatural causes. When the parents die, the children are left orphans *and* HIV-positive.

Joseph¹ was born in one of those remote villages. His mother didn't know she was HIV-positive until he was a toddler. When she learned that both she and her boy were HIV-positive, she ran away from the village and hasn't been seen or heard from since. His father went mad upon learning his status, also ran away, and died shortly thereafter. An older woman in the village took pity on Joseph and adopted him as her own son. She paid his tuition at a village school and made sure that he received his life-saving meds.



When she became too ill to work, she called her daughter Patricia¹ who was teaching at a primary school in Kampala, and begged her to help get Joseph through 7th grade, his final year in Primary. Patricia and her husband, Isaac¹, were living in a two-room flat, raising three children of their own, and caring for Patricia's cousin-sister and one of Isaac's nieces—all of them school-age. Their compassionate hearts could not refuse, and they welcomed Joseph into their home. Upon the death of her mother, Patricia became Joseph's legal guardian.



Isaac and Patricia

¹ Names changed to protect privacy.

The Director of the school, herself a kindhearted woman, waived tuition for Joseph so he could complete primary school. But the next year, Isaac and Patricia could barely pay for one term in secondary school and Joseph had to drop out. They brought him to us, and we were moved both by the boy's plight and by the sacrifices made by this caring couple. Reviewing Joseph's academic record, we decided that a vocational secondary school was the best option for him. He is now studying motor vehicle mechanics at a community polytechnic school with our other vocational students.



Joseph (center) and schoolmates

How one family survives

We are constantly amazed at the resourcefulness and determination of our single parents and guardians. Without education or training, they struggle to find ways to pay the rent and put food on the table. Jackline, a widow, and her family live in a single room that borders a four-lane highway. On the other side of the highway is a swamp. The swamp produces a vast quantity of succulent grasses that are a nutritious food for cattle.

A number of middle class residents of Kampala keep cows (yes, in the city), and grazing land is becoming hard to come by as the metropolitan area expands and develops. Jackline saw her opportunity.

Every day she crosses the highway and harvests swamp greenery with her *panga* (machete). Her children help when they're not in school. They haul it to the highway and wait for city folk to drive up and buy a trunkful for around eighty cents. It doesn't take more than a few loads to elevate the family income above the poverty line.



Jackline at work

Thank you for your continued support and prayers during these difficult times. May you be blessed!

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.



Wear & tear on the *panga* after a few weeks' work

Uganda COVID-19 Update

Uganda's coronavirus shutdown began on March 19th before a single case had been identified. The first known case was discovered on March 21st (a traveler from Dubai). The president immediately closed all borders. Out of a population of more than 45 million, Uganda has identified 657 cases and no deaths as of June 9th. The country remains in lockdown, although public transportation has recently opened up with some restrictions.