



## **OPPORTUNITY KNOX CHARITY CLG**

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2020- 2021**

Charity Number (RCN): 20106164

Revenue Number: (CHY): 21754

Company No: 574339

## Activities of Opportunity Knox Charity CLG 2020-2021

- Opportunity Knox Charity activities for the year from April 1st 2020 to March 31st 2021 were severely curtailed by the spread of Covid 19 virus across Uganda including the area of Tiira Village, Busia Town, and Eastern Uganda.
- The most recent visit by the Trustees, Harry and Ursula Knox was completed in early February 2020. The operations of the Charity were streamlined during that visit so that the Trustees would communicate with the three Private Primary Schools through their Owners/Directors from that time going forward until the end of the project which was due to end at March 31st 2023. There was also an arrangement made to communicate directly with the four secondary schools with regards to students and the payment of their fees if necessary. There was also the expectation that the Trustees would visit again in May and in September 2020
- Harry and Ursula Knox had taken approx. 100 children into English Reading Classes using the Phonics method for 3 weeks of the Children's Summer Holidays for the second year running. All of this activity was presented in the 2020 Annual Report and was also detailed in a comprehensive newsletter circulated with lots of photos to all Donors in June 2020. The provision of Jolly Phonics Workbooks and the provision of second-hand early year's English readers along with several hundred African English Readers was made possible by a grant of €10,000 from the ElectricAid Charity.
- Two School Libraries were established and stocked with English Readers donated by schools in Ireland as well as with 24 copies of each of 46 titles of a newly published African Reading Scheme. The Children really enjoyed reading these books about African topics when we used them in the three week long Phonics classes in January 2020 that were then used to stock the school libraries.
- The Children could identify more readily with the situations portrayed in the books which were based on typical occurrences in their daily lives and portrayed with characters with their own skin colour.
- The Libraries were set up in the Provident Academy School and in Tiira Parents Primary School. Due to the smaller staggered numbers attending classes in the schools throughout 2021 because of the Pandemic both Principals reported a great interest in ready the Library books.
- The titles in this African series of reading books has expanded from 46 titles to over 70 titles and with typical classes in Uganda having 60 or more children in the classes we intend stocking the Libraries with class sets of 60 books of each title available. We hope to arrange this after Wilson observes if the books have been well cared for by the school and by the children. We will then purchase and stock the Libraries with the additional Copies during the second term of this school year of 2022
- As text books for each pupil is non-existent in the school classes, sometimes the teacher has to share their own book along with 3 or 4 other copies of the book owned by the school. This year, with the help of the grant from the ElectricAid Charity we donated 12 copies of the Primary 6 English text book to Tiira Primary school so that the three children sitting in the same school desk would one copy to share between them.
- All students enrolled in the project for the school year February 2020 to December 2020 had their fees and their lunches for term one paid for as well as exercise copies and pens/pencils. New school uniforms were tailored and provided to each student prior to the departure of the Trustees from Tiira in February 2020. Many had received new schoolbags too.

- What could go wrong? The answer is that all schools were closed down by mid-March 2020 as part of the arrangements to limit the spread of the Alpha Variant of Covid 19 virus. This was very disruptive for everyone including the 60 families being supported by Opportunity Knox Charity. The Trustees arranged for a 50kg bag of Maize flour to be supplied to each of our families being helped before the end of March 2020. This was to enable the families to come to terms with the initial shock of the lockdown restrictions and to ensure no family or child would suffer from hunger during the initial weeks of the lockdown which greatly unsettled the poorest of the poor families who could not work in compliance with the Government restrictions. The food was purchased and distributed to the families for us by Taaka Hellen, Principal of the Provident Academy Primary School, one of the 3 Primary Schools involved with us in our Project.
- The lockdown continued throughout the year with the return to school on a staggered basis for certain classes throughout the year. This consisted of students in state exam-year classes returning in October 2020 and continuing up to their final state exams for Primary 7 class and Senior 4 and Senior 6 classes which were held in March 2021.
- On March 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 students in Class Primary 6 and Senior Classes 2 and Senior 5 returned to school. On 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021 students in Primary 4 and Primary 5 classes returned to school. Students in Senior 1 returned to School on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2021 and in Senior 2 on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. Students in Primary 1, 2, and 3 Classes were scheduled to return to school on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021. However, by that date the whole school system went into their second lockdown, which was meant to last just 6 weeks, but instead was only lifted on January 10th 2022 for all students.
- The Charity again distributed 50kg sacks of Maize flour in June 2021. All of this has resulted in widespread curtailment of Opportunity Knox activities since March 2020. However, we are delighted to report that all Primary 7 and Senior 4 students being supported by us passed their state examinations in March 2021.
- Before we departed from Uganda in February 2020 we placed 5 students in a private Charity-based Vocational School so that they could be given some vocational skills that they could use to earn them some money throughout their lives. There were two students who had completed Senior 4 successfully who we had sponsored for the four years in secondary school. They were brother and sister and were 21 and 20 years of age. Caroline wanted to be trained as a Hairdresser and Joseph wanted to be a plumber. The 3 others were dropouts from the Secondary School and Primary school and were of lesser ability.
- They were in the Vocational School for 6 weeks before lockdown and returned in April 2021 and completed 5 additional weeks. They contacted their former Principal in Primary school and said that they were not getting what they had been promised. There were no tools for the job they were interested in and no work experience of the type promised. All they did was write notes all day and on top of that they were not being fed properly.
- I had someone out there go to the Vocational school and speak to the Director who was Bishop Moses Barrasa. He was given two weeks to deliver what he had promised us. There was no change in conditions and the students left of their own accord before I got to reach them. I now feel duty bound to get the two Senior 4 students (equivalent to our Junior Certificate) vocational skills training in a Government School, which will cost a lot more. The others will not be accepted into the Vocational school because they didn't complete and pass Senior 4, a government exam. Wilson will search for a suitable place for them.
- Since March 2020 we have communicated continuously and directly with all of our schools by using WhatsApp, both by text message and by voice messages. This was to learn the names of the students and their Classes that required payments as they were returning to school. Some of the Primary 5 and Primary 6 students did not return for various reasons including a small number of girls getting pregnant and some subsequently got married. Some children had died or their family had moved.

- Because of the staggered nature of the dates that the students returned to school throughout the year, while vastly less money had to be paid for the students concerned, it did mean that there were more payment dates that had to be met throughout the year. Payment to the Primary schools and one Secondary School was made directly by using the World Remit Bank Payment App to the the bank account of the Director/ Principal of the School.
- In the case of the other three secondary schools where payments are made to the School Bursars, we were glad to use the voluntary service of Pastoress Molly Namanda Tumusime, owner of Jireh Guest House, where we stay when we are in Busia, and whose help we requested to pay the fees due for the students in their secondary schools. This involved several trips by motor car for Pastoress Molly to cover all 3 schools. These arrangements for the payment of school fees enabled us to keep track of the students returning to school. Copies of all original invoices and receipts were sent to me by WhatsApp messages. The original invoices and receipts for payment are kept by the schools until the next time we visit.. In the cases or the 3 secondary schools Pastoress Molly Namanda Tumusime has the receipts for us.
- A year's supply of Sanitary Towels was left with Taaka Hellen, the Principal of Provident Academy and Nursery School to supply to girls who are menstruating. The girls pick up a new supply at the end of their current Period so as to have a new supply at home at the time of commencement of their next period. We have this process in place because menstruation is the biggest single factor that leads to girls leaving school permanently in Uganda.
- It is easy for us to keep track of future payments to the schools because we know the Classes in which each student is enrolled for each year going forward and the only matter to be verified on the ground is that of their continued attendance at their school. No new families will be accepted into the programme. The inspection of the Roll books for each school and the physical checking that those enrolled under our sponsorship are present will be carried out by our volunteer of 4 years Mr. Wilson Bulwa, an employee of World Vision Uganda. He is very familiar with the concept and practice of sponsorship of students by Charities in Uganda an on monitoring attendance and payment of correct fees to schools and dealing with any other issues that pop up of an administrative nature.
- For this this school term which commenced on 10th of January 2022 we will be up and running at 100% capacity. Wilson Bulwa will visit Tirra Village at the end of January to meet with the Parents, the Students, the school Principals and Bursars. He speaks the local language and has translated for us with all of the above groups on several previous visits. He knows the children and their parent(s) from previous visits and has photographed each family unit and each child on more than one occasion in the past. He has helped solve family problems and he has talked to some of the children previously about improving their attendance level and about discipline issues concerning some children. He has a very relaxed and sensitive approach and usually his chats will bring improved behaviour from the Children.
- Wilson will check the roll books to see which of our children are currently registered and will summon all of these children supported by Opportunity Knox in each school to be called together and have a roll call to check that all those on the roll register are physically there in attendance on the days of his visit.
- He will meet with the parents and deliver them our message giving them real hope for their children's future and learning that we are going to continue supporting them for the next couple of years. He will meet with the students to motivate them to have regular attendance and to give their commitment to study well and make the most of our sponsorship. The parents like to see us and to hear our words of encouragement each time we visit the village. They endure their daily hardship of life but take great encouragement from the fact that people from a faraway place donate money and clothes for their children. He will meet with the Principals and Bursars to deal with administrative matters and to deal with any existing problems and also to foresee any new obstacles that might arise during term one 2022.
- It is planned that Wilson Bulwa will visit Tiira Village and all the schools for one week (or thereabouts) during the 3rd week of each term. For this first term he will photograph all the family units and then the children individually. He has taken these photographs on previous visit for us.

- It will be interesting for us and our donors to see how much each child has grown during the 2 years since they were photographed on our last visit. We will return to our regular visits as soon as the Covid situation allows us to travel safely to Uganda. Wilson hires a car when we visit and he drives us from Entebbe Airport to Busia Town where we stay in Jireh Hotel for the duration of our visits.
- Opportunity Knox is a “no overheads” charity. This means we pay for all of our own travel and accommodation expenses as well as for all administration costs at home or abroad. The Trustees have made a donation of a minimum of €10,000 per year so far to the Charity, to cover these overhead expenses. As is the result for all donations over €250 made per calendar year, 40% of the Income Tax paid by the donor on their donation can be claimed back by the Charity from the Revenue Commissioners. This means that approximately €4,000 will be paid in to the Charity for the Trustees donation of €10,000. A chy3 form has to be filled out by the donors who pay €250 or more so that the Charity can reclaim the tax on the donation made during the previous income tax year.
- As you will have seen in all expenditure statements going right back to the beginning of the Charity, there has all been an item called “India Project” paid from the Trustees Donations. It refers to help given for essential needs of teenage residents of an Orphanage in Bodhjunnagar, West Tripura State. It resulted from when the Trustees volunteered in July 2016 there. Going forward since then most of the children there have left the orphanage and now we are sponsoring one male student, aged 20 years, on a Course for General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) Diploma and a girl, aged 18 years for her last 2 years of Secondary education.
- The level of funds available to spend on our activities is vital to our continued existence. The majority of our funds come from Trustee Donations and Public Donations. Trustee donations are used to cover all administrative expenses at home and abroad. This includes all travelling expenses incurred by the Trustees in visiting Uganda. The Trustees have continued their donations in 2020 and 2021.
- Public donations are used to pay for all the expenses of students attending schools. These include education fees, porridge lunches, exercise copies, school bags, uniforms, short-term emergency food aid to families who need it and emergency medical aid when needed too. This is encountered, for example, with treating burns that we sometimes come across while visiting and the site of the wound is festering, and with treating jiggers infestation in families due to poor hygiene and so on/
- There has been a substantial falloff with Public Donations probably due to donors knowing that the schools were closed as well as some of the donors experiencing financial hardship due to unemployment or other hardships due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. A small number of our older donors who have been donating since 2016 are in poor health or have died. We are circulating all donors and supporters at the end of January 2022 to encourage them to renew their donations to OK.
- Locally, we had two fundraising events. Breda and Brendan Knox, 2 Ormonde Crescent opened their Award-winning urban garden to members of the public throughout the summer months. Small groups were accommodated every day and explored the garden. They were able to purchase young plants that had been propagated by Breda. They were able to sit outside in a suntrap by the fish pond and have some refreshments with sample some of Breda’s home-baked confectionary. Breda has done the same for the past five years and has generated a sizeable amount of income for Opportunity Knox from the €5 entry fee. Members of the various local Gardening Clubs have been great supporters of the event as well as friends from Kilmacow and other rural areas.
- Another great supporter of the Charity is Marie Ahearn from Lower Kilmacow. Previously she has donated funds resulting from coordinating the sale and exchange of school uniforms for the local national schools. This year Marie organised a Flowering Plant Sale along with a bring-and-buy cake sale. This was the result of a lot of effort on her behalf ably helped by many of her friends. She also ran a monster raffle comprising prizes donated by local business people and some of her friends. It raised a large sum of money, much more than expected. The fact that this was the first local fund-raiser in the village and parish since the lifting of some of the lockdown restrictions went very much in our favour.

## **Activities of Opportunity Knox Charity CLG 2019-2020 [Annual Report 2020]**

- Trustees Harry and Ursula Knox visited Tiira Village in Uganda again twice during the year. The first visit was in April/May 2019 and the second visit was in January/ February 2020. This is a “no overheads” charity which means the Trustees pay for all their own travel, accommodation, and other expenses.
- The Trustees continued to work with Mwima John Kennedy and his wife Hellen so that the fees for over 230 children were paid to the various schools we support for the second and third school terms of the 2019 school year and then due to the departure of John Kennedy to new employment Harry and Ursula paid all the schools directly for the first term of the 2020 school year prior to ending their visit.
- They continued to engage the services of volunteer Wilson Bulwa, an employee of World Vision Uganda, to hire a car to bring them from Entebbe to their guesthouse in Busia. There Wilson met with the parents as a group and translated for Harry and Ursula at two such meetings during the April/May visit and again for two meetings with parents and then with the Primary School Principals during the Jan/Feb visit.
- They met separately with each Family and got them to sign our Safeguarding Personal Information Statement once it had been explained at the Parents meeting. Some children needed to be taken out of very large classes in one school and the parents concerned were given a choice of 3 other school where the children would be placed in much smaller classes. Wilson Bulwa translated and interpreted for them.
- An Awards Ceremony was held where children were presented with Certificates of Attendance as well as Certificates of Achievement. The recipients were chosen using criteria explained to the Parents during a meeting with the Trustees, John Kennedy and Wilson Bulwa during the January 2019 visit.
- Four families who suffered from “Jiggers” disease were inspected and two were Jiggers free. Jiggers is due to a parasite entering the body through the soft flesh at the side of toe nails and finger nails. It is difficult to eradicate and is caused by poor hygiene. Most of our families do not wear any footwear. It can cause deformation of the feet and also the fingers in the hands. The homes and yards of the two families were sprayed with disinfectant again and the children were give soap and solutions to wash their hands and feet with three times daily over the coming month. The children concerned do not wear shoes.
- At the beginning of the six week visit in Jan/Feb and due to the departure of Mwima John Kennedy, reorganisation of the charity for the remaining three years took place with each family being asked to re-register and they were photographed over a two-day period. Some new deserving families were accepted.
- During the Jan/Feb visit Ursula and Harry continued to teach the children to read English using Phonics as part of the Literacy 1 Project which is funded by a €10,000 Grant from ElectricAid ,an Irish Charity.
- 22 Boxes each containing 20 kg of reading books, Lego, and jigsaws were posted out in advance. These materials were distributed and used during the Classes. Two School Libraries were established and stocked with English Readers donated by schools in Ireland as well 24 copies of each of 46 titles of a newly published African Reading Scheme. The Children enjoyed these books about African topics.
- Solar Panel and Battery Packs were given to 10 families so that children would have light for doing homework. The packs have 4 leads for light bulbs as well as an inbuilt radio and phone charging sockets.
- A new Memorandum of Agreement was signed with the Primary School Directors which covered the services and their costs along with terms and conditions to cover the remaining three years of the project.
- The Trustees would deal directly with the Schools to make the termly payments for the students.

## **Objectives and Activities of Opportunity Knox Charity.**

(This is an extract from our Constitution and Agreed Memorandum of understanding.)

### **Main Object:**

The main object for which the body is established is the promotion of education at primary, secondary and college level for the children from poor families in defined areas in Uganda and in the State of Tripura in North East India. The Trustees will decide on the families and children to be helped as a result of meeting the family and the children and assessing their level of poverty and need. This will be achieved through the payment of education fees for the children as well as providing other supports in terms of food, clothing and bedding, for the families of these children where needed so as to enable them to benefit to the maximum amount from their schooling. This will be further advanced through the provision of scholastic materials to the children as well as education resources and facilities to the schools (not funded by the local authorities) that these children will attend.

The provision of resources and community facilities that will enhance the lives of children and their families in their surrounding community will also be provided for the public benefit where resources are available to the body to fund them. The education of all girls and all boys within each family being helped to the end of high school level will be a priority of the body. All administration costs for the body as well as all personal expenses incurred by the trustees will be covered by the trustees donating at least the equivalent amount to the body. This means that 100% of public donations will go directly to paying school fees and purchasing goods etc that fulfil the objects of the company.

### **Subsidiary Objects:**

As objects incidental and ancillary to the attainment of the Main Object, the Company shall have the following subsidiary objects:

1. Pay School Fees, at Primary, Secondary and College level, which includes a daily meal, scholastic materials and a school uniform, for children from poor families.
2. Pay for mattresses, pillows and blankets for these same children so that they will be best able to concentrate and learn while at school and where necessary to provide basic kitchen furniture as well as food for breakfast for those children whose family does not have the financial resources to provide.
3. Pay for mattresses and blankets for other poor children and their families in the same community where our resources do not allow us to pay their school fees and other needs outlined in (1) above
4. Provide educational resources to school management, teachers and school-going children. The educational resources will include stationary and basic writing and mathematical equipment along with other resources that will enable the school and their pupils to implement the school's curriculum.
5. Pay for small scale projects, such as playgrounds, meeting rooms, re-thatching of mud huts etc that will be for the public benefit of all members of the local community in areas which we support.
6. The body's resources will initially be concentrated in small rural communities in Uganda and in India which will be visited by the Trustees on a yearly basis. In Uganda it is Tiira Village, Busia, and Eastern Uganda. In India it is the Village of Bodhjunnagar, West Tripura State, and North East India.



**What a great day! Marie Whelan of Lower Kilmacow organised a Garden Plant Sale and a Bring and Buy Cake Sale and a Monster Raffle. It raised €2605 on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2021.**





The two top photos show some of the mothers of our Opportunity Knox children who got a 50kg bag of Maize flour in March 2020 and again in June 2021 to help feed their families during the first month of each lockdown. The lower photo shows the two boys and two girls from Class Primary 7, Tiira Super Standard School who earned their Primary Certificate in March 2021. The 4<sup>th</sup> photograph shows a boy wearing his new uniform on his first day attending Tiira Secondary School on February 3rd 2020. Tiira Village can be seen in the background behind the boy. This is the main street of the village. Our families live in their mud huts hidden behind both sides of the main street. Some huts have a small plot of land.