



**OPPORTUNITY KNOX CHARITY CLG**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2022 - 2023**

**Charity Number (RCN): 20106164**

**Charity Revenue Number: (CHY): 21754**

**Company No: 574339**

## Activities of Opportunity Knox Charity CLG 2022-2023

■ Trustees Harry and Ursula Knox made two visits to Uganda, the first visit was in June 2022 and the second visit was in February 2023. Opportunity Knox Charity was fully operational for the whole of the 12 months from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2023 in Tiira Village, Busia Town, Eastern Uganda.

■ The activities covered by this Annual Report consist mainly of ensuring that all the children we support had all their school fees paid for them along with a porridge lunch. Those who needed new uniforms were provided for them by local seamstresses from the village, selected by the preferences of the School Principals. The children were provided with copy books and pens and pencils to last them for each term.

■ Some boys attending Secondary school in Busia rather than the Tiira Secondary School were provided with second-hand bicycles and also had dictionaries and calculators purchased for them.

■ Wilson Bulwa accompanied Harry and Ursula Knox on their visit to Tiira Village Schools during the second week of Term 1 and second week of Term 2. He meets with the Parents, the Students, the school Principals and Bursars each term. He speaks the local language and he translates messages from the visiting Trustees during the meetings convened for Parents on week 1 of each visit as well as on the final Saturday of each visit. While all school personnel speak fluent English, the vast majority of the Parents speak the local language. The children in the 3 primary schools we use are taught in English from Baby Infants all the way up to the Primary Certificate exam when in Primary 7 Class. English is the spoken language of all teachers and students in the Secondary Schools.

■ Wilson 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 of them. He has a very relaxed and sensitive approach and his chats bring improved behaviour from the Children.

■ Wilson carries out two further visits each term to call the roll and monitor the attendance of each child and checks the roll books to see that all of our registered children are currently attending school regularly.

■ Since the end of the Covid lockdowns and resumption of normal School openings, there has been reluctance by some boys, at Primary level to obey their mother and attend school regularly, particularly if they are the eldest boy in the family. There were no online lessons arranged during lockdowns for Tiira because there is no electricity and no computer, tablets or smartphones to facilitate online learning.

■ Often this refusal to attend school is the lure of making some money from helping with the mining for gold. This was probably not helped by children hanging around during the lockdowns and helping in the mines. The area is too remote for the implementation of the lockdown rule. If you walk within a half-mile radius of the centre of the village you cannot help but hear the constant evidence of several mining operations from the constant noise of pounding of ore mined being ground into fine powder and also the sound of the powder being riddled and cleaned and then being washed in basins of water which have some Mercury added to it for the gold to be attracted to it and cling on to. Many of these boys were already finding school difficult and were experiencing failure in primary school anyway.

■ So we have relented in insisting that all the children in the family have to attend school until they are 16 years of age. It is difficult for a mother who must leave home at 7.00 a.m. to start digging in the fields to keep tabs on which of their children will later decide to attend school or not when she is already at work.

■ There has been no such problem with the boys and girls in Secondary school because they were committed to attending their secondary schools since before the onset of Covid and had been taught for two summer holidays. Some girls have become pregnant but we managed to have them to continue attending school.

■ Wilson met with the parents and translated and delivered them our personal message which gives them real hope for their children's future and told them that we are going to continue supporting them up until December 2024. He meets the students along with their parents in Term 3 when the Trustees are not visiting so as to motivate them to have regular attendance and to give their commitment to study well and make the most of their sponsorship by the charity.

■ The parents enjoy hearing the Trustees words of encouragement each time they 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. Getting a bag containing clothes, books, soap and packets of biscuits always ensures the whole family attends for that critical Saturday meeting each term.

■ Wilson meets with the Principals and Bursars at the beginning of each term to deal with administrative matters including paying school fees each term.

■ Wilson deals with any existing problems and is able to foresee any new obstacles that might arise during each term. He is also in regular phone contact with the schools throughout the school term. Harry is also in contact with the Principals by WhatsApp texts to reinforce Wilson's messages with the Principals.

■ Wilson hires a car when the Trustees visit and he drives them from Entebbe Airport to Busia Town where they stay in Jireh Hotel for the duration of their visit.

■ During the February 2023 visit over 1,000 Ugandan Readers were given to all primary school children. They received 6 books in total. Two were at the reading level of their exiting primary class level and two from the class immediately below that class level and two more books for the next class level. For example, a student currently in Primary 4 Class got 2 books for Primary 3, 4, and 5 classes. This catered for those who might be weak readers as well as those at the normal level and also to motivate those who excel at reading. All 6 readers will be mastered and enjoyed before they complete their Primary Certificate exam.

■ During February 2023 we enrolled 12 students in Lumino Polytechnic to follow Vocational Skills courses. That school provides a 9 month course for those who were unable to pass the Primary Certificate exam and we had 3 students in that category who wanted to grasp an opportunity that they could never afford. Then there is a government recognised 3-year Certificate course for those who passed the Primary Certificate and may even have attended secondary school for a year or two. There is also a 2-year Diploma for those who completed and passed their Senior 4 examination. These three-year and two-year courses provide qualifications in Building, Carpentry, Electrical, Welding, Dressmaking and Hairdressing. No matter what level of academic education a student has achieved, all will need some practical skills for which they can use to earn money. The courses for motor mechanics proved very popular with the boys. Hairdressing and tailoring proved popular with the boys. We hope to provide sponsorship for these courses again in 2024.

■ Opportunity Knox is a "no overheads" charity. This means the Trustees pay for all of their own travel and accommodation expenses as well as for all administration costs at home or abroad. The Trustees make a considerable amount of their own money to cover all of their own travel and subsistence and any other overhead expenses. They also pay all of Wilson's expenses each time he visits the schools on his own.

■ As is the same for all charities, for donations to the Charity of 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 €450 will be paid back to the Charity for a donation of €1000 by one person. This brings in an extra yearly sum of between €6000 and €8000 to the finances.

■ As will be seen in the Accounts for 2022-2023, as of the 31st March 2023 there was a balance of over €3,017.43 of Trustee Donations in the OK bank account. A further donation of €7,500 will be made by the Trustees before the end of December 2023 and with the reimbursement of €3,000 on this donation by the Revenue Commissioners under the Charitable Donations Act, this will ensure that €13,500 of Trustee funds will be there to cover all overheads from April 2023 to March 2024. Further Trustee donation will be made in 2024.



■ A Chy3 form has merely 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 and these forms have been completed by the relevant donors and kept on file for inspection if request by Revenue Commissioners.

■ The end-date for the project was originally set for March 31<sup>st</sup> 2023 at the outset of the founding of the Charity in 2016. However, due to the time lost in school by the children due to the lockdowns during the pandemic, the Trustees have decided to extend the programme to cover the full 2023 and 2024 school years. Effectively the assistance to the students will end as of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2024.

■ 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 originally from the Boystown Orphanage in Bodhjunnagar, West Tripura State. It resulted from when the Trustees volunteered there in July 2016. In recent years the orphanage has closed. So now we sponsor one male student, whose parents died when he was 3 years, and who is now aged 22 years, on a Course for General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) Diploma and a one girl, aged 19 years who has just finished her Secondary education and may decide to pursue the GNM Diploma too.

■ The level of funds available to spend on the charity activities is vital to the survival of the Charity. The 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 2022. The knowledge that all overhead expenses are paid by the Trustees along with all administration expenses in Ireland, Uganda and India is a major factor in the decision by members of the public to donate to the Charity.

■ All of the Public Donations are used to pay for all expenses incurred by supporting the education costs of the children. This includes school fees and lunches, school uniforms and copy books and pens and other school requirements. It sometimes involves paying small amounts for medical problems that we become aware of by the children and their parents while we are visiting Tiira village. In a very small number of situations we provide a 50kg of rice flour where the families are unable to feed themselves on a temporary basis due to sickness.

■ Public Donations have come back up to the level that existed pre Covid Pandemic. We circulated all donors and supporters in February 2022 telling them that children were back in school and that the charity was now paying education fees etc. and inviting those who could afford it to renew their donations.

■ Locally, we had two fundraising events during the summer of 2022. Breda and Brendan Knox, 2 Ormonde Crescent opened their Award-winning urban garden to members of the public on a Saturday at the end of June. Apart from viewing the Garden the visitors 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 tea/coffee while sampling some of Breda’s home-baked confectionary. Breda has done the same for the past six years and has generated a sizeable amount of income for Opportunity Knox from the €5 entry fee as well as from the sale of her plants. Members of the various local Gardening Clubs have been great supporters of the event as well as friends from Kilmacow and other areas and have donated considerable more than the €5 entry fee.

■ Another great supporter of the Charity is Marie Ahearn from Lower Kilmacow. Previously she has donated funds which resulted from coordinating the sale and exchange of school uniforms for the local national schools. In June 2021 Marie organised a Flowering Plant Sale along with a bring-and-buy cake sale and monster raffle. This year she conducted plant sale from her own home. Another supporter, Margaret McGuire organised a small social event involving her friends to raise funds for the Charity. The local ICA club also held a successful bring and buy sale at one of their meeting sand donated the funds raised to the Charity. Some groups from the USA have supported too. By and large it is our fellow parishioners in Kilmacow who contribute to the public donations each year.

■ All of the bulleted points above are covered in more depth in the body of this Annual Report and have photographs showing the various activities we were involved in as well as photos the families we support.

## **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.

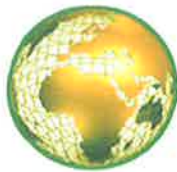
The provision of resources and community facilities that will enhance the lives of children and their families in their surrounding community will also be provided for the public benefit where resources are available to the body to fund them. The education of all girls and all boys within each family 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.





# Opportunity Knox

Company Registration Number (CRO): 574339

Tax Registration Number: 03453817 KH

Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20106164

Revenue Charity Number: (CHY): 21754

IBAN: IE67 BOFI 906195 62007312

**Opportunity Knox Charity," Cluain Caoin", Lower Kilmacow, via Waterford, Co. Kilkenny, X91 E37V**

## Annual Report covering the period April 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2023.

This Report is compiled for the general public and all those who have donated to the Charity or who have supported the Charity in other ways such as donating ladies clothes, children's and teenagers clothes including jerseys, soft toys, games and puzzles as well as fundraising events.. The purpose is to keep all informed on how difficult life is in deprived regions of the World, especially in Tiira Village, Busia, Uganda where many of the rural families there endure grinding poverty. The Repor is not to be regarded as one seeking a donation from you. Thankfully, even though we have not had to ask anyone directly for donations since we started on this journey 7 years ago, we have fulfilled our vision for OK. This in itself is a miracle. Your generosity knows no bounds.

### Introduction

- For Term 1 and Term 3 of the 2022 school-year, when we did not visit Uganda we depended on the loyal service of Wilson Bulwa, a Ugandan Volunteer from Kampala who has looked after us in so many ways since 2017. When we visit Wilson collects us at Entebbe Airport in a hired car, drives us to our Guest House in Busia which is a border town between Uganda and Kenya and around 200 kms from Entebbe. It is a long and hazardous journey taken on very poor roads filled with lots of traffic going in both directions. It involves around 6 hours of travel. Tiira Village, where we support children and families who endure grinding poverty is about 6 kilometres away.



Leaving from Dublin in February 2023



Greeted by Wilson in Entebbe May 2022



Rental already full of books and solar kits



Arrival home via Amsterdam Airport

For Term 2 2022 and Term 1 2023 Ursula and I travelled to Uganda and accompanied Wilson to Tiira Village. The visits were from May 13<sup>th</sup> until May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022 and February 9<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> 2023. The May 2022 visit was an important visit because we hadn't met and talked with the Children, Parents, and School Directors since our previous 6 week visit that ended in February 2020. The on-and-off lockdowns due to Covid-19 were the reason we hadn't visited until May 2022. We taught the Children using Phonics during their summer holidays in 2019 and 2020. Early December to early February is the time of their Summer Holidays. We purchased 150 Jolly Phonics Pupils Book 1 along with the Jolly Phonics Teachers Manual and other teaching materials to use in in the January 2019 classes. During those classes, for both 2019 and 2020 we introduced them to the wonderful world of beautifully illustrated English Readers suitable for children from Infants to fourth class.





We had brought out several thousand English Readers during 2019 and 2020 that were no longer needed by Schools in Ireland who were delighted that we could give them a new life. In 2020 we purchased over 2,000 Ugandan Readers, which had only been launched for African children in late 2019. We gave 2 Ugandan books of their choice along with 2 Irish used Readers to each of the children when the classes were over. Additionally, we setup Libraries in 2 of the Primary Schools giving those 24 copies of 40 different Ugandan Readers along with over 1500 used Irish Readers. During our May 2022 visit we gave 6 Readers to each Child, 2 appropriate for the class they were in and two for the level below and 2 for the level above i.e. for a child in Primary 2 they got 2 for Primary Level 1, 2 for Primary Level 2 and 2 for Primary Level 3.



So over 1000 books were distributed on the last day of our visit in May 2022 when each family attended to be photographed individually and to discuss any issues or queries they had. Obviously, the children prefer the Ugandan Readers because they can easily identify with the culture and characters featured in each Ugandan book. For Primary 4 level there were 20 different Titles, so when they had mastered their own two level 4 books, the individual child could swap them for two different level 4 books with a classmate and if they were really keen readers they could master all of the 20 level 4 readers. There are several thousand colourful and illustrated books now in family homes and in Primary schools in Tiira Village where there were none prior to that. The purchase and supply of all of these materials was funded by a €10,000 grant from the Electric Aid Charity, a charity supported by ESB's workers and the grant was to cover a five-year period 2018 to 2023.

When Wilson accompanies us on our visits he takes us to Tiara Village each day where he interprets for us with Parents, Children and School Directors and Bursars. The format for all our visits is roughly as follows:

- Schools are visited on a day they are not expecting us and the attendance of our sponsored children is checked.
- The whereabouts of a small number of absentees is questioned. They are monitored again during our visit.
- Wilson also makes two further unannounced visits in each term to monitor attendances.
- Poor attenders are told that they will not be registered for the next term if their attendance does not reach 80%.
- The official school rolls are provided to check overall attendance.



The vast majority of all of our sponsored children have a 100% attendance record. The problem for some families is that the mother leaves before 7.00 a.m. to go digging in the fields for her employer until mid-day and while she wakes the children for school, she cannot rely fully on her children to attend school or to attend on time. In some cases the motivation to attend is the thought of getting a mug of porridge at the 10.00 am morning break. Most will be lucky if they get another cooked meal at home that day.

We meet each of the 3 Primary School Principals several times throughout our visit confirming the names of those we are sponsoring and agreeing the fees and other payments such as for porridge lunches, new uniforms etc. We pay the agreed amount for the term before our visit ends. We converse in English with the Principals. Wilson distributes the exercise copies and pens and pencils needed by the children for the term. We are in regular contact with our schools directly via WhatsApp or indirectly through communication via Wilson, as deemed appropriate.



We spend another day visiting each of the four secondary schools where the children are attending and visit the Bursar's Office to see what children have enrolled for the term who are sponsored by Opportunity Knox. We ask to see our students and we find out if they have any difficulties that we can help with. This usually involves buying a new uniform or shoes or some particular books that are needed for some subjects or classes. Sometimes the students have decided to attend a school which is several miles away from their home and they may require their bike to be replaced or to be repaired. They have long trips on busy and dangerous roads especially if it rains. On longer visits we will visit the secondary schools for a second time to check that the students are attending and we meet the Principal or Deputy Principal if there are any difficulties with their attendance and studies that need to be discussed. At the beginning of each school year we give all of our students attending secondary school a set of 12 Hard-backed copies of 144 pages suitable for taking notes in each of the 12 subject areas that they attend for classes. They also get a variety of pens and pencils and maths sets, calculator, and dictionaries if requested.



Tiira Secondary School Students receive uniforms and copies



Tiira Super Standard NS with uniforms and copies



Riverside High School getting books

We usually meet the Parents of all of the Children on a Wednesday evening of the first week of our visit and we tell them what areas we will be addressing during our visit. We ask their help in motivating their children to attend school every day and to do their homework at night. The parents know that education is the key to a more fulfilled life and they have high hopes for the lives of their children who will be able to read, write, and speak in English, skills that they as parents never had. We explain how they can carry out their duties and responsibilities that they agreed to do when they were accepted into our programme. They are always delighted to see us and they are overwhelmed by the generosity of our donors here in Ireland and always let us know how grateful they are that people so far away from them in Ireland take such an interest in their own welfare and that of their children.



Ursula meeting with a group parents allows us to show our empathy to their circumstances and to emphasise that they are being great parents to their children

Wilson then leaves for home that evening after meeting the parents and interpreting for us. He returns back to us for the last day of our visit which is often a Saturday. This ends the two, three, or in two cases a six weeks visit.

### Home to Home Visits

This all depends on the length of the visit. In between times we travel to the village by taxi daily and visit the primary schools on foot in the Village and chat with the teachers and with the children. We solve any problems that there might be and we also visit some of the homes after school just to keep in touch with the family situation and see what the greatest need is that we can help with. In most cases there is nothing more to be done in the homes and the mothers are just so glad we called to visit them. All the families received mattresses and blankets early on in the project years of 2016 and 2017 when they were selected using our criteria. .

When we visit the home they delight in showing us the children's end of term reports and tests they have taken, which they keep and guard carefully under their own mattress. In other cases we learn of the need to pay for them to take a sick child or a child with a burn or other sore that clearly needs to be treated medically at a village clinic. We accompany the mother and child to the clinic which is run by a nurse and we pay for whatever treatment that is given as well as any follow-up treatment that is needed. In some cases we may learn from the mother, or from her neighbours, of extreme poverty where the children are literally hungry every day or of a mother not being able to work every day due to being HIV Positive. We arrange for them to pick up a 50kg bag of Maize Flour at a shop in the village, and with careful management this can last them for 6 to 8 weeks. If you compare the original photo that you received of a child or family at the beginning of the project and compare it to the photos from February 2023 you can clearly see how the children all look healthier and they and their parents do not appear as dejected and dispirited as they did back when they were first selected for sponsorship

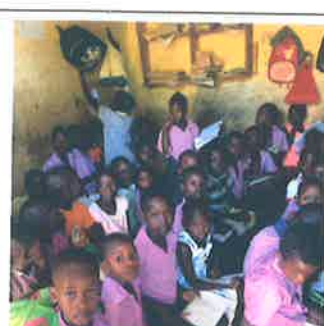




Children in Tiira Super Standard N.S. – note the standard of construction of the rooms



Children in Tiira Parents N.S.



Children in Providence Academy

### Life in Tiira revolves around Artisanal Gold-mining

None of the children we sponsor will, as far as we are aware or can predict with any certainty, ever attend third level studies due to the costs involved. Perhaps there is a slight chance of a scholarship for a bright and diligent student who is academic. Their parents cannot afford the costs unless they strike Gold. That is a possibility, though very rare, because gold mining is big business in Tiira Village, but very few locals benefit from it. You may want to Google “Gold mining in Tiira and Busia” and you will find lots of information about how the lives of locals are lost due to accidents in Official as well as in small Artisanal gold mines. The bosses and middle men cheat the local who work long hours in the hope of striking it rich. It is very attractive to teenage boys and young men, but it requires a lot of effort and often no return or maybe becoming disabled due to accidents in the mines. Some families before our arrival had struck gold and their first task is to replace their mud hut with a properly built concrete home just like a cottage built in Ireland in the 1920/30s in Ireland. But they usually fall back into poverty if they aren’t lucky again. There are two families in that situation being sponsored by Opportunity Knox.



Harry visits a family at home checking for their needs



Checking the needs of students at Busia Sec. School



Students from Providence Academy getting copies

So no matter how much Primary or Secondary school classes are passed, the majority will need to learn a skill that they can use to earn some income in their adult lives. There are no local jobs available such factory jobs in these rural communities, A student to passing their Primary Certificate is a noteworthy accomplishment.. This is decided by a Government Examination at the end of Primary 7 class. To reach that level and to sit for that examination a child has to pass the end of year examination for each of the classes that lead to Primary Class 7 i.e. you cannot enter Class 7 unless you pass the exam at the end of Class 6 and so on right down through the Primary School. Additionally, a child is not allowed advance to the next class unless the family have cleared all of their debts for that child to the School. They will not receive their end of term report from the school unless they have paid all their school fees, development fees, copy books etc.

### Increase in the Numbers attending Secondary School

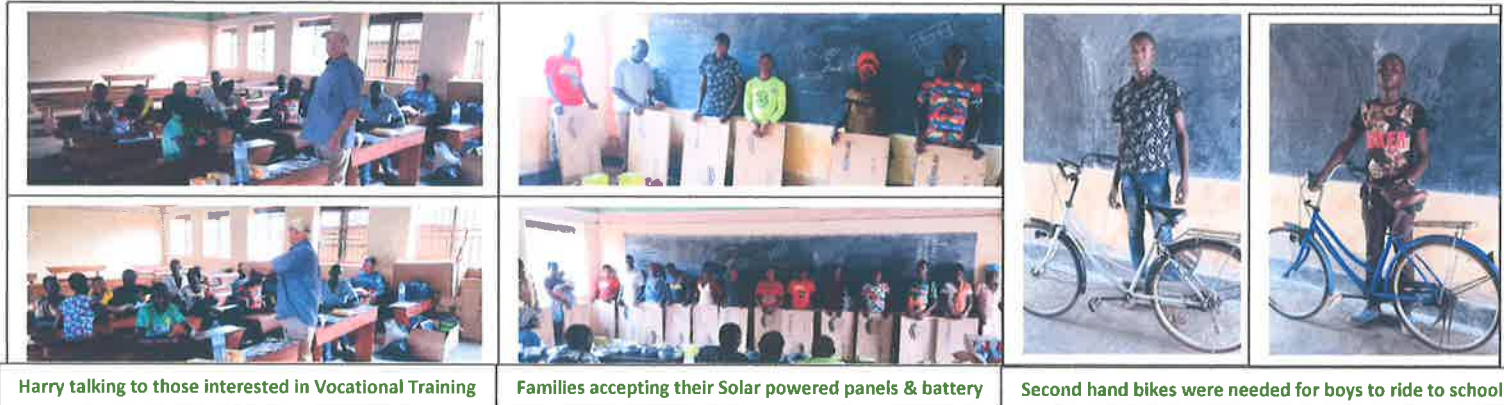
Through your sponsorship many of the students, who wouldn’t otherwise have done so, have advanced class by class without financial worries. Many have moved up into Secondary School and six students have passed the Senior 4 Certificate Examination which is a Government Examination that can be taken at the end of 4 successful years in Secondary school. This is a major achievement for the students. Most of their parents are illiterate and might not have advanced even as far as Primary 2 class. Four of these students have left school at that point and two are now in Senior 5 Class. The final government examination at secondary is completed by Senior 6 students. If you don’t pass your Primary Certificate you cannot attend secondary school and even if they do pass it, they may not be accepted if they are considered academically weak.

### New Development - Students attending Vocational Skills Training

We have been looking for Vocational Skills training for some of our students since 2020. The students suitable for Vocational Skills training can be divided into roughly 3 groups: 1. those who didn’t get their Primary Certificate, 2. those who have got their Primary Certificate and may have attended secondary school (or not) for a couple of years, and 3. those who have sat and passed the Senior 4 Certificate examination. Such Vocational skill training is expensive and there are private schools providing this training. The cost is very high and in many provided institutions the students don’t get government recognised certificates or diplomas and the training is questionable!



We placed 5 students in a Charity sponsored Private Vocational school in February 2020. 5 students had only completed six weeks there before the first Lockdown took place in April 2020. They recommenced in April 2021 but the students were not happy with the training they were getting there and did not want to waste our funds and opted to leave the school after five weeks had passed. We had made their views known and had been told things would improve, but they didn't. Apart from the training, the students complained they were often hungry. Things must have been bad because these children were from poor families and would have been used to hunger at home.



Harry talking to those interested in Vocational Training

Families accepting their Solar powered panels & battery

Second hand bikes were needed for boys to ride to school

For the past year have been researching to see where a government back training facility is located. We found one that is located about 20 kms from Tiira Village and we went to inspect the training facilities during our last visit. We met the various government trained instructors working in each department and the factors that helped us decide to send some students there were: the practical resources available in each workshop, the instructors who, despite being on official holidays, were there preparing their lesson plans for their incoming classes, and the fact that most courses lead to a government recognised qualification. It was estimated that there would be between 300 and 400 students attending for this school year. The obstacles for Opportunity Knox are the scale of the costs involved. Because of the distances involved all of our students would have to board there and so there are boarding fees and then there are fees for the food provided, there are the instruction fees, basic tools for the trade selected, and then because our students are from such poor families, a mattress, a blanket, a pillow, a pair of bed sheets for the bed, a mosquito net, a lockable metal box to keep all their personal possessions. Then the institute requires them to have overalls, safety boots and hard hats, folders, books. Many other bits and pieces had to be purchased for each student as a personal learning tool.



Some of the Apprenticeship Workshops at the Lumino Polytechnic: Tailoring Room, Building Construction Room, and Mechanics Store room and Mechanics Workshop

We had given students money to get a motor bike taxi to the Polytechnic for the day of admissions, pay for their admission form in order to be considered for a place. We gave them some money for food and then the return journey to home. There was the problem that the admission day was the week after we had returned home and we took a chance by giving each of those who said they were interested in seeking admission a 50,000 UGX note. This sounds like a lot of money, it is to the boys and girls involved, but in reality it is only be about €15. All of those that we took a leap of faith in and gave the money to went to the admission day and all were accepted.

The facility opened in the first week of March. So time was short to get everyone there and kitted out with the essentials. It was only through the truly heroic efforts by our volunteer Wilson who purchased their requirements and with cooperation from the Director of Tiira Secondary School, that they were all supplied with everything they needed and were supervised moving there and staying with them until they were settled. They are now undergoing instruction. Wilson has already been back to check how they are settling in and they are all very pleased with life there in the training centre. Boarding and living in a community like this is a new experience for them. There are many rules and regulations to make sure they carry out their duties and act responsibly.



Minibus Taxi being loaded with all the necessities for the 12 Vocational students to transport them as well as all their requirements for Lumino Polytechnic.





Vocational Students with the basic tools for their trade. Wilson briefing the students on what to expect.

Students receiving their metal boxes and basic tools.

The main courses that are offered there are in building construction, carpentry, electrical, welding, mechanics, hair styling, tailoring, secretarial, and computers. Our students have chosen Hairdressing, Tailoring, Welding, Vehicle Mechanics, Building Construction, and Electrician. Each vocational student will cost approximately €1000 per year. This includes School fees, examination fees, boarding fees, food costs, safety clothes and boots, uniform, books, cement, basic tools for the trade, mattress and blanket, bed sheets, mosquito nets, soap and towels and many smaller items. Senior 4 will have a Government-backed Diploma after 2 years, Primary 7 leavers will have a Government-backed Certificate after 3 years, and those who have not finished primary school due to lack of academic ability will complete a basic skills course for 1 year. The costs are high but having invested money in each of the student's education for five years so far, participating in the vocational training will round off their preparation for a new and better life. None of our students could ever afford to attend there without our support.

### Final Family Day for each Term

They parents and children always look forward to the last day of our visit when they will receive a bag of "essentials" put together by Ursula and that has been tailored to the needs of the individual family. Up to now we have always brought 100 kilogrammes of goods for these bags in our luggage as well as buying some goods locally. The items in our luggage are a mixture of adult, teenage, and younger children's clothes, soft toys, reading books, crayons and drawing books, soft toys, jigsaws, and games. We also buy practical items, including more second-hand clothes, in Busia to help them. This time we put a 1 kilogramme bar of sunlight washing soap, a bar of imperial leather soap for the mothers, and two packets of Bourbon biscuits for the whole family in each bag. We also gave them a box of Paracetamol tablets and a tube of ant-fungal ointment and a pair of scissors. In visits prior to Covid-19 we had posted out many 20kg boxes of donated goods by a delivery service which used to be offered by An Post. Sadly it is no longer operating since its suspension in March 2020. Those boxes of goods used to cost €80 to post. The cost with a courier service could be up to €300 per box and that would likely exceed the value of the items in the box and the time and effort collecting the goods and packaging them up securely. So we do not send boxes anymore. However, we can buy good second-hand clothes and anything else we want at very reasonable prices. It is nice and good to support the economy of the local community too.



Donated clothes and jerseys



Donated soft toys



Bourbon Biscuits



Colourful bags for the mothers



Luxury soaps for Mothers



Ugandan Readers for all ages



Some of the toys for boys and girls



Donated Scissors



Ursula is ironing



Ursula working late into the night filling the bags Arranging the bags by Family Number on the final day. Solar Panels and batteries to give light.



Each of the families is given 10 minutes on that day to meet Ursula and Harry as well Wilson who takes a photo of the family. This gives us a chance to meet each of the children, emphasise the importance of education and the need to attend school promptly each day and to give their full attention and to behave well. We get to tell them that they will benefit greatly from the gift of an education from a family in our parish of Kilmacow and other parts of Ireland. All needs of the family are listened to and responded to where appropriate. For example, on this visit money was given for flour for a family who is hungry, money to go to the Nurse's clinic for a baby who was ill. A festering sore on another child needed attention, the skin condition of a teenager also needed attention. Second-hand bicycles were requested for a long cycle to secondary school. Dictionaries and calculators needed to be bought for 3 boys in secondary school. All returned to show the receipts, the prescriptions, and the purchased bikes and books. Four months of sanitary pads were given to each girl who has her periods. We are rolling out Solar panels and battery kits to all families starting with those with children attending secondary school and high primary classes so that they can have light to study at home while doing their homework and they can listen to radio stations etc. We bring out the printed photos for the next visit. What they like about Opportunity Knox Charity is that it has a public face that they can meet with and they get an immediate response, without endless questions and forms to be filled out. They don't have to wait for months before getting a response.



Obwin Augustine is in Senior 5 in Busia Secondary School. He was in Primary 6 when we started in 2016



These are the 2 brothers mentioned just below who are in Senior 3 and 4, we will sponsor both to complete S 4



Vocational Students proudly wearing their safety hats and boots and below that 3 of them who are studying motor mechanics.



Ursula with a special needs child who is progressing through Primary School

A man in a desperate state, not part of the project, implored us to help him with the fees for two of his boys, one in Senior 3 and one in Senior 4 in Busia Secondary School where some of our sponsored children attend. We agreed to pay the fees for the boy in Senior 4 to finish at the end of this year and to pay the fees for the other son for two years until he completes his Senior 4 year. Pastress Molly who runs the guest house we stay in and helps with lots of charitable work asked us to sponsor a 12 year old girl to commence secondary school. The girl's step-father wanted to sell her off in a marriage. She had run away out to stay with a friend. Molly promised to house her in living quarters at the back of the guest house if the girl became homeless. Attending school was the only sure way to escape marriage for this 12 year old girl. We gave Molly the money to cover the fees for the 2 years we have left in Uganda. We got a neighbour of a family who are hungry to purchase and store a 50kg sack of flour and give out 1 kg. every day. These are just some of the ways we are able to help in these desperate situations through your generosity in donating to OK. Several people gave us money to help with any unanticipated needs.

Primary Schools	Pupils	Fees only per year per Child	Copies, pens per child per year
Providence Academy	76	€100	€20
Tiira Parents	31	€100	€20
Tiira Super Standard	35	€100	€20
<b>Total Primary Children</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>€100</b>	<b>€20</b>
Secondary Schools			
Riverside Secondary School	4	€200	€40
St. John's Secondary School	2	€200	€40
Busia Secondary School	5	€200	€40
Tiira Secondary School	28	€200	€40
<b>Total Secondary Children</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>€200</b>	<b>€40</b>
<b>Total Vocational Students</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>€1,000</b>	<b>included</b>
<b>Total Sponsored Students</b>	<b>193</b>		

Trustee Income vs Expenditure		
Audited Accounts	Trustee Donations	Trustee Expenditure
2016-2017	€23,437.62	€23,437.62
2017-2018	€10,000.00	€7,706.75
2018-2019	€14,386.91	€12,645.94
2019-2020	€5,017.09	€16,364.93
2020-2021	€15,359.04	€5,273.03
2021-2022	€16,327.22	€10,667.55
	<b>€84,527.88</b>	<b>€76,095.82</b>
<b>Balance 31/3/2022</b>		<b>€8,432.06</b>

Trustee Expenditure covers all "overheads" This table shows that the Trustee donations covered all overheads.



The table on the left shows the current costs of education fees as well as for copies and pens per child per year. They have increased steadily over the past 7 years, in the way costs rise in our own country. There are additional costs for replacing uniforms every couple of years. Thankfully, we have been able to cover the increases from your donations. All copies of our Yearly Annual Audited accounts from when we started in 2016 can be examined on [opportunityknox.ie/documents](https://opportunityknox.ie/documents). We are expected to provide official receipts for all donations received. Many of you don't see the need for this. There are other documents on our website that show we are meeting the code of governance stipulated by the Irish Charities Regulator. Take time to view our online openness and transparency.

The table on the right shows that up to 31/03/2022 the Trustee donations covered all "overheads" with €8,432.06 left unspent. Since then another €10,000 has been donated by the trustees to Opportunity Knox Charity.

Remember, all of the Euros you donate are used directly to pay fees and associated costs for the poorest children in Tiira Village. The Trustees pay all their own travel and accommodation expenses, as well as those for Wilson Bulwa, from the Trustees own donations to the charity. This is why we describe it as a "no overheads" Charity. None of the Euros donated by you are used for Administration or Travel and Accommodation costs of the Trustees and Wilson. This way of operating the charity has clearly appealed to so many people who support us. They know that none of their donation is used for renting office space, or paying for administrative staff in Ireland and Uganda. The Charity runs a small project in rural India and all the funds for that project are paid from the Trustees own donations too. Thank you for your continued financial support. We can see the difference that your donations are making to the families and to their children. Be assured that your money is making a real difference in easing the plight of our families and children. They are freed from the burden of finding education costs. In many cases it means children and their mothers do not have to go gold-mining in the evening and at weekends.



Harry and the Owner of the Private Tiira Secondary School



Wilson took this photo of half of the families we support at a meeting he called in January 2022

You can see all of the current families, with their original Family ID Number in the following pages. Some families have left due to various changes of circumstances in the past 7 years. In the existing families, some children have left school because they couldn't pass the class exam to move on to the next class. Some boys have gone back to gold-mining, which is often just like what we see portrayed in the old western movies. Some girls have been married off. Some of our existing girls have got pregnant but we have persuaded them to keep attending school. It is very difficult to understand the existing culture. So we respect their customs and show by our own example and behaviours and kindness that the equal treatment of women and men improves life for all.

If you want a **photograph** of one or more children that you are personally sponsoring then **send me the child ID number** you were assigned at the beginning by texting **086-6054519** giving your own name and I will take the child's photograph on my next visit in June 2023. If you would like to receive updates by WhatsApp message then please send me your mobile number again identifying yourself by name. This will be mutually helpful especially for those who do not follow us on Facebook or cannot access our website on the Internet. We are finding it difficult to make the time to give the same level of detail of children's progress as we did at the beginning. Hopefully, the newsletters give enough detail. Just compiling, printing, delivering and posting of this newsletter takes us approximately 6 weeks. Preparing for visits takes several weeks in collecting clothes and toys and then packing them into our luggage.

We have been working on this project for 7 years now and will continue working wholeheartedly on it until January 2025. In the past 7 years both of us, just like you, have aged. We are finding the air flights and road journeys more difficult, especially bringing so many heavy suitcases and lifting them on and off buses and at airports and baggage halls etc. We will travel more lightly in the future by sticking with fewer and less heavy suitcases. This Newsletter has been compiled and distributed by the Trustees using their own money.



Family 1



Family 11



Family 2



Family 12



Family 3



Family 14



Family 4



Family 15



Family 10



Family 16







Family 17



Family 23



Family 18



Family 24



Family 19



Family 25



Family 20



Family 27



Family 22



Family 28



Family 29



Family 41



Family 30



Family 42



Family 33



Family 44



Family 35



Family 45



Family 40



Family 46







Family 47



Family 54



Family 48



Family 60



Family 49



Family 61



Family 50



Family 62



Family 52



Family 65



Family 5



Family 21



Family 26



Family 39



Family 43



Family 58



Family 59



Family 64



Family 66



Family 68



Family 73



Vocational student with metal box tools and blanket







Two girls from the guesthouse displaying some of the women's dresses we brought on the February 2023 visit.



This is a photograph from our first visit in April 2016. We were very popular with the children on account of having balloons.

