

'Opportunity Knox', which was founded by Harry and Ursula Knox, is continuing to have a hugely positive impact in an African village.



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reaching the maximum number of 220 children that they can realistically manage, they have finished expanding.

However, Harry and Ursula say they will always be flexible enough to take on board a mother who seeks support and who they believe is in a genuinely desperate situation.

During their recent trip, they taught phonics to children in Primary 3 to Primary 7 classes along with those in Secondary classes, and introduced them to a wide variety of books.

"We knew from some brief testing on our last visit in June 2018 that even the Secondary students needed to improve their reading skills if they wanted to benefit to the fullest extent from their classes," explained Harry.

To assist their teaching duties, they teamed up with student leaders who had an

understanding of English.

During the weekends, Harry and Ursula visited some of the families they have supported.

"We were delighted to see and hear how their lives had changed for the better since commencement of support by the Opportunity Knox Charity," explained Harry.

"They expressed gratitude to the people from half-way around the world who had come and taken an interest in their lives and gave them and their children hope where previously there was none. We tell them about our village and how people have rallied to their plight."

During their time in Uganda, a range of different issues emerged which Harry and Ursula have tried to address.

"One girl who was at the classes came in early to ask if we would buy her and her brothers and sisters shoes," explained

Ursula pictured with Ugandan children.



A Ugandan student (and Kilkenny fan!) pictured with a drawing.

Harry.

"We agreed to do that and in the process discovered that four of the seven children showed signs of 'Jiggers' in their feet. This is a parasite that gets into the feet and hands by burrowing through the soft tissues around the nails. It can cause deformation of the toes and fingers if neglected. This is the fourth family we support that has been discovered to have 'Jiggers'. It results from very poor hygiene and is extremely difficult to treat and to eradicate. All of the interior of the house and its contents as well as the outside of the walls and the yard need to be sprayed with a chemical to eradicate it from the environment. Then the children and adults have to be treated continuously for several weeks with the correct lotions and creams until all signs of it have disappeared."

In addition to providing school fees and basic necessities, Harry and Ursula have also provided recreational activities for the children after being

shocked by how little they had to play with.

'Opportunity Knox' has also been responsible for developing a brightly coloured playground in the village which is open to all children to use.

Ursula, a big soccer fan, enjoyed speaking with the children about different teams and players.

Harry provided the children with six individual skipping ropes and three long ropes that would allow several to skip together at the same time.

Although they thought it might be difficult to generate interest in the activity among the boys, the activity became hugely popular after one of the older boys gave a brilliant display of skipping.

"Before we knew it practically all of the boys were skipping like mad. Soon we had to buy extra lengths of rope and make nine additional ropes," explained Harry.

Harry and Ursula have obtained great satisfaction from seeing the improvements in the village and how simple measures are having such hugely positive impacts.

However, some challenges remain.

Unfortunately, they say women are still very subservient to men.

Ensuring that girls remain in education and are treated equally is a struggle.

"It's stunning how quiet they are in the company of men," says Ursula.

"We hope to encourage them to stay in school and to have the knowledge and the ability to speak up so they can be treated as equals."

Another obstacle to keeping girls in education is the onset of menstruation.

"This is exacerbated by the lack of privacy in the latrines, as well as the shame the girl feels when they soil their uniform," explained Ursula.

"Women in rural areas use homemade pads that are ineffective. We were faced with such a situation when we visited this time. A girl from one of our supported families was refusing to go back to school because of such an 'accident' happening to her in November. We called a meeting of mothers and their daughters and Harry explained the problem and how

the mothers need to help their daughters."

They proposed a solution and, as a result and with the help of Auma Hellen, wife of Wmima John Kennedy, (both Uganda volunteers), they set up a system of a supply of commercial sanitary pads that can be picked up once a month by each girl from Hellen so that the girl has a supply of pads to use when her next period begins.

"A pack of a well-known brand cost 70 cents for a month's supply. The mothers and the girls couldn't believe that such a product existed. In any event they would not be able to afford to buy them even if they had known. Before we departed a total of 37 girls had registered and collected their monthly supply. Every extra year that a girl stays on in education delays her marriage by two years. So instead of 12 and 13 year old girls leaving school with little control of their lives, we hope to have girls of 18 to 20 years old leaving education. This will provide girls with many more options and enable them to shape their future lives."

Ensuring boys remain in school for as long as possible is also a challenge as the proximity of lucrative gold mines is an attraction.

Despite these challenges, Harry and Ursula say all in the village are very much aware of the importance of education.

Ursula recalls the teaching methods of her mother, who taught in Strangsmills NS, and the wise words which she often espoused.

"I remember her saying 'boys and girls many of you will have to emigrate. If you can't read or write you'll be fooled, if you can't add, subtract, multiply, divide money you'll be robbed'. She had this vision, knowing what the world was like and knowing how they might suffer if they didn't have basic skills. When I went out to Uganda and met the children, it's like her voice came across the miles."

Both Harry and Ursula are grateful to all who have supported 'Opportunity Knox' and look forward to enjoying continued support into the future.

For more information on 'Opportunity Knox' visit www.opportunityknox.ie or their Facebook page.

Ursula with local women in Tiira.



Harry with a local family.

