



## Account of our most recent trip to Tiira Village, Busia, in Eastern Uganda from January 1st to January 27th 2019.

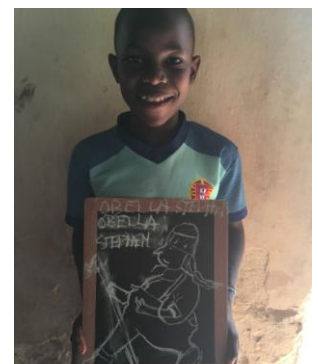
This visit had a different focus than previous visits. We are finished expanding as we have reached the maximum number of 220 children that we can realistically manage. However, we will always be flexible enough to take onboard a mother who seeks support and who we believe is in a genuinely desperate situation. On this visit we would be helping a selection of the children by teaching them Phonics. This would help the children who would range from 10 yrs to 20 yrs to become better readers.



For those of you who are new donors and sponsors, we will give you a quick synopsis of our existence to date. We visited Tiira village as one of several sites we visited on a trip to Uganda with World vision back in October 2015. We were appalled at the levels of poverty in the village. Due to the eagerness of Wmima John Kennedy who we met there and who spoke to us and who had sent Harry a FB friend request by the time we arrived home, the idea of a charity and what it would do was hatched out over 3months of texting back and forth. John had educated us on the poor circumstances of the people there and had told us that while they were all poor there, 3 categories of poverty exist there, namely poor; poorer, and poorest of the poor. It is the poorest of the poor we set out to help. Previously we provided the children with mattresses and blanket. They all sleep together on the hard floor of their mud huts.



We arrived in Entebbe Airport at 1.00 p.m. on January 1st. We were met by Wilson Bulwa who acts as an advisor to us. He had hired a car to bring us from there to Busia. This is the closest town to Tiira village and we were staying in Jireh Guesthouse. We leave at 8.00 a.m. with a trusted driver that we know and we return at 5.30 p.m. We never move outside the courtyard of the hotel once we return home. If we ventured out alone and unaccompanied by a Uganda we would likely be a target for robbery or even kidnap.

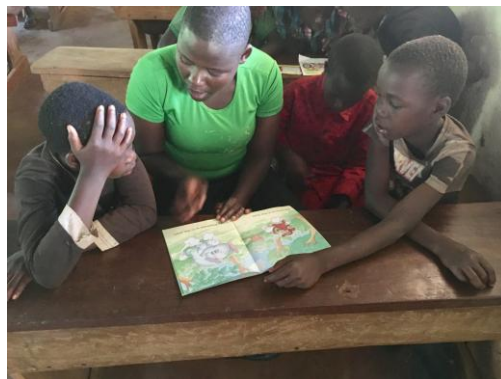




We started to work on the next day. First we visited various offices of police and administrative offices of the local county to let them know of our visit and tell them what we would be doing. Our volunteer John Kennedy believes it important to check in with these various officials, so that they will know we are in their country. They would know the purpose and length of our visit. This would prove helpful if we were ever the subject of a crime there while in Uganda.



We met with the mothers and/or fathers of the children that afternoon to explain what we hoped to achieve on this visit. We were going to take children from Primary 3 classes upwards along with those in Secondary classes and using the resources we had brought with us to teach Phonics and allow them to experience a wide variety of books (450). We taught groups that had children from around 10 years up to 20 years. We knew from some brief testing on our 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.



There were 140 children involved in Primary 3 to Secondary 3 classes so we would be unable to accommodate all of those. We asked parents to allow their children make up their own minds if they wanted to attend school for 3 hours a day for 3 weeks. We told them we didn't intend using corporal punishment which is the norm in many of the schools. We didn't want unhappy children disturbing the work in class. We also didn't know the disposition of Ugandan children. They were asked to encourage their children to attend, but they were not to force them to attend.

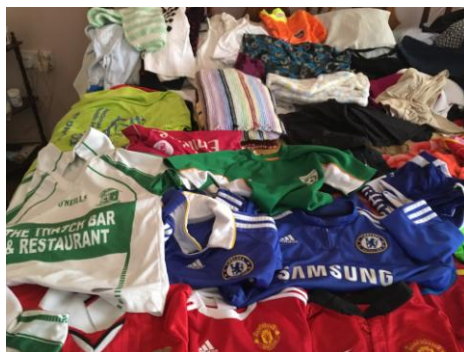




Those interested children were asked to report to the Office the next morning and to register themselves. Not all the children from each family came and that meant that there was the freedom not to participate. As a result, we registered 90 children and of these there were 12 senior boys and girls from Secondary classes which we recruited to be student-leaders who would attend at both the 9.00 a.m. – 12.00 p.m. class and the 1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m. class. We provided a small financial incentive along with the promise of them getting first choice on choosing their favourite books at the end of the course from the 450 books we had posted out in advance for use at the classes. But the real benefit was the improvement in their fluency.



On the next day we met with the 12 student-leaders and spent a couple of hours interacting with them, so that they could get used to our accents in English and that we could understand their responses. We knew from our last visit that one of them told Wilson that they could speak and understand English but that he could understand our English. We would be depending on them to relate whatever we said to the younger children seated on either side at the desk if this was necessary. There is a phonics programme designed to be taught in Uganda and while we used a Phonics Pupil's workbook used in other countries we used the letter sounds and taught the rhymes and songs from the Ugandan programme that we had purchased which blended in with the Uganda culture.



On Monday the classes began, with Ursula leading the teaching and Harry was there to supplement the teaching when Ursula was flagging from the high temperatures. The children engaged with the phonics lessons and enthusiastically completed each exercise in the workbooks. The lessons constituted learning the sounds of the letters, listening to and identifying the sounds in a story, practicing letter formation and identifying the sounds in the pictures. To finish the work of the lesson they completed the illustration in the workbook. They also participated in listening exercises and some phonemic awareness activities.





Ursula read age appropriate stories to them after the break and captured their interest with her animated body and voice. Stories about animals really appealed to them and then from the large selection of books we had brought over (450) the student-leaders chose a book to read to the children in their group. The children used chalk and blackboards to create a chalk picture of their favourite part of the story and then wrote a few lines on the reverse side of the blackboard to complete the task. As we progressed through the three weeks the younger children were allowed browse through the pages of the book of their choice admiring the illustrations on the pages. In the final week the student-leaders listened to the younger children reading a story from a book appropriate to their reading age.



Harry was relegated to have biscuits and a drink for everyone at break time. They consumed nearly 500 packets of biscuits over the course of the 3 weeks. Harry made sure that the biscuits had a different flavour each day. On the first day of the classes we taught them a skipping rhyme and Harry provided them with 6 individual skipping ropes and 3 long ropes that would allow several to skip together at the once time. We gave half of the ropes to the boys and half to the girls. We were worried that the boys might refuse to skip. I don't know how it happened; perhaps it was when one of the older boys gave a brilliant display of skipping, but 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. The boys and girls loved showing Harry how good they were at the skipping. We even had a skipping display in the classroom for the final lesson.



On the weekends we visited some of our supported families. We were delighted to see and hear how their lives had changed for the better since commencement of support by Opportunity Knox Charity. They expressed gratitude to the people from half-way around the world had come and taken an interest in their lives and gave them and their children hope where previously there was none. Their lives had been one of enduring their poverty and eking out a living to provide the basics and then to raise money for school fees for some of their children. We tell them about our village and how people have rallied to their plight.





One such problem came to light while solving another. One girl who was at the classes came in early to ask if we would buy her and her brothers and sisters shoes. We did 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 hands and feet 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 with Jiggers. It is caused by poor hygiene and is very difficult to eradicate. All of the interior of the house and 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 and then the children and adults have to be treated continuously for several weeks until all signs of it has disappeared. We have provided John Kennedy with the knapsack and wellingtons and masks to do the spraying and also to show the people how to wash and apply the chemicals needed to eliminate it from the toes and fingers.

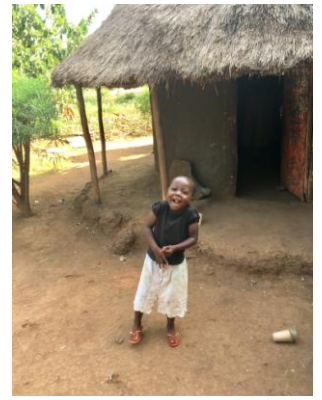


We have read on various online resources over the past couple of years that show one of the causes that girls leave education early in Africa is the onset of menstruation. This is exacerbated by the lack of privacy in the latrines, as well as the shame the girl feels if she soiled her uniform. Women 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 last. We called a meeting of our Mothers and daughters and Harry explained the problem and its consequences and a proposed solution. As a result and with the help of Auma Hellen, wife of Wmima John Kennedy, (both our Uganda Volunteers) we set up a system of a supply of commercial sanitary pads that can be picked up once a month by a girl from Hellen so that she has a supply of pads ready 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 several 18 to 20 year old girls leaving education over the life time of our project. This will provide girls with many more options to shape their future lives.



We knew that this visit would be different from our other visits where we had visited mothers and their families and assessed their overall means. This allowed us to decide whether the families fitted our criteria and if they did then we bought mattresses and blankets for the children, who squealed with delight. We also discussed what school they would like their children to attend. So, as such, there was lots of contact with the parents but very little with the children. On this visit we had continuous contact with ninety children for three weeks and developed a relationship with them that was not possible before.





We left Uganda tired and worn out but our hearts were buoyed by the good we had done and the difference we had made in the children's lives and that of their families. The Phonics programme was a success, we helped with the treatment of Jiggers, we put a system in place for the regular supply of sanitary pads for all the girls participating in our programme, we took on one new family who needed support, we formed a direct connection with over 90 of the children and cemented our bond with the mothers involved through meeting them at the beginning and end of our visit as well as the meeting about the sanitary pads. Already we were planning our next trip and deciding what we will focus on. We are grateful to our volunteers in Tiira, Auma Hellen and Wmima John Kennedy, and to Trustees John Carey and Maria O' Mahoney and Patron Fr. Brian Flynn. We are thankful to you, our donors without whom we would achieve a lot less than on our own. We are thankful for your support and your encouragement.

