



IMARA-UGANDA EDUCATION FUND NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2018

A Visit to Uganda

We are met with squeals of delight, hugs and kisses as we arrive at the home of very dear friends, a widow and her son who lost their property to her in laws when her husband died some years ago. Simple wooden seats are arranged under a tree for us just outside the tiny rectangular house. Sitting under the stars eating doughnuts and drinking coke which the widow rushes to fetch, we feel truly blessed and humbled by the warmth and love we receive and the generosity of people who have nothing but give everything. The tiny home is surrounded by a well swept yard set amidst rubbish and squalor, more rubbish and squalor line the bumpy red dirt road that leads up to the shops and Lira town. As they praise God, this family is grateful and uncomplaining.

Sylvia and I arrived in Lira the day before having spent two nights in Kampala where we were met at our little guest house by the smiling faces of the three lovely girls, former Imara



scholar K and her sisters, who have adopted us as their “Mums”. K was expecting her first child at the end of March. On our second day in Kampala, we spent time with the girls and an evening with Tom of the Imara-Uganda team and his wife and son.

Our host, Tom’s father George, warmly welcomed us to his home in Lira and offered us and the visitors who came to see us wonderful hospitality.

On the agenda for this visit was to seek opportunities to listen to women. This came from our concern that girls in rural areas such as Abia do not perform nearly as well as boys at school. We had some wonderful opportunities to listen to women and among the reasons given for poor performance were:

When at home, girls spend most of the day doing domestic work leaving little time or energy for study.

When money is short, boys are sent to school but not girls. Girls are needed at home
Girls feel inferior. They do not expect to do as well as boys.

There are few female role models living lives that the girls want to emulate.

Children are left at home alone while parents are out drinking, discipline is a problem, discos a temptation and early pregnancy is common.

Abia Primary School promised to encourage the girls more and to invite people in to talk to parents. Change may come slowly but the school is attempting to address the problem.

Two women particularly inspired us. I met one of them on my first visit in 2009 when she was 13 years old. This wonderful Christian young lady is living with the stigma of HIV and the difficulties this presents for her on a daily basis. Because of her own suffering, she is determined to help others who are suffering too. She is at college but because there is little money she has taken any work available and has started a few small businesses. At present she is making sim sim paste and she brought us some to sample.

The second lady is an MP. She was one of 11 children. Her parents separated and her mother worked hard. She was cared for by a grandparent. She was often needed for work at

home and several days a week the children were sent to collect water in clay pots. Because of the number of children from the area collecting water, each one inched forward a little at a time until they reached the bore hole and took their turn to pump the water into their pots and carry it home. They missed school when the water needed fetching. In spite of this she completed her schooling and now has a Master's degree and a leadership role in Uganda. She has a heart for helping children and has been supporting some by paying their school fees.

An unexpected opportunity arose for us to move some of our girls to a school on the outskirts of Lira. The school is much smaller than Abia Primary School, class sizes are smaller and boarding facilities are good. It has a good reputation and most importantly the performance of girls is equal to that of boys. Four of our girls, including our two new scholars have been accepted into the school. Moses, a member of our Uganda management team, has a child in the school and he visits it regularly.



We paid two visits to Abia Primary School. We took two small suitcases of books for the library. Our grateful thanks go to those who donated books or money to enable us to buy them. We also handed over two computers to the school and met the teachers who had enjoyed a short IT course in Kampala.



We so enjoyed time spent with the children. Five children started in Senior 1 at St. Katherine Girls School and Dr. Obote School. Their smiles told it all.

O Level results came out while we were in Uganda. We were proud of Evaline who achieved a good Division 2 pass. We have since heard that she went for interview to a primary teachers training college and has been accepted. She begins her two year training this month and will make a lovely teacher.

There were disappointments too. Our two A Level candidates have received their exam results and they have not performed well.

Home visits are part of the selection process for new scholarships and this is where we witness life at its toughest.

9/2/18 We bump along a dusty narrow dirt track never intended for cars. After about a mile, we arrive at a clearing and a few small mud huts. We are greeted by a poorly dressed and desperately thin widow, mother to one of



our new scholars. Simple wooden seats and a wooden bench are brought out for us. A little distance from the huts is a pit toilet but there is nowhere to wash in private and water is collected from a borehole some distance away. The homestead has a tiny granary. Cooking is done outside on an open fire or in a tiny tin shack with broken tin doors and no roof. In the corner of the yard is the grave of the widow's husband. Three or four chickens scratch around in the yard. The widow explains that she used to have more chickens but they became sick and died. She crawls on hands and knees in an attempt to catch a chicken and she gives it to us. We don't want to accept this gift but to refuse it would be hurtful to the widow. We kick ourselves for not having brought some bags of sugar or tea as a gift. We are shown into the little hut where she sleeps with her daughters. There is a narrow bed on one



side and rush mats and a mattress are rolled up in a corner ready to be laid out on the floor for the girls at night. Clothes are hung over string around the room.

We leave this home and drive back to the main road. By "main" I mean the rutted dirt road that leads from Lira to Abia and beyond. We pass the school and church and down an even narrower track than the last one. We bump along for about two miles into the bush and I wonder

what will happen if we cannot go further and there is nowhere to turn round but our driver, Martin, seems to be enjoying the challenge. Eventually we arrive at a clearing, leave the car and travel the last 200 yards to Ju's home on foot. Like all the stories of our scholars, hers is a sad one. Her mother died of AIDS in 2015 and a sister also died. Ju lives with her uncle and a remaining sister lives in Lira with another uncle. Ju's



father suffers from epilepsy. One of her cousins also has epilepsy and he doesn't attend school. Walking to school during the rainy seasons when the tracks we have travelled are thick mud will have been a challenge for Ju. Like the last home we visited Ju's home is made up of a few huts, a pit toilet and this time a little room for washing in. There are goats, chickens and a calf. Again water must be collected from some distance away.



It was while we were visiting these homes that we learned that K had been admitted into hospital and later we learned that she had needed an emergency C op. We were concerned for K and devastated to learn later that the baby had lived for only about 13 hours.

Only a few days earlier another of our former scholars lost the severely disabled uncle who brought her up and was a rock of stability in her young life. This girl gave up her job as a nurse to care for her uncle in hospital, sleeping on the floor beside him and bringing the food he liked so as to encourage him to eat. Sylvia and I felt we were meant to be in Uganda at this time. It is wonderful to share in the good times and we are so proud of every achievement of our scholars and joyful when we know that theirs will not be a life of poverty. It is a privilege to be welcomed into homes and given so much love, but sharing in the lives of these people also means sharing in the saddest of times.

The day after K and Y's baby died, we returned to Kampala. As we arrived at the guest house where we had been met with happy smiles only 2 weeks earlier, it was hard to hold back the tears. Part of our last few days was spent with K and her partner and other family members in the hospital. By the time we left K had been discharged and was beginning to heal physically and we pray that she and Y will know God's comfort and the love of friends and family as the emotional scars begin to heal.



Our visit had its hilarious moments too like when we returned from Abia to Lira with a noisy goat and six live chickens in the back of the car. They were all gifts from families in Abia.

When we were in Kampala on one of our earlier visits we had our first ride on a boda boda. A boda

Back to school boda is a motorbike taxi that weaves its way in and out of the crazy Kampala traffic ignoring any of the very few rules of the road. Sylvia loved the experience and I did not. I vowed never to get on a boda again and on subsequent visits I have inconvenienced everyone by insisting we wait for a minibus taxi. Minibus taxis are old and battered. They are like a bus service that takes a particular route. Unlike the boda one often has to wait a long time to find one that goes the right way and has enough unoccupied seats. On this visit we needed to travel and Martin wasn't free to take us. We hadn't the experience to find a minibus taxi going in the right direction and so we set out to find the safest looking boda driver. I suggested we both get on the same boda and so with the driver in front and me in the middle hanging on to him for dear life and Sylvia hanging off the back (slight exaggeration) we set off. (Sorry no photos!) Our driver was considerate. However, he passed the traffic heading away from us on either side, narrowly missed traffic joining from side roads or heading towards us and as we squeezed through the narrow spaces between cars our driver had the skill to know just how many centimetres were needed on either side to avoid scraping our legs and his, provided the other drivers didn't make a mistake! We arrived safely!

I have tried to share with you just a glimpse of our time in Uganda. With your help and prayers our Imara children have the hope of a much brighter future than would otherwise be possible. If you would like to sponsor a child and make a big difference, please get in touch with us. Finally a big thank you to those who are already supporting the charity in so many ways.

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