

## Uganda visit report, October 2014

*Susannah Evans & Janet Hayes*

Susannah and Janet visited Rafiki Thabo's Uganda programme from 27<sup>th</sup> September to 8<sup>th</sup> October 2014. We spent the majority of our time in Kabale, with a couple of days in Kampala at the beginning and end of the trip. The objectives for the trip were as follows:

- To meet with the committee to discuss various matters, including current workload, plans for the future and any issues with the students;
- To meet with as many students as possible to introduce ourselves, collect data for the impact survey and collect life stories, audio recordings and photographs for use in publicity material; and
- To network with other organisations working in education in Uganda to discuss potential partnerships.

We also delivered dictionaries donated by the Rotary Club to our partner schools in Uganda and established a school link between a primary school in the UK and one in Uganda.

This report provides a summary of the main activities/findings of the visit.

### Meeting with the committee

We had a very productive and encouraging meeting with the committee. We met with Reverend Benon Byaruhanga (Chairman), Edwin Babimpa and Gad Turyahebwa. Unfortunately Catherine Nuwagaba was unable to join the meeting as she was working elsewhere in Uganda. In general, the committee feel they are working well together and that the workload is manageable – although they did express some concerns about workload if we continue to grow the programme as quickly as we have been recently – we now support 48 students in Uganda at 16 institutions. They also felt that the workload is evenly distributed between committee members and they are able to meet at short notice to discuss any



concerns/issues arising. We identified some ways in which we could support the committee better to manage the increasing workload, including:

- Providing Benon with a 'home office' – we have now given him a laptop (donated by Susannah) and a dongle so he has internet connectivity at home. The committee also requested a scanner and printer for him. We felt this was less urgent but could look for a way of getting such equipment donated and out to Uganda;
- Increasing the expenses we pay the committee – the current amount is insufficient, given rising costs and increasing students numbers. The committee will put together an annual budget by mid-October for approval of Uganda admin fees to be added to main Rafiki budget. Committee will then account for spending at the end of the year;

- Referring applicants who contact the UK first (via the website) directly to the Uganda committee, rather than providing them with an application form. The committee prefer to pre-screen applicants rather than raising their hopes by asking them to fill in an application form;
- Developing a checklist/criteria to help committee decide whether a student should be invited to apply. All agreed this was a good idea. Edwin to share the checklist Rotary use and JH to devise a checklist for use in all 3 countries; and
- Possibly bringing in a Rafiki graduate as an extra committee member if workload becomes unmanageable, e.g. to distribute funds to institutions, collect receipts etc. This could provide him/her with valuable work experience while searching for paid employment.

The committee reported that all students are doing well and are being visited as regularly as possible. They actively follow up with the institutions the students are studying in to check on their performance and behaviour. Benon is clearly playing a mentoring/counselling role in helping students decide on their next steps in their academic journey. The committee are working hard to instil Rafiki 'values' in the students we support, e.g. working hard, good discipline and a spirit of 'giving back' to others.

The committee share our vision of nurturing a Rafiki alumni network and would like to see its members donating to a 'local fund' once they are earning a salary. This fund could either be used to pay for a student's fees or to pay for the extra resources many of our most vulnerable students need but cannot afford (e.g. books, uniforms, stationery – and sanitary towels for girls<sup>1</sup>). We also discussed alumni members visiting current students to inspire/encourage them and having an annual get together, e.g. at the end of the summer term, in Kabale, for the committee and all current and former students – to share experience/stories, encourage one another and further instil the Rafiki values. We agreed that Sarah Akimpurira would be a good person to lead the alumni and JH and SE subsequently met her in Kampala to discuss how this would work. She is now going to set up the alumni and JH will link her up with the other students who have graduated/are about to graduate and with the alumni leader in Kenya.

We discussed future programme development with the committee, encouraging them to 'dream big'. They agreed that what we are already doing should continue – we should aim to support as many students' education as possible as this is the best thing we can do for them and for the development of Uganda. We agreed that girls were particularly vulnerable so we should seek to support more girls where possible. We also agreed it was best to stick to supporting students in Kigezi region as there is plenty of demand and is manageable for the committee and we would maintain high levels of local knowledge/trust. The committee suggested we introduce a subsidy on top of fees as some students simply can't afford the other things they need to attend school (e.g. books, pens, sanitary towels, mattress and blanket if they are boarding) – this would only be for the most needy students (e.g. no parents/parents unable to work). The committee suggested, if we had a huge pot of money, building a 'Rafiki school' where we provide free education to the neediest students and build Rafiki values into the students. [later when we visited Benon's school we realised this is pretty much a Rafiki school in terms of values and allowing students to study when they can't pay their fees].

We discussed approaching eminent Ugandans for funding, in recognition of the fact that there are many wealthy Ugandans (many of whom are from Kabale) who could contribute, rather than being

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<sup>1</sup> Many girls cannot afford sanitary towels and therefore do not attend school when they are menstruating, effectively missing 1 week of school each month

dependent on developed country funding. The committee were reluctant to do this as it could lead to hijacking/skewing priorities of who to support, supporting for political gain etc. They feel it would be better to nurture the alumni and encourage them to give.

### Meetings with students



We met 39 students (four of whom have recently graduated) studying at 11 different institutions. All students appear to be doing well, understand our values and are extremely grateful for our support. Every student we met completed our impact survey and had their photo taken. Most provided their life story and allowed us to record them speaking about their experience of being supported by Rafiki. There are some incredible stories which we will write up and use in our publicity materials in due course.

### Schools feeding programme

We met with Benon (headmaster) and the head of the PTA of Kamuganguzi Janan Lewan Memorial Secondary School, John Poitaraabbeho, to discuss the feeding programme we support at their school. The school is extremely grateful for the support we provide to the programme and claim that it has contributed to the dramatic increase in student numbers (from around 200 in 2011 to over 400 today), increased retention levels, increased teacher motivation, and has even prolonged some HIV/AIDS positive students' lives.<sup>2</sup> They have built a new kitchen and dining hall (the previous buildings collapsed, putting students' lives at risk) using school/parents funds but are now seeking funds to put a proper floor in the dining hall, as well as to plaster and paint the walls and equip the hall with benches and tables. JH asked them to send through the costs involved in doing this in order to enable her to write a proposal for funding for this.

Benon and John explained how the programme currently operates. John will send through a breakdown of the current costs of the programme. We discussed how we could cut costs and make the programme more sustainable. Benon remains convinced that the costs of the feeding programme should not be included in the school fees as he is concerned that this would cause some students to drop out of school. We discussed the model being used at Fusi School in Lesotho (where students cultivate land as part of their lessons and the school has a chicken coop etc) and whether this could be replicated at the school. There is land available around the school which could be cultivated but the students would not be allowed to do this in Uganda. So they would need to employ someone or find a volunteer to work on the land, which would not be easy. They were potentially interested in the idea



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<sup>2</sup> The school provides more nutritious meals to students living with HIV/AIDS in order to increase their energy/wellbeing levels

of a chicken coop/piggery and some small, easy to grow, crops. We agreed that they would discuss these ideas with the PTA and come back to us with a budget for what they decide. JH will then write a proposal for funding for this.

We tentatively discussed the possibility of/appetite for scaling up our support to feeding programmes. It seems most secondary schools include feeding programme costs in their school fees but discussion with Benon and his wife suggest that there is a greater need for support at primary school level – and costs for this would be lower.

### **Networking with other organisations**

While in Kampala, we met with some organisations that also work in education in Uganda, as follows:

**British Council:** 3 programmes are of particular interest:

1. 'Digital Hubs' project aims to create digital hubs in remote areas to enable schools and local communities to access the internet. This has now finished but schools can follow up with Uganda Communication Commission/Cyber Schools to get PCs and internet installed.
2. 'Connecting classrooms' project provides resources/grants to UK and Ugandan schools that have a link. Grants are available for teacher/student exchanges. JH to alert Kingham Primary School to this and to look for a secondary school to partner with Kamuganguzi Janan Lewan Memorial Secondary School.
3. Scholarships to UK: our brightest students could benefit from these, although they are of course highly competitive. Condition that students return to Uganda and work to benefit their communities. Look for students to share this information with.

**World Vision** also works in Kabale region. They sponsor children but look at the wider community's needs too. They try to build economic empowerment of households with sponsored children. They seemed very interested in our work and will link us up with the Kabale programme manager to see if there are any students we are supporting in the communities in which they work. If so they could work with the households our students are from to increase their economic wellbeing. Also they sometimes have 'gifts in kind' (books, resources etc) that they could share with our students/institutions. There may also be partnership possibilities in future as they often want to work with partners implementing programmes in the ground.

**FENU (Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda)** brings together around 100 NGOs (both national and international) which are working in education in Uganda. FENU is largely an advocacy organisation but has also implemented projects. They have a good relationship with parliament and the ministry of education so are able to influence policy on behalf of its members. They are particularly interested in increasing the quality of education in Uganda. Their CEO gave us some interesting insights into the Ugandan education system and its challenges. We should consider joining the network – this costs 50,000 Ush (£11.40 approx) upfront and 70,000 Ush (£16 approx) per year. It would be good to support an organisation advocating for improved education provision in Uganda.

**FOURSUM** aims to bring performing arts into schools. They run workshops, arrange theatre trips, and take productions into schools in and around Kampala. Their Creative Director approached us as they want to reach more schools up-country but students have to pay for their services and the students we support would of course be unable to do so. We introduced the Creative Director to Benon in case either wants to take the conversation forward.

### **Other business**

We distributed 24 **dictionaries**, donated by Rotary International (via Kingham and Wychwoods Rotary Club) to Rwesasi Secondary School, Bubaare Secondary School, Kamuganguzi Janan Lewan Memorial Secondary School, Kamuganguzi Janan Lewan Primary School and Aine' Mbabazi Primary School.



We delivered letters from around 75 students at Kingham Primary School to Aine' Mbabazi Primary School in Kabale. We then collected letters from the Ugandan students to the UK students for JH to pass back to Kingham Primary School. We hope this is the start of a fruitful **school link** which will raise funds for Rafiki as well as educating the children about different cultures and education issues in Africa.