

St. NICHOLAS Uganda CHILDREN'S FUND

Newsletter

September 2018

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"He who opens a school door,
closes a prison gate."

—Attributed to Victor Hugo



From Primary to Secondary School

Ugandan schools have seven years of primary education. Students can begin Primary 1 (1st grade) at six years of age. Ideally, students complete Primary 7 at twelve or thirteen. Children in the slums are often much older because their families are not able to pay their school fees consistently.

Upper Primary students take four subjects: English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. At the end of their final year, they sit for the national Primary Leaving Exams (PLE) where they are tested on cumulative knowledge in those four subjects. Students' results must indicate sufficient competency to advance to secondary school. If they fail the PLE, there are vocational training options available to them.



Last year's Primary 7 students (now in Senior 1)

In the first year of secondary school (Senior 1), the subject load increases from four to fifteen! For children who have been focused on four subjects, this can come as

a shock. Those who have developed good study habits are able to adjust, but others struggle with subject balancing and time management. A particular challenge is that all secondary school students must take four years of Biology, Chemistry, and Physics.

Priorities for the very poor

We accept a limited number of new students each year and we prioritize students who are eligible to enter Senior 1. Secondary school costs at least three times as much as primary school, and families who have managed to scrape together funds to get their children through P.7 find high school completely out of reach. For these families, the cost to educate one child at the secondary level exceeds their annual household income. For this reason, there is a significant disproportion in enrollment rates between primary and secondary schools in Uganda. For every six students enrolled in primary school, only one is enrolled in secondary school.

The tragedy is that just when these children reach the vulnerable teenage years, they find themselves out of school and without direction or purpose. Boys become petty thieves and many begin sniffing glue and other deadly inhalants. Girls are forced into early marriage or given out as housemaids where they are frequently taken advantage of by the man of the house. It is a sad statistic that one out of every four Ugandan girls ages 15-19 becomes pregnant.

Boarding School

We offer every Senior 1 student the option to attend boarding school. The urban slum environment is not conducive to students' efforts at serious study. By removing them from the trials and temptations of the city, we can give students an educational setting where they can concentrate on their schoolwork without distractions. Fresh air, regular meals, teacher involvement, and extracurricular activities complete a comprehensive educational experience.



Secondary School boarding students

Senior 1 Stars

We're always pleased and sometimes surprised by the scholastic success achieved by our top Senior 1 students. Unfazed by the transition from four to fifteen subjects, they rise to the challenge. Here are two of our stars.

Christine is one of our new Senior 1 students this year. She is thirteen years old and lives with her aunt. Her mother died in childbirth when Christine was four. Her father was a mechanic and died in a work accident. The raised cab of a truck he was working on came loose and crushed him. Christine's aunt has two children and the family of four lives in one room. The young aunt supports the family by walking through the neighborhoods selling second hand clothes.

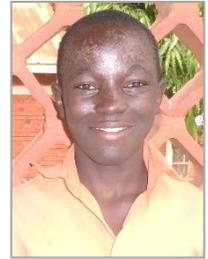


Christine (2nd from right) relaxes with friends.

Christine's results on the Primary Leaving Exams were good but not exceptional. However, once she was given the opportunity to attend secondary boarding school, she began to fulfil her potential.

On her first term report card, Christine earned twelve Distinctions in her fifteen subjects. Her best subject was Chemistry, with Geography, History, Physics, and Literature rounding out the top five.

Robert¹ was born HIV positive, having contracted the disease from his mother. His father died when he was two and he's been in our program since 1st grade. He performed poorly that year, and we insisted that he repeat. Since then, he has been a consistently excellent student, capping his primary school career by scoring in the top division in the PLE. His academic achievements have continued in secondary school, despite having to take powerful antiretroviral drugs to keep his condition in check.



On his 1st term report card in Senior 1, Robert earned seven Distinctions in his fifteen subjects, with Divinity being his best, followed by Geography and Physics.

Thank you, dear friends, for assisting our children as they continue on the path to maturity and future promise.

Peter & Sharon

We welcome your donations.
Checks may be sent to:

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund
P.O. Box 285
Chardon, OH 44024-0285

Or you can donate online at
www.ugandachildrensfund.org

The St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund is a registered non-profit 501(c)(3) organization eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions.

¹ Not his real name.