

An Amazing Trip, An Amazing Blessing

By Betty Allen, Board Char, Circle of Peace International

I was fortunate to return to Makindye Uganda this year to visit Circle of Peace School for the second time. Excited to be going, hating the 24 hours of travel but knew that once there I would be welcomed with open arms from the Bbaale Family and all the students. Our journey was uneventful which Joanita and I were thankful for.

We took over 500 pounds of luggage. They were chocked full of school supplies that had been donated by our wonderful COPI supporters, two laptops and a desktop scanner, clothes and shoes that Joanita collected, toiletry items, medicine, donated costume jewelry, treats such as candy, cookies and crackers and many more things that are too numerous to list.

Unpacking and sorting took us almost a day. Items for the school, gifts for each teacher and family member was sorted and packed into little gift bags. These little items were received with great joy and appreciation.

Our days were packed with to do lists. With monetary donations, we purchased material for 40 school uniforms along with 100 athletic uniforms and socks. Drainage grates were installed so that children and adults wouldn't fall into the drains. Gutters were added to the main house so that rain water can be captured for use. We purchased a year's worth of copier paper and toner, a DVD player and speakers, septic tank cleaning and repair materials. And we treated students, teachers and staff to an ice cream party. A huge THANK YOU to everyone who made this possible!!

I want to take this time to talk about the school and the Bbaale Family. What this family does day in and day out amazes me. Joanita had a vision for a school that children could attend regardless of their ability to pay for their education. She started with 8 children on the front porch. Today her family continues to provide an education for over 400 students. There is a mix of families that can pay full tuition, partial tuition or no tuition at all. The school budget is always stretched to the limit. There are a couple of other sources of income, the chicken farm, family crop farm, rent from a small parcel of land and support from other family members.

MaryLove, Charles, Ibrahim, Sulaiman, Farook, Mom Amina, Medina and many other helpful hands make sure that the school is ready each day. They start early (sometimes 4 am) in the kitchen, making breakfast for the family and students that may not have had breakfast at home. By 6 am Charles, along with other drivers, head out to pick up students using two vans and a car. They make 3 trips each morning and again in the afternoon. A large number of students are dropped off by a family member or they walk to school.

Teachers start arriving and ready their rooms. The children play on the playground or go to their classrooms until the school bell rings. There is laughter and smiles from these 440 students. They are truly happy that they are at school and they come ready to learn. Classrooms are crowded with little elbow room but these students don't seem to notice. They are there to learn. They have the supplies their family can provide and Circle of Peace provides the rest.

The teachers and their helpers are attentive to the children. They want their students to excel and they do all in their power to make that happen. The children are taught English as a second language. Their penmanship is better than most students here in the United States. You can walk into any classroom and see them working hard. There is NO disruptive behavior in any classroom. These children are respectful because they know what a gift they are getting.

They have dreams, big dreams, of becoming doctors, lawyers, pilots, teachers, farmers and laborer's. They know that with an education they will be able to help their families. The children head home around 4 pm homework in hand. Some have support at home that can help with their homework others are not as lucky. Some can't practice their English because their parents only speak their native language. Others may have to wait until the next day to have their next meal. When the children arrive the next morning, smiles are in place and they are ready to learn.

The Bbaale Family along with dedicated teachers and helpers are creating an environment that makes Circle of Peace School a success. All of the Bbaale family members make the education of children a priority with little to no financial remuneration from the school. They spend long hours every day doing what they do because they believed in Joanita and her passion to provide education to all children of Uganda. I am proud to know such a loving and caring family and that I have had an opportunity to be a small part of this amazing journey.



Betty Allen helps a COPS student try on a new pair of shoes.



Betty helping to tear down old building.



New building under construction.