

Partners' Progress-Uganda

The Newsletter of Real Partners Uganda, Inc.

November 2012

Dear Partners,

We returned from our 14th trip to Uganda one month ago with renewed enthusiasm and motivation. It was a wonderful and productive 7 weeks, and included many celebrations: the wedding of Tree of Life Ministries General Manager, George and his longtime significant other, Esther, the P-7 Leavers blessing and party, the dedication of new buildings and Diane's Garden. We were joined for part of our stay by Dana and Kathryn Hiscock on their sixth visit, and three first-timers-- Ken Bennett, Mike Grant and Deanna McMillian. All three have sponsored children at Mustard Seed Academy and were eager to meet them in person. They also offered their special talents and services to Tree of Life Ministries/Mustard Seed Academy. And, what amazing talents they have. Ken played with kids, worked to improve poultry and garden operations, and joined fellow-Rotarian George Kateregga in establishing a link between his club in Pennsylvania and the newly chartered one in Lukaya. Mike, a retired newspaper editor, worked with small groups of students to encourage their story writing, and the results were fantastic. We'll share some of the stories with you in the coming months. For many years, Deanna worked as a CPA and in IT training; recently she returned to school to get a master's degree in social work. She used all of this knowledge in various ways but chiefly dedicated herself to understanding the lives of the MSA students. We asked her to learn about an MSA child's typical day--not just in school but also at home. She was able to visit two homes of day-students and meet their mothers. She also spent an evening, overnight, and morning at Rapha's House, the new home for orphaned and homeless MSA students. We hope that you will gain insight about the lives of these precious kids through Deanna's eyes.

Love and Peace, Joe and Elaine Griswold

A Day in the Life of a Mustard Seed Academy Student

I had no idea what an incredible experience this assignment would be for me. I would like to share that experience with you, so rise and shine – it's time to start the day.

5:00 A.M. – Each room at Rapha's House has one light bulb and they're all shining brightly!



Deanna and her "roommates" at Rapha's House

The girls instantly slip out of bed and join the other boys and girls in the dining room, where a matron is holding a box of toothbrushes. Each child takes one, holds it for the matron to apply toothpaste, slips outside to brush, then returns the toothbrush to the box. They scoot around quietly while they wake up. Next, each child takes a quick bath and dons dress uniform or sportswear.

As the girls make their beds, one begins quietly singing *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*; others join in. Once the children are ready, they gather at the dining room tables with their "backpacks": plastic bags, string bag packs, second-hand backpacks often with one or both straps broken free. The children are proud of each one. I notice a boy sitting next to me wearing wet shorts, clean but wet. I asked why the shorts were wet; he said he had only one uniform; he washed it each evening, but it wouldn't be completely dry by morning. This oversight was immediately corrected and he now has a second uniform.



Walking to school in the dark

6:30 A.M. – Off to school! It's still dark, but day is quickly approaching.

The 30-plus children at Rapha's House leave together for the walk to school. They will

arrive by 6:45 a.m., since it is close to the campus. Hopefully, the 360 students living at home also are joining others on their walk, to practice safety in numbers as they learned in the Child-to-Child Program. All but a handful walk from Rapha's House or home to get to school, sometimes during heavy rain along muddy roads.

For a few children who have physical challenges, this walk can be more difficult.



Katangole Peter, one of MSA's disabled students who struggles to get to school on time

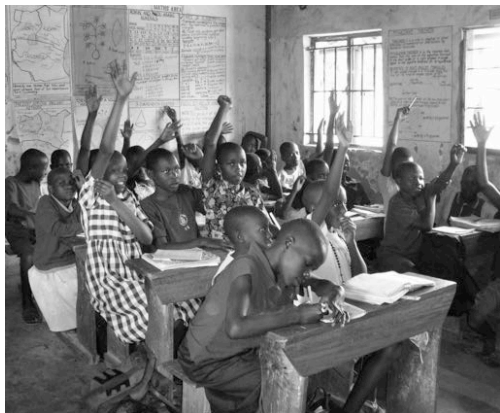
But no matter the distance or difficulty, smiles show their happiness to be in school learning and being cared for in so many ways.

While walking from Rapha's House, I noticed a child who had a backpack with singer Bob Marley's picture on it. I had my cell phone with Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds" on it and played it for them. It was surreal as I wondered about the lyrics, "Will every little thing be all right?" I knew that these students' lives would be much better because of the holistic education and caring that Mustard Seed Academy works to provide.

Once the 404 students arrive, they tend to their morning tasks, which include sweeping classrooms, offices and the school-yard, getting books to each classroom, and washing the chalkboards.

7:30 A.M. – Classroom learning begins!

I sat in on classes to watch the skilled teaching staff work with these eager learners.



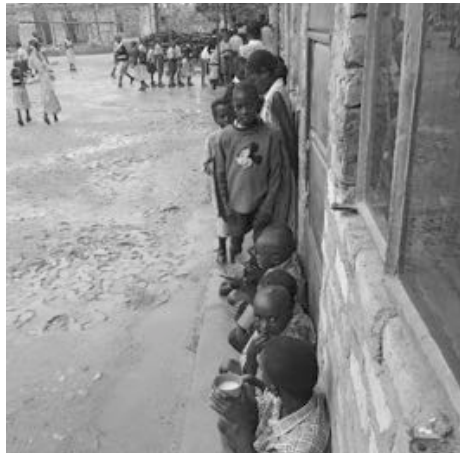
Enthusiastic classrooms, participation

Hands raise quickly as students respond to lessons. They are praised for correct responses and gently helped when needed. Children are excused to run errands and visit restroom facilities for short and long calls (think about it). Upon return, they tap on the door while kneeling, awaiting the teacher's invitation to rejoin the class.

As the children work independently in notebooks on an assignment, they seamlessly share items such as rulers and erasers to neatly complete their work, underlining the answers for emphasis. Teachers circulate among the students to assist as needed and to review and correct the work.

10:30 A.M. – Time to break the fast! And then 11:00 A.M. – back to the classroom for more lessons!

After three hours of lessons on empty stomachs, it is time to wash hands and eat warm porridge, especially comforting on a cool day in the rainy season.



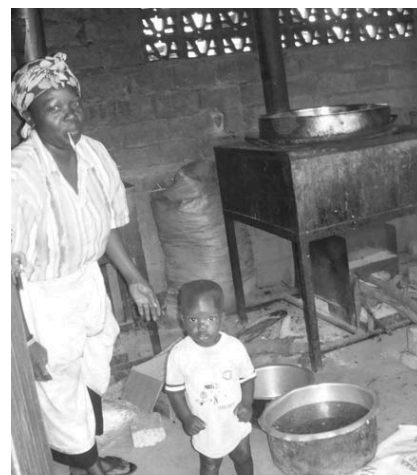
Drinking breakfast during morning break

After break, I sat in on an English lesson with the P-3 class (8 yr olds). One of the topics was to understand the meaning and use of the word "because." Teacher Grace gave an explanation and then wrote on the chalkboard, "Why did I not come to school yesterday?" She asked if anyone could respond with a sentence using the word "because." Eager hands quickly went up. One girl said, "I did not come to school yesterday because my mother died." All praised the girl for proper use of the word. A boy answered: "I did not come to school yesterday because my father beat me."

The responses made me realize that these children are mature beyond their years, continuing their education despite heartbreaking circumstances for many. They carry sadness over family members lost for a variety of reasons - malaria, childbirth complications, accidents, HIV, desertion-- but they persist daily in their education with hope and happiness.

1:30 P.M. – Was that the lunch bell?

School cooks create a hearty lunch, often beans and posho, a thick cornmeal mush. Veggies are added to boost nutrition. The meal may seem basic to muzungus, but it is satisfying to the students and critical to their ability to learn.



MSA cook has beans ready for lunch

2:00 P.M. – More time to learn!

Everyone can imagine the students learning in the classroom. But learning occurs at Mustard Seed Academy in many other ways as well. Here are three:

Mustard Seed has established a health clinic, staffed by two nurses who diagnose and treat ailments ranging from infected wounds to malaria to HIV. Teacher Charles has worked with Real Partners Uganda Health Programs



P-7 girls are grateful for AFRIPads

Coordinator Kristen to develop the Child-to-Child program. Student leaders are educated in a variety of topics such as puberty, nutrition and HIV, so they can pass the information on to other children.

Teen girls often miss school and fall behind on lessons because they don't have proper supplies to deal with their periods. The school found another organization, AFRIPads.com, in which local women make low-cost, washable cloth sanitary pads in an effort to reduce menstrual-related

absenteeism and to give Ugandan women an opportunity to generate income and support for their families.

The school operates a small farm with the anti-malarial plant Artemisia, the protein supplement Moringa (Miracle Tree), ponds to raise fish for sale, and a chicken house to produce eggs for food and baby chicks for sale. Students supplement the work coordinated by Teacher Anthony and gardener Saaka to improve their knowledge of agriculture that can lead to better nutrition.



Closing assembly for primary students

4:00 P.M. – Closing Assembly

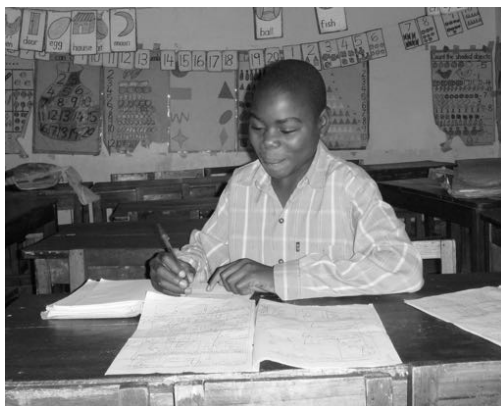
The school day is packed with learning, but eventually it is time for the closing assembly. Each class lines up and the children arrange themselves, shorter ones toward the front. Medications are distributed, announcements are made, and head master or teacher reminds students to complete their studies, wash their uniforms and return looking smart the next school day. Children enthusiastically volunteer to lead the Lord's Prayer, the national anthem and the Mustard Seed school song, and the school day is officially closed. Most students stay to work on homework.

4:40 P.M. – Extra lessons for the next hour.

After school many children stay to complete extra lessons in topics they may be struggling with, or to review. Some children must be shooed home, because of their eagerness to learn or perhaps because they are unable to study or "revise" at home in the absence of electric or family support. They feel secure and happy at school.

As Teacher Charles worked late on extra lessons, I asked what he likes most about

teaching at Mustard Seed. "It's the cooperation among the teachers," he said. Staff commitment to supporting the education of



Ponsiano participates in after-school lessons

the youngsters is infectious, whether it be in the work of the teachers, cooks, nurses, gardener, social worker or other employees. Although the primary focus is learning, not every minute is all work and no play. Sometimes the children sneak in an after-



Mustard Seed Dancers practice for the wedding

school dance, or a soccer game just for fun!

5:40 P.M. – Time to head home before dark!

Evening time is for chores at home and at Rapha's House, where children also have time to study. Some home-based children may be able to complete chores and, with oil lamps or electric, be free to revise (study), too, but not many.

As I prepared to enter Rapha's House, I left my shoes on the porch. Later, I noticed they were missing. I took Bob Marley's advice: "Don't worry about a thing, every little thing is going to be all right." The shoes will be there when I need them, I assume. But they're not. So I tell one of the boys, to which he responds: "Madam, one moment, please." He runs into the house, retrieves my freshly washed and now dry shoes, and places them at the threshold for me to slip

into as I stepped outside. I am embarrassed at thoughts I'd had while considering what might have happened to them.

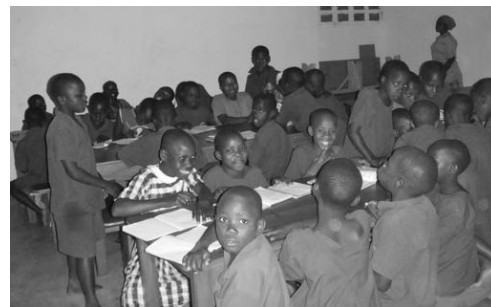
Muzungu sleeping over!

I slept over at Rapha's House to understand what the orphaned students' lives were like outside the classroom. I was welcomed immediately by the students who live there. The staff had just arrived. All willingly wrote their names in my notebook and let me take pictures. This helped me learn names and faces.

House matrons did not seem to believe I was going to sleep over, so I showed them the sheets and travel pillow I brought to sleep on the floor. They simply smiled, giggled and walked out. While sharing gum, along with chewing and disposal lessons, with the children, the school's general manager, George Kateregga, arrived with a mattress. "It is not possible for a muzungu to sleep on the floor," he said. For this gift, which I am secretly pleased to have, he received two pieces of gum.

Dinner is served!

Once the children finished their chores, revising, and dinner, they asked if they could perform for me. Of course! They performed several songs, as they had on earlier occasions at school. Often their songs are meant to educate others on health issues such as the importance of twice weekly drinking a cup of the bitter Artemisia tea that has reduced the



Students doing homework in the dining room

incidence of malaria at the school, or the responsibility of parents to have their children immunized against polio, measles and chicken pox.



Serving dinner at Rapha's House

9:30 P.M. – Lights out!

The matrons announced it was time for bed, and everyone quickly slipped into bed and under the covers. They do not use pillows. The girls' room has 10 bunk beds, six occupied by two girls each. Muslim students delayed bedtime to participate in evening prayers led by one of the staff. It was lovely to lie in the quiet of Rapha's House and listen to the beautiful prayer chants and realize the organization's dedication to supporting the education and nurturing of poor children of all faiths.

I must confess that I was disappointed in the bedtime process; I was looking forward to the girls telling stories, teasing each other and giggling. Instead, I had to hurry to each girl, cozy under covers, to tell her to sleep well. The girls drifted off quickly, only to report the next morning that I snored throughout the night. I hope all the home-based students slept as peacefully as these children did.

In closing - As we made last visits to the nursery and primary campuses before heading home, Jjajja (Grandmother) Elaine explained to Teacher Sylvia that Americans always leave Mustard Seed with a divided heart. We miss our family and friends, but part of our heart is left with students and staff who have changed our lives. We went to Uganda to meet the children we sponsor; we received much more than we gave.

Postscript

It is often said that after you go to Africa, you'll never be the same. That certainly has been true for me. My heart is now divided.

I began donating to Real Partners Uganda because I was dissatisfied with the huge charity organizations to which I had been donating. In the five years since I've been donating to RPU in support of Mustard Seed Academy, I've received newsletters providing its goals and progress. I've received handwritten letters from both of our sponsored children. And while in Uganda, I met those children and saw the enthusiasm and spirit of youngsters who have few possessions but who are unbelievably happy and spreading it to others – including me. I hope to return to Uganda and the academy some day to see the continued good work it does.

To assist the organization in achieving its incredible work, I encourage you to consider sponsoring a child, to consider what \$16 or \$35 a month means to you. Is it five to 10 gallons of gasoline a month? Is it

packing your lunch once or twice a month instead of eating out? Is it the cost of a sports t-shirt?

As a sponsor, maybe someday you too can join a service safari trip to the school. It will change your life for the better, forever -- I guarantee it!

Sponsorship	Student Type	Annual Donation	Monthly Donation
Nursery/Primary School	Day-Student	\$180	\$16*
Secondary School	Day-Student	\$420	\$35*
Rapha's House (all ages)	Boarding	\$370	\$31*

**Sponsors who wish to pay on a monthly basis may do so through our website's "Donate" page by choosing "subscription" payments. We regret that we do not have the staff to handle monthly checks from all of our student sponsors.*

Many of the students on the waiting list for Rapha's House already have a school sponsor who is able to continue to pay for the day-student expenses; they need sponsorships for boarding expenses only.

For a primary school child living in Rapha's House the total needed per month is \$47 (\$16 for school expenses plus \$31 for boarding expenses). This total may be paid by one sponsor or two different people. Likewise, a secondary school student living in Rapha's House needs both the school expenses sponsorship of \$35 per month plus the boarding costs of \$31 per month for a total of \$66 per month or \$790 per year.

There are 65 beautiful children waiting for that special someone. If you are already a sponsor, won't you please share this newsletter with friends and family?



RPU friends with P-7 student Oliver who needs a sponsor for high school