

Improving Chances for Ugandans



Registered Charity 1138984

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING
OCTOBER 2015

Trustees: Len Richards, John Scampion, Patricia Scampion

1. REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

Our support continues for The Good Shepherd School, which goes from strength to strength. Along with Dan Hindley and Helen Jameson, two of the trustees (JS and PS) visited the school in February.

The buildings still look well constructed and well cared for, a testimony to the founding investment in the school made by the charity HUGS (Helping Uganda Schools) who also continue to help the school, most recently with funds for medicines. And now a residential block for the teachers has been added. A major contributor to funding the building of this block has been the congregation of Our Lady of Grace, Prestwich, whose donations we have passed on directly to Sr Theresa. Offering accommodation to the teachers makes a significant contribution to the quality of their lives, as teacher salaries are relatively poor in Uganda. The school is very grateful of this support from OLOG.

The children in the main school appear healthy and happy, and once again excellent results in the school leavers examinations at the top end of the school, taken as children move on to secondary school, speak volumes as to the excellence of the teaching within the framework of optimal class sizes and a child focussed approach to the curriculum (both rare in Uganda).

Between 10 and 20% of the children in the main school have significantly challenging disabilities, physical, learning or hearing, and this number is growing, particularly at the lower end of the school where children with quite complex difficulties have been admitted or have moved up from the Outreach Group. We are funding a teaching assistant in the early years classes to help with this. In this context the school is a model of successful inclusive education, with children with severe difficulties playing and learning alongside children whose difficulties are relatively minor.

The Outreach Project, which works by bringing a small group of some twenty five profoundly disabled children into school for teaching and therapy, or to learn very simple vocational skills, continues to function well. Improving Chances funds this project in its entirety, paying for transport for the children, equipment and medicines needed, and teaching and therapy staff.

While this project works with a core group of children who have attended since its inception in 2012, there is some turnover of pupils as they move up into the main school, drop out, or, rarely, move on to schools or other provision more local to their homes. The children have a very wide range of needs, most with severe learning difficulty, but they include two children with good learning potential but mobility problems that so far have prevented their integration into the main school. (In the UK they would have individual support from a special needs classroom assistant.)

The school as a whole, supported by the part time nurse funded by Improving Chances, continues to work with children with epilepsy with growing confidence. The school now keeps a stock of anticonvulsants so that children do not run out of them and stop taking their medication with resultant loss of seizure control.

The charity has also this year paid for a number of children to have investigations or treatment for conditions associated with their disability. Often the treatment itself may cost very little, provided by Government facilities or charities, but the family may be unable to afford the travel or subsistence costs of taking their child to a centre in Kampala or elsewhere outside Fort Portal.

Our funding can make this possible. We have also purchased wheelchairs, adapted chairs, and other aids for children in the school.

We were delighted to see that the Sensory room set up last year is being used well and that the equipment has stood the test of time. The vehicle that helps to bring the children into school is also well maintained.

We also visited Rwbaale in February to see how the maternity ward that was constructed there with Improving Chances funding was functioning. While it was quiet on the day we visited, we were greeted enthusiastically by a group of ladies attending an antenatal class, and there was one young lady "lying in" on the ward itself. The building looks good and the facilities are excellent. We have been delighted to learn that a project linking the Central Manchester Hospitals Trust Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department with the Virika Hospital in Fort Portal is likely to be developed further and encompass support for the hospital in Rwbaale.

2. FINANCES

We recorded income of £25700 this year. £5700 of this was from Our Lady of Grace Church in Prestwich, specific donations from them being made to fund the building of the accommodation block for the teachers.

Of the remaining income £10800 came from regular standing orders. We are extremely grateful to our regular monthly donors who now provide over half of our income. Without them we could not guarantee our ongoing support to the school, which would jeopardise the care of the children in the Outreach Group, and undermine the livelihoods of the staff employed therein.

We also received £3,200 of individual donations, often to mark an event or as a special fund raiser. Congratulations and thankyou to Mary Griffin, who celebrated her 80th birthday and asked people to donate to us in lieu of presents. And a special thankyou to Little 'Uns at Stand Church, and to Aston Manor Academy and St John Vianney School.

Many congratulations to Oliver Hayes, who undertook a sponsored swim in aid of Improving Chances and raised a fantastic £355; and thankyou for the ongoing support from Halliwell Children's Health and Development Centre, who went on another sponsored walk this year.

Our charity's focal fund raising event this year was our chairman's Everest Base Camp trek in May, on which he led a group who included disadvantaged native Australian children from the area of Queensland where he now works. Well done, Len, an immense challenge met and overcome, and well sponsored.

We spent £21300. As detailed above, £5700 of this was used in constructing teaching accommodation. Of the balance £200 went in bank charges incurred in transferring funds to Uganda, and £15400 was used to continue to support the outreach service at The Good Shepherd. This included staffing with four teaching staff, a nurse and a physiotherapist, , and providing a driver and maintaining the vehicle to transport children to the school. We

also funded some essential items of equipment for children including wheelchairs, orthopaedic shoes, and calipers, and on the advice of local clinicians, we paid for some essential medical care for some of the children which would not have been available without our funding.

Overall our finances can be summarised as:

Balance from last year	£2800
Plus Income for the year	£25700
Less expenditure	£21300
Balance at year end	£7200

Fund raising remains our biggest challenge. The trustees are aiming to raise sufficient income not only to maintain the present level of care we provide which costs about £15000 a year, but also to establish a contingency reserve to ensure we can maintain the ongoing funding of the project through any unexpected events. Of particular concern in this respect is the risk of major repair, and eventual replacement of the cabin truck used to bring the children to the school.

3. FUTURE PLANS AND CHALLENGES

Improving Chances will continue to support the Good Shepherd School for the foreseeable future. While obviously meeting the needs of only a small proportion of the disabled children who need education in Western Uganda, Sr Theresa can be justly proud of a school that is genuinely helping such children in a sustainable way, and blazing a trail for others. Pupils are learning and being cared for within their own environment, and by Ugandan teachers and therapists. Barriers are being broken down and issues of stigma addressed. The message that every child is valued is there for the whole community to see. Indeed, it is not just the children who are learning, but the parents as well, and, of course, the teachers, as Improving Chances facilitates the further training of each of them in turn in special needs education at Kyambogo University in Kampala.

Currently, our concerns about funding have been largely allayed due to the generosity of our regular donors. However, we do continue to have a shortfall which is met by one off donations and sponsorship. While Sr Theresa works very hard to make the school self sufficient it is very unlikely that she will ever be able to support the most severely disabled children in her community without outside help. Improving Chances therefore needs to find new ways of attracting funds.

Dan Hindley has initiated a scheme for offering aprons made by the children in the vocational class at the school to friends and family in the UK in return for a donation to

Improving Chances. Dan is funding this initiative himself through earmarked donations to the charity. This is not only contributing to our finances, but also providing gainful employment for the vocational class.

4. TRUST MANAGEMENT

The Charity continues to function without overheads, and with good communication with the school despite the distances involved. The three trustees are happy to remain in place, and are grateful for help with maintaining the website from Aaron Nielsen.

The Annual General Meeting of the charity will be held on Friday Jan 8th 2016 at 7.30pm at the Cottage of Content, Fern Rd, Buxton.