



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Visit to the Isaac Newton High School, Masaka September, 2011

Development continues apace

During our last visit to the school in November 2010 we saw that huge strides had been made by the school during the year. Discussions with Peter Kisirinya, the school's Director, also identified new priorities for 2012. Good news from the Uganda schools has been disseminated widely, with help from the British Humanist Association and New Humanist, and this made 2011 our best fundraising year since we established the charity in 2008. As a result we were able to harness more than £34,000 towards the further development of the Isaac Newton High School.

Scholarships

The Isaac Newton High School was established by Peter Kisirinya to provide secondary education for children in his home village community. The school is in an area where farm incomes are low and highly variable, and families find it difficult to find money to pay school fees on a regular basis. Local school fees at Isaac Newton are low - £12 a term up to O-level and £15 a term for A-level courses. However, when annual farm incomes can be £20 or lower, even these fees are a major burden for families. Furthermore, due to HIV/AIDS and other illnesses, mortality rates are high and this leaves many children without one or both parents. Lucky ones are taken in by an aunt or uncle, or by their grandparents, others lodge with friends, friends of the family or live with siblings.

In this setting the scholarships that we provide are invaluable. They enable young people to attend secondary school, who would otherwise have to get by with only primary schooling. Scholarships cover recipient students' school fees, breakfasts, lunches and school uniforms. In 2011 UHST supporters provided the school with 22 scholarships. The £2,640 transferred for this purpose also makes a major contribution towards the school's running costs, notably teachers' pay, and the money provided benefits indirectly all other students in the school.

When students are awarded a scholarship in their senior 1 year we try set aside funds to see them through their 4 years of schooling to O-level. This objective is helped by the many supporters who set up standing orders to support a student for 4 years. In 2011 we allocated 8 new scholarships for Senior 1 students, we also support 11 students in senior 2, one in senior 3, and two students in Senior 5 taking A-levels.

Samuel Ssebulime (right) is a scholarship student in Senior 2. He lives with his mother, having lost his father. The decision to offer Samuel a scholarship has been well justified by his performance in school. Samuel has been the best student in his year on the basis of his marks. He plays in the school football team and has shown himself to be very effective in school debates.



Olivia Kisakye performed well in her O-levels and was awarded a scholarship to study for A-levels. Her chosen subjects are Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Fine Art and General Studies and her ambition is to become a surgeon.



Olivia is an orphan who lives with her 74 year old grandmother, three younger sisters (aged 14, 10 and 6) and a 4-year old brother, the baby of the family. She enjoys school and would have dropped out after her O-levels if we had not found her a sponsor.

Ashraf Bukenya is in Senior 5 (the lower 6th) taking A-levels in Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and General Studies. Ashraf would also like to become a doctor.



In 2010 he gained the best O-level results in the school and also in the whole District. In Uganda subject grades are grouped into an aggregate score to give an overall grade. Ashraf gained 1st Grade overall – a standard which fewer than 8% of students in the whole of Uganda achieve.

Ashraf is a very eloquent young man and good debater. He also happens to be a good footballer and is striker in the school team.

He has 3 younger brothers - all in primary school.

However, both parents have died and since their death he has shared a rented hut with an older friend, a boy, from the school. The older boy runs a motorbike taxi and from the proceeds feeds them both and pays for Ashraf's schooling. Unfortunately fare income was down last term and he was not able to pay the school fees - so Ashraf was suspended from school.

One of our supporters, a retired headteacher, wrote to us to say he was looking for a bright student to support through A-level and university and he has agreed to help Asraf, who is now back in school and working hard for his A-levels.

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the immensity of the problems we see in the world. However, as we can see from the examples above, providing targeted help to individuals at the right time has the potential to transform lives.

Facilities and Learning Resources

At Uganda Humanist Schools Trust a key principle is to allocate funds so they extend educational opportunities to more young people and raise the quality of learning experiences once they are in school. In line with international research evidence on the importance of providing students,

especially in rural schools in low income areas, with the means to learn independently of the teacher we have placed considerable emphasis on providing textbooks.

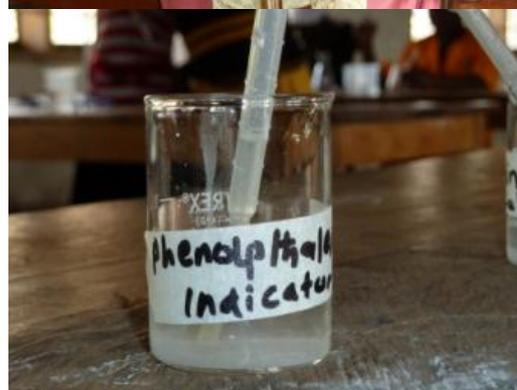
In previous years we provided books for Senior 1 in order to reduce differences and raise reading levels at the start of secondary education. This also facilitates an embryonic Foundation Literacy Programme. In 2010 we concentrated on providing textbooks for Senior 4, the students preparing for their O-level examinations, and also paid for teachers to give extra tuition to make up for time lost. As we reported earlier, these initial efforts have already resulted in a noticeable improvement in O-level results.

Since November 2010 we have put money into the school's bookshop account to enable textbooks to be bought for Senior 2 and Senior 3 students. Now there are, at a minimum, half sets of books for students in all the core subjects.

With books on site in the library and a wealth of resources on the computer network it means that students have a substantial quantity of resources to use for private study out of class on week days and at weekends.



In November 2010 Peter Kisirinya expressed concern that he had not yet been able to make use of his new school science lab, provided by IHEU, for practical work. Sorting out this problem was our first challenge of the year. In 2010 we provided money to construct benches and stools and then for windows, doors and shelving to create secure storage for chemicals and equipment in a science prep room. Once this work was completed £1000 was deposited in the school account of ChemEquip, a schools' science supply company. Since getting chemicals and equipment teachers have been able to get students to learn science by doing it. The photographs show girl O-level students in Senior 4 doing just this.



Girls' dormitory

There is a strong demand for boarding facilities at schools in Uganda. Families believe that boarding keeps their children safe, well fed and offers better opportunities for study than they generally have

at home. Peter has faced particularly strong pressure for boarding from girl students. He did for a time allow some girls to sleep on the floor of the science prep room but the local school inspector stopped this due to inadequate accommodation and washing facilities. Boarding is particularly helpful for students who are orphans and are not living within a caring family.

UHST has never seen its prime role as being to provide buildings. In this case, however, we were approached by a family who wanted to make a bequest from the estate of their mother, a lifelong Humanist, who wished to support a Humanist education project in Africa. We met the family and a family member travelled to Uganda to visit the schools. Satisfied with what they saw, the family confirmed the bequest. UHST paid for an architect to design suitable accommodation for 48 girls, with washing facilities, latrines, a sick bay and a room in which a matron could sleep. The total cost of the completed and furnished dormitory will be £28,000. Over £21,000 of this came from the bequest. Walsall Rotary provided £1,500 to pay for two 5,000 litre tanks that store water collected from the roof for washing and cleaning. We are currently obtaining quotations for solar panels to provide lighting in the bedrooms and a power socket for the matron's room – for mobile phone recharging and a radio.

Building this facility has been our main project in the school during 2011. Final completion is expected by December. Below are some photographs of the dormitory during construction.



Teachers' pay and conditions

We have drawn attention in earlier reports to the low pay of teachers in the school. The position has become more critical as Uganda is experiencing high inflation. Teachers earn 1,000 Uganda shillings

(25 pence) for each 40 minute lesson they teach. In addition each teacher receives an allowance for the costs of travelling to school by motor bike taxi (boda-boda) and there are additional payments for posts of responsibility such as the Head teacher and Director of Studies. With these extras the Head teacher earns the equivalent of £33 a month. The Director would like to raise pay levels but finds it a struggle to keep such a small school solvent, so he is not in a position at the moment to pay teachers more.

UHST has offered to help and the Director and staff are considering a number of alternative proposals, as outlined in the Mustard Seed School Report. In the short term we have offered to find money to pay a bonus to teachers who stay with the school throughout a school year, in order to encourage higher staff retention.

Staff housing is another increasingly critical problem. When there are students boarding on the site it is important to have staff sleeping there too. Recently the Head teacher, Ezra Mulwana, has been sleeping on a bed roll under one of the benches in the computer room. He has received complaints from students, who don't like to think of their Head Teacher sleeping in such conditions. It is therefore a priority to find ways to provide decent accommodation for a few teachers on the school site. One immediate way to do this would be to purchase the tenancy, for about £5,000, of the neighbouring shamba (farm). This comes with a house that could be refurbished for the Head teacher and his family and it would provide space for building some basic accommodation for single teachers.

School Needs in 2012

Over the past two years there have been substantial improvements in the Isaac Newton High School infrastructure as a result of grants from UHST and IHEU (see the reports of March 2011 and November 2010). From a simple beginning made by Peter Kisirinya with a single building in 2005 we now see an attractively developing site. Peter has planted trees and we can begin to imagine how the site will look as the trees mature. Below are two views of the site. The top picture shows, in the foreground, the computer lab (with solar panels) and staff rooms, which stand in front of the bookstore, hall, science lab and classroom block (shown in close up below).



Some of the requirements for the future development of the school include:

1. Improving the kitchen and cooking facilities to replace cooking on an open fire with a more efficient wood burning stove with an external flue so that the cook is not breathing in noxious fumes in an enclosed space.
2. Improving the pay and conditions of teachers.
3. Refurbishing the staffrooms by plastering walls, concreting the floor, fitting windows and doors and providing shelving and storage cupboards so the teachers have better facilities to prepare lessons and do their marking.
4. Drilling a well or borehole with lift pump to provide a permanent supply of fresh water on the school site.
5. Providing accommodation for teachers. We need to raise about £5,000 to secure additional land for this.
6. The school is required by the Ministry of Education to have its own playing field and the whole site must be fenced.
7. More textbooks are required so that all subjects are covered, including A-level, and we need to build up class sets so that every child has a textbook to work from.
8. Provision of other educational materials for science, art, music and sports.

If you feel you or your group would like to contribute to meeting any of these needs then please contact us at uhstinfo@gmail.com or download a supporter form from our website: www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org.

Steve Hurd, 26 October, 2011