



Canadian Harambee Education Society

We can't do everything...but we can do something!

SPRING 2008 NEWSLETTER

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Message from the President

As many of you know, I went to Kenya to establish CHES in an additional location. I was accompanied by Julie Doll of Portland, Oregon who was traveling to Kenya to help with interviews and the set up of the new programme. She was also looking forward to meeting with the girl she is sponsoring.

Well, the best laid plans (gang aft aglay) - were not to be. We arrived in Kenya and planned to rest in Nairobi for one day and proceed to Kisumu. We stayed at the home of Festus Litiku and his family. The next day we tried to get to the train station to book a passage for that evening. We had just entered a round-about when a wall of traffic - people, buses and cars - came straight at us on both sides of the street. It took a lot of maneuvering and we got the car turned around but not before a couple of people jumped in begging us to give them a ride out of the riot. We made it safely home and turned on the television. We learned that trouble had erupted in the capital after the results of the presidential election were announced. Somehow the second-place candidate (Kibaki - who is a Kikuyu) had surged ahead and was hastily declared the winner defeating the front-runner (Odinga who is a Luo). Needless to say, people were outraged, and since they had no recourse, they took to the streets. What began as a political protest soon deteriorated into a tribal clash.



We were pinned down at the house and had to stay indoors a lot. With cell phones we were able to ascertain just where the riot was at any particular time and we would sneak out of the house to get food stuffs or use the internet. We were never in direct danger but we could see fires, hear bullets and smell tear gas. We just hoped that the riot would not come down our street. It didn't.

We were able to have a meeting with one of the people from the new area and we presented a modified proposal. I also managed to have lunch with one of CHES's girls from Imbale, Judith Awinja, who is beginning her final year in medicine and was waiting for her internship. I kept grinning at her

knowing that she is one of our tangible successes. I also had lunch with Tom Mboye's widow. Mboye was a politician who was gunned down for daring to challenge the Kenyan government.

I also met with Margaret Maywaka and her family. Margaret is the first CHES girl and is a registered nurse. She is now married and has two children of her own and two step-children. Her first born is a girl whom she named Lorrie. Lorrie is now finished form four and wants to be a lawyer.

I began to think about the obvious successes of CHES and the not-so-obvious. At the very least, we give the girls four years of education; they are four years delayed in getting married and having babies. When they do get married they have fewer children, and those they have are less likely to die in infancy and are better nourished and better educated; their self esteem is generally higher and they can command respect from society, their families and future husbands. So, if your girl does not make it to university or any other post-secondary training, we and she have both succeeded just because she is a CHES girl.

Lorrie Williams



Thank You

Thank you to over 100 sponsors and contributors for requesting to receive your CHES newsletter online. This has saved CHES over \$100 dollars in stamps and stationary which will be used to buy need supplies, such as textbooks, for CHES girls in Africa.

To receive a copy of this newsletter via email, please send a request to
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REPORT FROM KENYA

As we have all followed in the news, horrendous violence broke out in Kenya this past winter and, no doubt, our sponsors will be wondering how CHES fared during the trouble.

Our agents have returned and reported that Kakamega, the home of our operations in Kenya, was fairly near to some of the most disturbed areas but, aside from a few frightening days at the beginning, it remained safe for our agents and relatively quiet during the months of upheaval. Almost all of the girls returned to their schools and we were also able to place a good number of new students. All fees were paid in advance for the entire year.

Finally, we were even able to assign some scholarships in Rarieda, the very poor area we had decided to experiment with as an expansion. As of now, all seems to be quiet in Kenya and entirely back to normal in Kakamega.

M. Chiarenza

DIRECTOR'S RETREAT

Last Fall, Treasurer Louise Paulsen hosted a full day retreat attended by all directors. The programme was designed and facilitated by Catriona Harker. All directors contributed extensively and worked hard establishing priorities.

Our efforts were successful as we ended the day with both new Mission and Vision Statements and, in addition, the substance of a set of goals and action plans for the forthcoming year.

The results of this work and a three year master plan will be presented at the AGM in September.

Vision Statement

To improve the quality of life of women and their communities in Kenya and Tanzania by providing secondary education scholarships for girls.

Mission Statement

In CHES,

- we believe that if you educate a girl, you educate a society
- we believe that educating women results in lower infant and maternal mortality, healthier, smaller, better educated families and greater economic advancement in agrarian communities
- we provide scholarships to Kenyan and Tanzanian girls who qualify for Secondary School placements but who need financial assistance in order to attend school
- we strive to maximize students' success in school and in their communities by supporting their learning and their transition into adult community life
- we promote the global commitment of supporters through sponsorship of individual students and projects
- we build relationships and promote understanding between supporters and sponsors on the one hand and students and their communities on the other hand
- CHES is a non-profit, non-sectarian and non-political society

DORM NO LONGER DORMANT

Ideas are nice to share but when they translate into completed actions, it is wonderfully heartwarming. CHES readers will remember that over the last few years Chris and Catriona Harker have raised funds and have had a dormitory constructed for girls on the grounds of a Technical School, so that girls as well as boys can now acquire training in a trade.

Since the "Learning Centre" (no longer merely a "dorm" as it is far more than just a place to sleep) opened in February 2007, the following highlights are worth mentioning:

- A. A state-of-the-art computer lab has been installed and has been in operation since August
- B. The number of girls enrolled in the school has steadily increased.
- C. In July, the "CHES Learning Centre" was used to host 165 girls for a four day workshop and a two week tutorial session.
- D. The first class of five girls graduated in November 2007 from a two year computer and business programme. All had acquired full time employment within two weeks!
- E. Although most girls opt for the office services, computer skills or sewing programmes, four girls in the January 2008 intake have signed up for a four year course to become electricians.
- F. In January we underwrote the cost of a 4 km pipeline for water and an on-site storage area so that the school, for the first time in its 25 year history, now has a permanent water supply.
- G. We have paid for the repair of the school tractor which means that the school's 20 acres are now being farmed. As a successful harvest of maize and beans will ensure that the staff and students can eat, this must be regarded as an essential service expenditure.
- H. We are funding the building of a new kitchen, storage room and dining area, as the previous facility was a health hazard.

Chris and Catriona Harker

CHES was recently featured on the CBC's **The National**. For a limited time the following link will lead you to a copy of this story online:
http://www.cbc.ca/national/blog/video/healtheducation/educating_margaret.html

CHES is hosting an event with the CBC's Erica Johnson, featuring in-depth coverage on the making of *Educating Margaret*, the title of this documentary.

See event details further down in the newsletter.

PRIMARY INITIATIVE PAYS OFF

When CHES began in Katesh in 1993 it targeted the daughters of the pastoral Barbaig people. The Barbaig moved with their cattle to wherever there was water; education at that time, was not seen as a priority.

As the years passed, it became evident that most of the girls receiving CHES scholarships were from the Iraqi tribe. The Iraqi are farmers and more business oriented and delighted at the chance to educate their children.

The selection process was not discriminatory. Barbaig girls were simply either not being sent to school, dropped out before their critical grade seven year or, because of their home environment, did so poorly in their final exams that they could not earn a place in secondary school.

In 2003 a team that included CHES Agents and a small group of CHES Barbaig graduates masterminded a programme that would take a small team of our successful young Barbaig girls into local villages to encourage parents to send their kids - and particularly their girls - to school. Supported over recent years by agents and the local CHES committee, this team, over the last 18 months has visited a total of twelve villages, some of them very remote.

Each village received three visits: the first was to confer with the mothers only; a subsequent visit embraced the village council; the final visit invited the entire village to a "play" in which the values of education were illustrated in comic but impactful form. Additional support in the form of school uniforms, school supplies and lunch programmes was offered when appropriate.

In March we learned that as a result of this initiative, virtually all the Barbaig children in the villages visited are now enrolled in school and that those in the higher grades are being encouraged by their families to stay the course.

This programme, though fairly expensive, must be considered "cost effective" because of the positive results. We were able to fund it as a result of our CIDA grant.

Chris Harker

The Winter of My Discontent

I traveled to Kenya on December 26th packing two cardboard boxes of gifts for the girls and medicines donated by Novapharm. Julie Doll, one of our sponsors, and I arrived in Nairobi on Dec. 28 just in time to experience the riots that then pinned us down for two weeks. Luckily we were able to stay with the Litiku Family who graciously extended us hospitality. Although we were safe, we were constantly reminded of the unrest by whiffs of tear gas, gunshots, fires and mobs of people.

My heart broke for the people of Kenya who saw years of building up the economy, world recognition and tourism slipping into chaos. It will take decades for the brutalities committed to be replaced by a feeling of national pride.

My thoughts were with the girls and I wondered how this would affect the opening of schools. There was a delay, but we can report now that our girls are back at school and CHES will be sending agents again. In fact, I was able to meet the head of the Board of Governors for Lwak School and add them to the roster of schools supported by CHES.

There is an uneasy truce between the warring factions of government and I hope for the sake of the people that it prevails.

Lorrie Williams

UPCOMING EVENT

TUESDAY, MAY 13 @ 7:30pm

MEET ERICA JOHNSON

...and hear her recap the making of the documentary, "Educating Margaret" that aired on the CBC. Come to the Sapperton Pensioners' Hall, 318 Keary Street (kitty-corner to the Royal Columbian Hospital). Entrance is free but we will have some silent auction items, raffles and a bar for a bit of a fund-raiser. It will be a chance to see the documentary again and to also hear her CBC Radio production of Baby Rescue.

All are welcome!

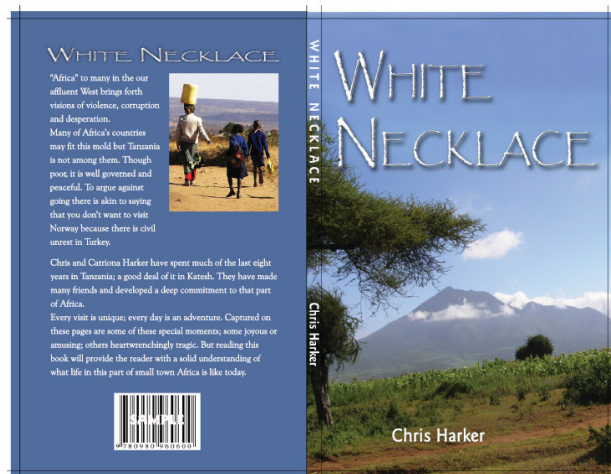
A CHES PUBLICATION

Chris Harker, one of our Directors has written a book that is expected to be published in June. Titled, *White Necklace*, it is a series of stories about the young people - often CHES graduates - whom he and his wife Catriona now count as their friends in Katesh, Tanzania where they have visited many times as CHES Agents.

The hopes and ideals of our youth differ very little throughout the world. The differences occur in our ability - or lack thereof - to achieve these goals. In *White Necklace*, Chris describes the excitement of a wedding, the anguish at a funeral, the hilarity of language problems, the determination to succeed and many more such stories. All are true.

The book will sell for \$20. This is a fund raiser so all profits will be turned over to CHES. You may add a bit more to the purchase price if you so wish as a donation for CHES. Please consider buying a copy for yourself and another for a friend. Copies will be available in June from Chris or from other directors, with prior notice. Cheques should be made out to CHES and "White Necklace" written on the memo line.

Chris Harker, Tel: 250 656 9229 or Email: chriscat@pacificcoast.net



From Jan Irvine, recent CHES Agent in Kakamega. Late December 2007 - early January 2008

Working in some capacity in Africa had long been a dream of mine. I had known of CHES for several years before I became actively involved, and later when I had my life organized sufficiently, I made application to go to Kakamega as an agent.

I found out soon after arriving that an election was due to be called before the end of the year. I was not perturbed. I had heard that tensions could be expected to run high, but multi party elections were now allowed, and it was widely hoped that there would be a change in the Government. People were optimistic that there would be positive change.

Voting day was called for December 27th. As one must vote at the place where one is registered, it seemed in the few days before Christmas as if the whole country was on the move, (and it was). People were returning home to the villages for Christmas and to cast their ballots. The matatus and the vans coming into town in the days leading up to Christmas day were full to over capacity.

Then came the vote, with a turnout that would be the envy of most Western democracies. The following day had also been made a statutory holiday, followed by the weekend. People waited for results and the tension built. Institutions such as banks had now been closed for almost a week. The contested victory was announced at 6.30 pm on Saturday evening, but early Saturday morning the chaos started in the market in Kakamega and quickly spread to all surrounding areas. All roads were blocked with bands of roaming young men; burning tires were hauled into the middle of the roads, any vehicles out on the roads were stopped and usually looted and burned. Even big buses (Greyhound size) were stopped, looted and burned. Truck loads of G.S.U. (General Service Unit - not armed forces, but like the Police) would race around, with new mayhem being created within minutes of their passing. One never knew when the rubber bullets were exchanged for the real thing. Bullets do not discriminate between the lout and the young father racing to get home to his family. G.S.U. clubs swung and smashed into anyone in their way.

There was little food to buy, no newspapers, all live broadcasts were banned, cell phone messaging was also banned by the Government, cell phone cards were fast running out of time, (new cards were only available on the black market) and any news in English was to be heard only through the BBC Africa service. Rumors abounded. The violence and mayhem was still an everyday occurrence on January 2 when girls started arriving to make applications for new scholarships.

Some had been walking since dawn, arriving 3 hours later. There were a few vans and matatus providing very limited transportation service, but fares had doubled, tripled, and in some case quadrupled as petrol supplies were limited. One girl came on the carrier of a bike pedalled over 30km by her father, all on pot-holed dirt roads. Another girl and her mother managed to get enough money together to get a ride on the back of a motor cycle. No one knew when the violence was going to end, when food supplies would get back into town, when there would be money in the bank machines (for the few who had money in the bank) or when it would be safe to be on the roads.

What the girls of the Kakamega area did know for sure was that historically, this was the time when applications were made for new CHES Scholarships. Replacement scholarship interviews had finished in December, and this was the time for Form 1 girls to see if they could qualify for an interview.

And so they came.

There were to be about 40 new Form 1 scholarships made available, and as high schools were closed indefinitely, the days available for interviews were extended to make sure that even the girls from the furthest reaches of the district would be able to have a chance. In all there were over 250 interviews.

Some girls were living with relatives, their huts had been burned. Some did not have all of the documentation as it had been burned and they could not get to the primary school to get more. Some of the Headmasters had fled for their lives and schools closed. Girls even made their way from places like Nakuru, far out of our area. Still the girls came. Escorted by mothers, fathers, brothers, uncles, and some even found the courage to come alone.

One such student was Mercyline. Her mother had died, her father did not find enough work to feed his children adequately, and the shamba was not big enough to support the family. A neighbour, Grace, had taken it upon herself to encourage Mercyline to stay in school. She would give Mercyline and her siblings any food that was left, and would employ Mercyline to work in her garden, in the house, and to carry water. Grace made sure that exam fees were paid, and also provided school supplies. When the results of the Standard Eight exam (K.C.P.E.) were published, Grace was delighted to see that despite poor nutrition and attending a poor rural school, Mercyline could qualify for an interview. She sent Mercyline to CHES House to try for a spot.

At the time I did not know this history, Mercyline was just another applicant to me. One of the many shy, skinny, dusty girls dressed in near rags and wearing borrowed shoes. Grace came later to CHES House to see if Mercyline had been selected, and was overjoyed to see her name on the list. She added something to the story. Mercyline had left for Kakamega very early in the morning.

By dusk she still had not returned to the village. Darkness fell, and still she did not come back. A moonless night in rural Africa is darker than one could ever imagine. Girl children are constantly at risk, and to be out after dark is enough reason to be very alarmed as to what would befall the girl. No female is out without male protection after dark. There was no way that Grace could go and look for her, even if she had the ways and means to do so. Mercyline finally arrived at 9.30 p.m. She had nothing to eat all day, was hungry, exhausted and terrified. The fare to Kakamega had doubled again that day. Mercyline had made the trip and had walked from town to CHES House, then walked back to town to catch a matatu. It had been a long day, but she hoped to be back home before dusk at 6.30 pm. But Mercyline did not have enough money to get all the way back to her village. She explained the problem to the matatu driver, but rather than being understanding, he had taken the few remaining shillings that she had and had turned her off the matatu many kilometers short of her village. She had been walking for hours. When she heard anyone coming she would hide in the bushes until they had passed by. Despite all this she had qualified for an interview and was praying that she would be accepted for a scholarship. I met Mercyline again later when Grace brought her back to CHES House to do all of the tasks associated with formally becoming a CHES student. She was so excited. Added to the excitement was that Grace was taking her to the market when they left CHES House, to buy some of the items that she would need to go to boarding school. Items such as soap, toilet paper, pencils and pens as well as requirements such as a foam mattress, handkerchiefs, a mug, plate and spoon to name a few.

Mercyline was "called" to live and study at one of the more prestigious schools in the area. Some of the girls at that school come from well-to-do families. They arrive in cars, and have a life that a girl such as Mercyline could never dream of.

Mercyline will have support in the school from the CHES Patron, and nearly forty other CHES girls. CHES girls are the leaders in all of the schools where they are placed. Most see the scholarship as a chink in the door - a glimpse into how they can change their life for ever. Many show the level of courage that Mercyline did, and continue to be courageous through Form 4.

A CHES Form 4 leaver looks very different from the shy, often malnourished girl who starts Form 1. She walks tall. She has gained many inches in height and pounds on her body from the four years of regular meals. Her hair shines and skin glows. She is confident, well spoken and hopeful of the future.

CHES says on the brochure "We can't do everything, but we can do something". It is up to Mercyline now. I hope that she is successful.

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