Canadian Harambee Education Society

*We can’t do everything . . . but we can do something!*

Fall 2016 Newsletter #62

A CHES House Graduation

Full Story on Page 11
Meeting Our Graduate Student

As we return to Canada, we reflect on the amazing experiences we had in Tanzania with Chris and Catriona Harker. The trip was especially highlighted with a meeting with our CHES student, Tamari Slaa. We have sponsored Tamari for the last four years (Forms 1-4), receiving pictures, copies of her marks, and very interesting letters about her life and schooling. But nothing can compare to sitting with her outside the CHES house in Katesh and hearing her quietly, and in very good English, explain her dream of becoming a doctor.

Tamari’s last report card had excellent marks in everything except Math. She was very embarrassed when we asked about it and explained that they didn’t have a Math teacher at her school so she was trying to learn it on her own. She was very happy to have been able to attend the Math immersion workshop put on by CHES during her last school holidays and was proud to say her Math mark will be much better.

She lives at home with her parents and 5 older siblings on a 2-acre subsistence farm growing maize and grain. The school she attends does not have a dormitory therefore she walks to school. Her school day is 10 hours long and in addition to that, she studies 4 hours at night. She ranks in the top 3 in her class and explained that the top 10 were girls and that they all want to be Number 1. She said, “I don’t know what is wrong with the boys!”

Tamari has now completed Form 4 (Grade 11). All students will write national exams at this point and only the top students will be selected to go on to Forms 5 and 6. If she is selected, the government decides which high school she will be assigned to. She hopes it is a school with a Chemistry laboratory. Chemistry and Biology are her favorite subjects. She is very hopeful that she will be selected. When we said that we wished her well on her exams, she very confidently replied, “I WILL do well!”

We took a few gifts for her; one of which was a calendar with pictures of BC. She studied each picture with great interest and asked many questions, some of which we found difficult to answer! How do you explain a gondola lift (she asked if it was a power line)? And skiing! Not something she could imagine. One picture was of horses. She had never seen horses but thought we must use them to pull carts to transport goods in the way they use donkeys and oxen. When we explained that people ride them she thought they were one of our means of transportation. Recreation was not a word she was familiar with. Her life consists of work and studying.

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AGM Update

The AGM of the Canadian Harambee Education Society was held at the Centennial Community Centre in New Westminster on Saturday, September 17. As well as hearing reports of this past year’s activities, attendees viewed a PowerPoint showing the progress of our new office/agent quarters in Kenya and the process of selection of Tanzanian students.

Current CHES directors were re-elected for the coming year:
Nadia Anderson
Gordon Brown
Bev Ford
Caitlin Davis
Carol Gilchrist
Catriona Harker
Chris Harker
Karen Kilbride
Mandy Klepic
Nancy Mann
Louise Paulsen
Joy Ruffeski
Lorrie Williams

In addition, the following individuals were elected and welcomed as directors:
Orrie Babiuk
Sara Okunyanyi

Many Thanks

Even though the Harambee Golf Classic was canceled this past summer due to lack of registrations, over $20,000 was still donated by hole sponsors and other golfing enthusiasts who wished to support the work of CHES.

A sincere thank you goes to the wonderful committee who organized the annual tournament for so many years. An amazing $244,509 has been raised through the Harambee Classic Golf Tournament since 2010. In addition, $83,896 was raised towards building our own office and agent quarters in Kenya through Ginny Golding’s 1 swing at a Time event. Your generosity has made a real difference in the lives of so many Kenyan and Tanzanian CHES girls.

At the end of our visit, we told her we were very proud of her and that we will continue to support her in Forms 5 & 6. She was so appreciative and thanked us many times for helping her get an education. This quote is from one of her letters: “Thanks a lot, myself I am very happy for all you have done in my life. You have made my life better and like that of others. I will put more effort into my studies so that I can reach my goals and fulfill my dreams.”

Carol & Terry Varcoe (sponsors)
A Rewarding Day In Katesh

The speckled pigeons dancing on the tin roof of the CHES House and the distant sounds of girls’ laughter and chatter as they leave the Hostel for school at 6:30 am awaken us to a new day in Katesh. So much on the agenda. So little time.

We prepare and wrap gifts which sponsors have given us for their girls. A box of books and school supplies is readied for a local primary school supported by an elementary school in Victoria, BC.

A hurried breakfast is followed by the arrival of the Acting District Education Officer so that we can request financial support for extending our Math Seminar Program to include upgrading Math Standard 6 and 7 teachers. He is supportive but time will tell if our hope is fulfilled. Money is scarce and demands are high. But, oh, the request is ardent because so many of our girls have attested every day that we have been here that the Math Immersion program has transformed their understanding of Math. A veil of darkness and mystification is being lifted.

I rush into town to get pictures printed of young school girls, once in uniforms but now transformed into stunning young women resplendent in multi-coloured and stylish Africa dresses as they celebrated their Secondary School graduation last week. The internet is down, the photos aren’t ready. I will return tomorrow.

I walk back along the highway; once a quiet, potholed road to nowhere, it is now a busy highway to Dodoma, the capital, to Southern Tanzania, Zambia, and South Africa beyond. I hear running footsteps behind me. A breathless young woman catches up, “Mama Catriona?” she calls. She is on her way to CHES House. She is overcome with delight as she has just heard that Louise in CHES Canada has approved the paying of her school fees to complete her teacher training. Another CHES girl launched to help a lifetime of hundreds of children.

The afternoon takes us to two rural secondary schools to meet CHES students. Country wide, Form IVs are writing their final exams today which will determine their fate for years to come. So serious is this event, so vital to their lives, that an armed guard, replete with automatic rifle, guards the proceedings. There will be no cheating here, no sneak previews of exams, no altering of answers.

Form I-III girls greet us shyly at first but soon the more talkative ones take over. Their shy and unassuming gratitude to their Canadian sponsors and to the academic support program of Tutorials, Life Skills Workshops, and English and Math Immersion touches our hearts. On the way to our second school we stop at a small roadside pharmacy. A young woman rushes out. We recognize her. She is Juliana, a CHES grad trained as a pharmacist after graduation. She is married, has three children and loves her job. We hug enthusiastically. It has been 8 years since we launched her in her career. The hugs say it all.

At our second school, we meet Magreth, our sister’s girl. She is articulate, poised, and full of self-confidence as she introduces us to her teachers and her fellow students and shares her dream to be a doctor. Her English and her poise and presence bursts our hearts. We look over the valley from her school. Mount Hanang dominates the landscape, a flat-topped acacia and gamboling monkeys complete the picture. We return to Katesh and CHES House. Quiet conversations with the wonderful Tanzanians who run our program in Katesh, Pius, Naomi and Bernie complete the day.

It has truly been a rewarding day in Katesh.

by Catriona Harker (CHES director)
Rebecca Odhiambo: Office Manager in Kakamega

Rebecca, who since 2007 has been the office manager at CHES Kenya, is a 38 year old mother of two boys, Link, an active 6 year old and Innocent, born December 31, 2015. She is married to Evans, a secondary school teacher and a member of the CHES Kenya board.

She rents a place close to the office and so is able to balance home and work responsibilities as well as a modest social life. She is a Luyhia by tribe and a devout Christian. She lives her daily life exhibiting the values of her culture and religion: respect and concern for all, integrity, hard work, importance of family, and the value of education. Although serious about her work, she laughs often and easily.

Her contract with CHES outlines the usual responsibilities of an office manager: secretarial duties, purchasing, organization and control of supplies, organizing meetings, training personnel in the use of resources such as the library, paying bills and record keeping, liaising with the schools where CHES girls attend, and communicating with CHES Canada and CHES Kenya. As office manager, Rebecca has to work with the other CHES employees (the guards) as well the CHES Kenyan Board. She recognizes the value each plays in the work of CHES in Kenya, and has the manner and personality to not only lead but also work co-operatively, with all the CHES family in Kenya.

Her stated duties also include a shared responsibility with the CHES agents. Together they are responsible for the selection of replacement students and those young woman aspiring to enter secondary school on a CHES scholarship. This involves checking the elementary school final marks and verifying that the statements the girls give us are a true representation of the family financial situation. To do this a number of CHES graduates are trained by Rebecca and sent out into the rural areas of Kakamega to visit the homes and view the conditions under which the students live.

Once the selection process is complete and the names of the selected girls are known, then it becomes the responsibility of Rebecca along with CHES agents to make the best match between the girls and the schools that are used by CHES. It is through Rebecca’s intimate knowledge of the local schools and community, and the apparent needs of the chosen students that CHES is able place the selected applicants in the schools most likely to suit their needs.
Conflicts Can Be Overcome

CHES began in Tanzania largely as the result of an ill-conceived Canadian aid project and also because of tribal conflict in the same area.

In the mid 1970s Canada was encouraged by Tanzania to initiate a massive wheat-growing programme in central Tanzania. The local Iraqi farmers were delighted as this initiative provided jobs and income. The project took off and was successful as the resulting cash crop provided Tanzania with much needed foreign income.

Lost in the shuffle were the Barbaig pastoralists who traditionally moved with their cattle from one area with water and fodder to another - depending on the season. At that time, virtually none had attended school; they were not politically aware enough to know what was going on. Nor were they consulted as they obviously had no interest in wheat or indeed, farming.

Once the project was underway, the Barbaig people were no longer permitted to trespass on the new wheat-lands that straddled their traditional grazing lands. Huge numbers of cattle died as did many of their herders.

The Iraqi and the Barbaig who had for eons been rivals had now become enemies. It was somewhat akin to the conflict between the farmers and the ranchers in the early days of the American West. Things were quite nasty for a time.

Canada withdrew in embarrassment in the late 1980s and, in an effort to redeem itself, supported a number of new aid projects in the area in the early 1990s. Canadian CUSO volunteers, seeing that girls were not being educated beyond Grade 7, contacted the CHES Board in Canada and our Tanzanian program was born.

by Gordon Brown (CHES director)
But times change. Today families from both the Barbaig and Iraqi groups might have cattle and tend their crops. Iraqi and Barbaig school kids share desks at school and play on the same football teams. Intertribal marriages are now common.

To prove this point, we were invited, along with eight Canadian guests, to a celebration of solidarity deep in the savannah lands west of Katesh. We arrived to find an enormous crowd from both groups there to welcome us. A boisterous Lutheran minister escorted us from one location to another, explaining to us the different housing styles, how the choices of food and its preparation varied between the two cultures, the varying tools (hoes versus spears), clothing differences and, subsequently, traditional songs from each group which, appropriately, ended with a piece that both groups sang together, symbolizing the friendship that is so evident everywhere in Tanzania where interpersonal warmth is a national characteristic.

We ended our visit with about 200 of us sitting on logs and stumps to enjoy a meal of roast goat, rice, and soda pop. Regardless of our colour, religion, or tribal affiliation, food and friendship brought us all together. The difficulties that the wheat project initiated may not have been forgotten but they have certainly been forgiven.

by Chris Harker (CHES director)
Where is the Kenyan Building Program at Now?

CHES has many dedicated sponsors who year after year make it possible for a poor, young girl in Tanzania or in Kenya, to attend a quality secondary school. The CHES sponsorship not only gives the girl a chance to attend a secondary school without fear of being “chased” (sent home to find school fees or some additional levy), but also the chance to dream of a future, far brighter than the past she has known. Thanks to Ginny Golding’s One Swing at a Time, and an anonymous but generous donor from Saskatchewan, we are building our own office and agent quarters in Kakamega. Outside of the school fees, the greatest cost to CHES in Kenya is the rental of the building that houses the office and agent quarters. Free of that burden, CHES, as is always its focus, will put the money saved directly into services for the girls. This will mean, as an ongoing legacy, a number of additional scholarships and extra support for the girls.

A plot was purchased in late 2014 and the title deed finally obtained in June 2015. Once the title deed was safely in our possession, CHES began the sometimes daunting task of researching the construction industry in Kenya. A Kenyan from Kakamega, with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the construction industry and who had some empathy for CHES in Kakamega as he, himself, had been a sponsored student when boys were sponsored in the early years, was the person finally chosen to lead us through the building process.

A decision was made to do the building in three phases. Phase 1 was a guard shack and perimeter wall. This phase was, in the short term, for the security of the building materials left at the site and in the long term for the safety of the office staff and agents. That phase was tendered in June 2016 and completed on
Phase 2, the main office building, library, and agent apartment was begun in September 2016. Because of the quality of work and the performance of the contractor of Phase 1, he was, after seeing his bid, offered the contract for Phase 2. At this time, Phase 2 is progressing as we had hoped. The foundation has been laid, and the concrete slab for the floor completed. The walls are going up and the building is starting to take shape. It is expected the building will be completed by the end of the year, and turned over, by the contractor to CHES in late December.

Although ready for occupancy in January 2017, because of the demands of interviewing and screening for new students as well as decisions regarding selection in January, it is not expected the move to the new premises will occur until February.

Phase 3, which was to be a safe house for CHES girls who may be at risk during school breaks and which could also be used to accommodate an extra agent during the rare time it would be needed, has been put on hold as funds are not sufficient to do so at this time. Kakamega is a fast growing community and land and building prices reflect the growing demand. Due to escalating costs and the uncertainty of the exchange rate, it was decided to put Phase 3 on hold until all expenses for Phase 1 and 2 and the cost of the move are clear.

We anticipate all the elements for the business operation of CHES Kenya and the accommodation of a CHES agent will be in place for the start of 2017.

By Gordon Brown (CHES director – currently in Kenya overseeing the building)
Selina

In the CHES House in Katesh, we are waiting to meet Selina, our “CHES girl,” for the first time. She is in Form I, so she has been studying English for only the last 10 months. Bernadette is there to translate.

We have been looking forward to this visit for months, wondering how well we would be able to communicate, how familiar we could be without causing discomfort, what gifts would be appropriate.

Selina arrives and greets us shyly, murmuring “Jambo,” with downcast eyes. We clasp her hands and return her greeting enthusiastically. We begin what we hope will be a conversation, asking Selina about herself and her family. Each time, she looks to Bernie for translation and gives the shortest of answers.

Where have you come from today? We have come from far away, on the west coast of Canada. We give her a little atlas. She focuses intently on it and finds Katesh. We show her Victoria. She looks at us quizzically. The distance must seem inconceivable to her.
How many people are in your family? We tell about our families and show her pictures of Daniel’s grandchildren sitting in front of a photograph of her as they make friendship bracelets for her. She does a double take as she sees the photograph of herself. We tie the bracelets on her arm and she risks a little smile.

Do you have any free time for reading story books? We give her a little story book written in simple English. She explains with Bernie’s help that after an hour and a half walk home from school and chores at home, it is late and almost dark. Anticipating this situation, we have brought her a Luci light, an inflatable plastic lantern with solar panels. As we explain to her how it works, her eyes light up. She is obviously fascinated and excited. She understands most of what we are saying. She turns the light successively to low, high, and flashing, then looks up and gives us a big smile.

by Antoinette Alexander and Daniel Myers (sponsors)

Do you like to travel to warm, sunny places? CHES is always looking for volunteers who would like to spend several months in Kenya as a CHES agent. For information contact the CHES office at (778) 565-5261.
A CHES House Graduation

When the local Tanzanian executive learned that Catriona and I were bringing eight post-safari guests and CHES supporters in to visit the programme in Katesh they decided to choose this time to celebrate the Form IV Graduation of the 22 Sara Williams Hostel girls.

It was quite an event.

The dining hall was transformed with bunting and revised seating to honour the occasion. We were seated at the head of the room with our guests. On our left were the grads, no longer in school uniforms but attired in a variety of lovely and stylish dresses; some with an African theme while others opted for a more western style. They all looked lovely, excited, and no longer like school girls.

Behind them were the hostel girls from the lower forms; there to support their colleagues and knowing that their time to be the centre of attention would come in due course.

Across from the grads were the parents or guardians. They too had dressed up for the occasion in clothing styles that varied from colourful Katengis to traditional goatskin beaded dresses worn by the Barbaig family members. Beside them were the Head Teachers from the schools our hostel girls attend.

At the back, was the CHES staff, there to ensure that events unfolded as planned.

The Master of Ceremonies was the ever ebullient Samwell Mwasha, the only male CHES grad in the history of CHES Tanzania who is now a degreeed math and science teacher and an acting Head Teacher.
The nearly 3-hour event was a joyous one with lots of singing and dancing from the girls interspersed with congratulatory speeches from CHES, school administrators, parents, and us. The formal segment continued with the handing out of Official Certificates of Form IV completion that we had brought with us from Canada. As each girl received her certificate, family members rushed up to adorn her with colourful garlands; they then posed for photos. Following this, there were numerous individual prizes that varied from Katangi cloth, to mysterious wrapped parental presents, to interestingly, plastic plates.

As is customary in Tanzania, the event morphed into a wonderful meal prepared by William, the hostel cook. An informal “meet and mix” period ended the evening with girls chatting with family members, hugging each other, and insisting on having their photos taken with everyone.

No doubt the girls will remember this occasion for many years to come. As will we.

by Chris Harker (CHES director)
Your Support of Girls’ Education Does Make a Real Difference

Often, sponsors do not know what happens to the girls they sponsored through CHES after a girl graduates from Form 4. The CHES office has set up a database of former students for whom we have such information.

The following is a true story of a sponsor reconnecting with one of her former students. I know it will touch you as it has me – your continued support is truly appreciated.

Connie and Me

My dream was birthed in a small health center in my village where my mother worked as a subordinate staff (cleaner). Sometimes I would accompany her to the health center to play with the staffs’ children; she would introduce me to the doctor. I liked the doctor’s work and I thought to myself that I should become a doctor someday. I was seven years then. My mother was a widow, my father died while I was three years old and we were 7 siblings, I was the last born. I saw how my mother singlehandedly struggled to provide basic needs to us with her meager salary. We also had a farm where we would all work on during the weekends to grow food stuffs and some cash crops. This was our main source of food and income. Passion to work hard and give back to my mother burned inside me, I wanted to give her a better life someday. I went to primary school in a school in my village.

I scored 418 marks out of 500 marks in my Kenya Certificate of Primary Education and was introduced to CHES by my teacher in the school. I went for the interview at CHES house and was privileged to get the chance for scholarship for my secondary school education. That's when I came across the name Connie Gerwing for the first time. We would write letters to our sponsors at the office at the end of every term in school and also submit our marks for the semester. I had a peaceful time in my high school, I never had to go home for school fees, that wasted time for students and they had to struggle to catch up when they returned from home. I felt very privileged and was very thankful for the opportunity to have undisrupted studies. I knew that’s the only chance I had to make the most of my life so I gave it my best. All was not a bed of roses for me though, my mother passed away when I was in Form two. It was the hardest blow I must say. For that period I felt like the world had come to a standstill, I almost gave up in life. All through, my mother had been my motivation; I actually worked hard for her, to give her a better life someday. I thank God that I managed to go through that darkest time of my life. I received a lot of support from my class teacher and my friends. Through God’s enablement I got back to my feet and life had to go on. I still held onto my dream of becoming a doctor.

To cut the long story short I got into medicine school in Kenyatta University two years after my high school education. I had scored an A plain and was among the top students in the country. To God is all the glory. I fell in love with pediatrics in fourth year and decided I should specialize in pediatrics heart surgery. All this while I desired a chance to write to Connie Gerwing, and thank her for contributing greatly to my career and also to let her know how I am doing. But I did not have any contact to her. I was introduced to a friend of my sister from Canada who works for CHES and sent her an email requesting her to pass my message to Connie that I would really love to communicate with her and thank her. After a few days I received an email from Connie ‘How wonderful to hear from you’. It was so overwhelming, I could not believe it.
We started communicating on mail and I learnt that Connie was coming to Kenya that February. We arranged to meet at her hotel in Nairobi. I was waiting at the lobby; I had some photos of Connie which I received from her friend so I had a picture of who to expect. Finally we met that evening. It was a short meeting but it felt like a great family reunion. Connie is a wonderful, kind motherly lady. She is strong, running a very busy schedule, she challenges me. Her passion to see the well being of others is very humbling, she has a very big heart, she is compassionate and loving. I call her my Canadian mum, I love her.

I don’t even want to start imagining how I would have ended up minus my high school education, minus the selfless support I received. I am forever grateful. CHES is a noble organization that has seen to the success of many girls like me who come from poor backgrounds but with a potential of bringing change to their society and the world at large.

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Eglay and Me

Our story begins in 2001 when I first heard about CHES on CBC radio. As I listened to the story that morning I thought about my time in Kenya in 1980, teaching in a Harambee school. Kenyan communities built these schools in the early days of freedom from British rule because they believed in education as a way forward. They still believe that.

I quickly noted down the contact information for CHES and became a supporter. It was a way that I could give something back to the people in Kenya where I’d had such a great experience years before.

The students I sponsored wrote letters but I was a busy person and not a very good communicator. Every four years there was another student and the previous one was almost forgotten. I hoped that they went on to do something with their lives but never knew.

We can’t do everything . . . but we can do something!
I went back to Kenya in 2010 with my son, reconnected with friends from 30 years before and started my own project to support the schools in their area 200 kilometers east of Nairobi. I returned several times over the next few years and in January of 2016 I was preparing for another such trip. I often had other Canadians come with me to see the country for themselves and get a taste of life in a very different part of the world.

As I turned on my computer that January morning I found an email from another CHES supporter named Don Reimer who introduced himself and said he was passing on an email from a former student of mine, Eglay Nyakoa.

The name didn’t mean much to me but I was excited to see these words, “All through since I finished high school I have been having a desire to reach out to my sponsor who supported me throughout high school education to thank her and let her know of my progress academically so that she can see the fruits of her selfless support to me. I wanted to write my story to her so that I can appreciate her and also she can have a picture of what her support has contributed to my life. Her name is CONNIE GERWING. Do u know her by any chance so that I could use your help to pass my message through? I will appreciate from the bottom of my heart.”

I immediately sent her an email and told her how wonderful it was to get this message. Not only were we able to connect quickly by email but I was about to come to Nairobi where she was going to medical school. We arranged to meet.

Meanwhile, at home, I found two of her letters to me from those secondary school years. She worked hard to achieve great marks in her classes and her goal to be a doctor was there, a neurosurgeon no less. And there was sadness too as she told me about losing her mother. “I am now an orphan . . .”

I only had one free night in Nairobi so we had to meet that evening. At the appointed time I went to the lobby of my small hotel and saw a lovely young woman there. We looked at each other for a moment and then hugged in recognition.

Eglay has had many difficulties to overcome in her life; the death of both parents before she finished secondary school, poverty, living a long way from where she wanted to study. My contribution was money but hers is intelligence, strength of character, great work habits and persistence. Eglay is a great success story for CHES. Now in her last year of study to be a doctor of pediatrics she got funding to study for a term in Germany to gain international experience.

We now communicate regularly and I’m looking forward to more trips to Kenya which include a visit with Eglay in Nairobi.

by Connie Gerwing (sponsor)
Notice to CHES Sponsors

All sponsors should have received a printed invoice stating that the fee continues to be $600 for the 2017 school year even though school fees in Kenya actually cost more than $650 per student for the boarding schools CHES students attend there.

Thank you to all sponsors who have already sent in the $600 for their student; your receipt should be in the mail before the end of 2016. If you have not sent in your donation, we would appreciate receiving it by early December 2016 so we have sufficient funds to send to Africa for the beginning of the school year in January. If you wish to postdate the cheque to January 2017 or send monthly postdated cheques that is acceptable as well.

Many of you had students who will be finishing Form IV in 2016 and you may wish to send in funds to start supporting another student in the coming year. Please let us know your wishes and send in the funds by December 1, 2016; we need to know how many new students we can support in 2017. Donations can be made by credit card through CanadaHelps.org. However, as this service takes a 3.9% fee from the CHES portion of donations, an additional $25 to cover this service charge would be appreciated. If you prefer, you may phone our office to receive information as to how to do a bank transfer of funds directly from your bank account into the CHES bank account; this costs considerably less than the fee charged by Canada Helps.

American sponsors may send their donation to the Humanist Society at 1777 T Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-7125 and they will issue you a US tax receipt. The money is then forwarded to CHES and we will notify sponsors when it is received.

Extra donations to help cover school supplies, student support costs, or operating expenses will be receipted and are always appreciated. Please pass on the word about CHES to your friends and family members as new sponsors are always needed.

If you have questions about tax receipts or payment for your student please contact Louise Paulsen (treasurer) or Julia Kambeitz (secretary) in the CHES Office.

CHES and the students would like to thank you all for your generous donations.

CHES adheres to the ethical principles of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Please check out these principles on the following link:
http://www.afpnet.org/Ethics/EnforcementDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=32610