

Canadian Harambee Education Society

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

Spring 2020 Newsletter #70



CHES Girls during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As you are aware, people worldwide have been impacted by COVID-19. In both Kenya and Tanzania all schools were ordered closed on March 18 and have remained closed in order to prevent the spread of the virus. All students, whether boarding or living at home, were sent home with instructions they should study during the closure of schools.

In Kenya the government indicated that learners should undertake online learning via TV, radio, computer, and mobile phone. The government produced a timetable and online work that is supposed to be covered by students at home. While this may be possible in urban areas, in reality all families where CHES operates do not have access to these devices. In addition, electricity is not available in the homes of most CHES students and the cost of any internet is prohibitive. Such disadvantages present real challenges for rural families. Rebecca, our Kenyan office manager, has been personally getting in touch with all the parents and guardians and asking them to contact their girl's class teachers to get more information and suggestions as to how to what they should be studying at home. CHES provides textbooks to our girls so they do have materials from which to study if they took them home with them. According to this year's school calendar, schools were scheduled to close for Easter break from April 10 to May 4. At the writing of this newsletter, Kenyan CHES girls have missed just over 4 weeks of instruction.

On March 17 the first case of Covid19 was detected in Tanzania. The next day, all schools were closed and boarding students were sent home. There was a short time for teacher-student consultation and so study plans were established. However, with no access to online learning, any monitoring or support from teachers is not possible. Moreover, the school closure was supposed to last a month but it is already far longer than that. All Tanzanian CHES girls have

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textbooks and, hopefully, will have taken their books home with them. Reading a textbook though is not an ideal way to learn. The almost good news is that this is the rainy season when crops are planted and cultivated. If a good crop is forthcoming, their subsistence families can survive for another year. Students home from school augment the work force and, potentially, increase the yield. The problem is that this year the rains in Tanzania have been heavy and non-stop since December. Too much water can be as problematic as too little when it comes to harvest time. However, finding time or a place to study while living at home and being expected to contribute to the welfare of their family is a challenge for our Tanzanian girls. In addition, without the likelihood of having the annual tutorials and workshops in June, it will be a real struggle for them academically this year.

CHES directors are particularly concerned for our Form IV students as they write their final exams in November and, based on the results, will or will not move on to further studies (Form V and VI in Tanzania; university in Kenya). We are hoping that government exams in both countries will take into consideration the lengthy interruption of learning for this year's students but past governmental practices do not give us confidence that this will occur. Tanzanian students in Form II also write national examinations and if they do not reach a certain standard, the government does not let them continue into Form III (or even repeat Form II). Here are Links to some articles that cover the reality of educational situation.

<https://bit.ly/3dUTIfA>

<https://brook.gs/2X3A0aB>

by Joy Ruffeski
Executive Director

CHES AGM

We are unable to confirm the date and location of CHES' annual general meeting at this time. We would like to hold it either on November 21 or 28 and hope it will be held at the New Westminster Public Library downstairs meeting room (yes, the elevator is repaired so access is possible for everyone). We are unable to book this until libraries reopen and will do so at the earliest possible time. Should social distancing and/or any other pandemic measures still be in place, we will hold it as a Zoom (on-line) meeting so that everyone can connect and attend from anywhere in the world.

Please look for an update in our fall newsletter.

Thank you for your understanding of the situation.



Mr. Postman - Where are the Kenyan Letters?

If you are wondering where the letter is from your Kenyan student, we are also wondering.! Letters from all the Kenyan students were posted on February 6 and they generally take around 2 months to arrive. There are numerous possible reasons as to why this period has been extended and be assured that when we do receive them we will mail them to you immediately. Rather than just mail your student's last term marks out and then have to do another mailout when (and if) the letters do arrive, if you wish to have a copy of her marks emailed to you, please email the office ches@canadianharambee.ca and Julia will do so immediately. Thanks for your patience.

Fundraising Dinner on International Women's Day

On March 8, just before the virus put a stop to large gatherings, CHES celebrated International Women's Day with a dinner/fundraiser at the Sapperton Hall in New Westminster. There were two special guests in addition to many sponsors and contributors. His Excellency John Lanyasunya, the Kenyan High Commissioner, spoke about the importance of education for girls. The second guest was Erica Johnson, the CBC reporter



who created the documentary "Educating Margaret." We were delighted that she brought her daughter, Zoe.

The dinner was catered by Gino's Restaurant and donated by Leona Green and Angela Kerslake. Two special donations were made by Anita and Bob Smurthwaite--thank you for that generous gesture.

Simon Fraser University also made a donation--thank you, Ruby

Campbell, for arranging that.

Thanks go also to CHES directors Karen Kilbride, Nancy Mann, Bev Ford, and Orrie Babiuk for help in putting the evening together. CHES also acknowledges the help from Julia Kambeitz, Mandy Klepic, and Lorrie William's grandson, Deven.

Entertainment was provided by the Quayside Voices and they ended their splendid performance by leading the audience in a rousing rendition of "Bread and Roses."



The silent auction added to the evening and people "rushed home with their treasures." A good time was had by all and we raised about \$3000 which will be used for scholarships that have to be topped up.

Sincere gratitude to all who came out to support us. There are innumerable good causes out there and now we are not sure what the future holds for us. Be assured, however, that the girls in Africa who have been educated by CHES sponsors and supporters have a much better chance to navigate this unsure world.

I will hold steadfast to my optimism.

by Lorrie Williams



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International Women's Day in Tanzania

Tanzania celebrated International Women's Day on March 8. The evening before, Naomi arrived at CHES House with a seamstress who measured us briefly and left. By 8 a.m. the next morning, we were presented with a dress for Catriona and a shirt for me--both using the brown and white material chosen for one and all to wear on this eventful day.

Naomi and Bernie drove us 30 km east to the celebrations in Endagaw, where we gathered in large shed with a roof but no sides intended for crop storage. Chairs were arranged in rows, a red carpet led to the decorated head table, and a sound system with superior amplification was in full working order.

A large crowd of women, all wearing different styled dresses of the same material, waited for the arrival of the District Commissioner (DC) on the main road. When he arrived they enjoyed a celebratory dance with him down to the venue.

There were lengthy speeches as all dignitaries and special people (including ourselves/CHES) were introduced and recognized. Interspersed with this were singing, dancing and even exercise groups from a variety of communities and schools. Catriona and I enjoyed these events somewhat more than the speeches, which of course were in Swahili.

Sitting in the front row in front of the gigantic speaker had its challenging moments but the spirited spontaneity of the occasion overcame any such drawbacks. On numerous occasions, members of the seated audience were encouraged to join the dancers in front of the DC. Few held back.

As there were few left who hadn't spoken, what I believed to be the final speech came from the DC. Joseph Mkirikiti is a polished speaker and adept at saying what everyone wanted to hear. They loved him. As the clapping died down, I turned to Naomi, wondering if it was time to head to the car. "Just a tiny bit more," she replied.

An hour later, after some wind-up singing and dancing and several amusing skits, she indicated that only the meal remained on the agenda. It took a while for a group of caterers to bring in tables and food but the wait was worthwhile as the food--lunch in fact, at 4 p.m.-- was both welcome and delicious.

We drove home in a car crammed with participants seeking a ride; we could feel the warmth of companionship. It was both a treat and an honour to be included in these unforgettable festivities.

by Chris Harker



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How Does CHES Work?

The objective of CHES is to provide secondary school scholarships to Kenyan and Tanzanian girls whose families cannot afford to send them to school. The opportunity of an education alters their lives from being a struggle for survival (which generally involves a subsistence existence with numerous children) to a life leading to a career, better housing and fewer children. And the next generation is likely to follow and possibly improve upon the headway made by their CHES mothers.

To do this we operate three offices in three locations. CHES relies on many volunteers in all three countries as we have only three employees.

The Surrey Office

Our office headquarters in Surrey are generously provided to us free of charge by the Surrey Teachers' Association. This office has the task of raising the money, budgeting, matching girls to sponsors, and dealing with issues if and when they occur. Julia, our part-time secretary, is our only employee in Canada.

Funding falls into three categories:

- Sponsorship money (\$600/year) for more than 500 girls. We can sponsor only as many girls as we have sponsorship money for. Finding new sponsors is an ongoing and challenging task, but happily a large percentage of our sponsors sign on for a new girl once their current girl graduates. The \$600 covers all costs related to tuition, boarding, student travel, uniforms, sleeping nets, etc.
- Expenses other than those related to school. This includes the running expenses of three offices in three countries, the cost of workshops, texts, and medical needs. Funding for this comes from many sponsors who pay a bit more from the annual appeal, from donors who prefer to donate but not sponsor a girl, and from a variety of organizations. Our budget has to adjust to what we receive.
- Occasional capital projects such as the building of the hostel complex, the purchase of raincoats, and more recently, the installation of gas stoves and solar panels.

The Tanzanian Office

Funding from Canada arrives and is deposited in the CHES account at the local bank. Each year the Surrey office informs the field office how many new girls can be selected for the new Form I class and what the funding can be in the various budget lines. From that point on the Katesh office has fairly wide discretion. An important role early in the year is to select the new girls from the many applicants, a challenging and often heart-rending job. Other duties include the twice yearly payment of school fees, organizing English immersion classes and tutorial sessions, and purchasing and distributing texts. The office staff also act as counsellors and advisors to, this year, 390 adolescent girls, many of whom have enormous personal problems, a result of their homes where alcoholism, abandonment, extreme poverty, violence and even murder are common issues.

There is a CHES Board of Trustees that meets several times a year to make decisions and establish policy. The major work, however, falls to our incredibly valued treasurer, Naomi, and our extremely competent office manager, Bernadette. When not on duty, they are always on call. Bernadette is the only CHES employee in Tanzania.

The Kenyan Office

As in Tanzania, funding from Canada arrives and is deposited in the CHES account at the local bank and the number of girls in Form 1 to be selected is given. However, in Kenya, CHES relies on volunteers (generally from Canada) who act as agents to interview all girls who are applying for a scholarship. CHES alumni, who now are attending university, do the vetting of students to see that they are the most needy before the agents do the final selection of students. Our office manager Rebecca, informs the families, places the students in appropriate schools (where they have been called), and also ensures that they have the appropriate learning as well as personal supplies.

During the school year, as all students attend boarding schools, Rebecca, along with the Kenyan board, visits the schools numerous times to meet with the CHES patrons and our girls in each school. She acts as advisor to the girls and ensures that they are doing well with their studies. Rebecca also is responsible for the disbursement of funds sent from Canada, mark taking, agent orientation, workshop planning, and the overall welfare of the girls.



A Send Off Party for Arapha



CHES sponsors all know in their heart of hearts that sponsoring a girl changes her life. However, it is always reassuring, validating and heart-warming when one personally observes the results of these efforts.

Shortly after we arrived in Katesh in early March 2020, we were invited to the Send Off party for Arapha Abraham, who began her CHES career as a shy and nervous Form I student. She came from a family where her father had walked out on her mother, leaving her to struggle on her own. Arapha graduated from Form IV, moved onto high school and from there earned a Diploma in Accounting and later a BA and then an MA in Business Administration from the University of Dar es Salaam.

Along the way she met Rajabu, the man of her dreams, and plans to marry ensued.

A Send Off party is primarily for the bride and occurs a few days before the actual wedding. It is hosted by the bride's family but family and friends from both sides are invited, even the groom-to-be.

Invited for 6 p.m., we arrived 45 minutes late and about 10 minutes before everything began in a marvellously decorated hall complete with a DJ and an MC. We were seated as were many others but events got underway when women close to the bride's family paraded in, dancing and singing to the music that came over the PA. The dancing continued in front of two throne-like chairs and soon many others from the audience joined in. The women in particular were all beautifully dressed in stylish African fashions that included a wide assortment of headgear. Many of them wore traditional Barabaig garb as did a number of the men. It was a loud, happy cacophony

of warmth and good cheer. Though tempted, Catriona and I resisted the impulse join in, perhaps because we had not practised the intriguing bum-bounce that seemed so natural to those born to it. Instead we took pictures and nursed our soft drinks; this was a Muslim party so no Tanzanian beer was available.

The music was paused from time to time, allowing the MC to introduce family members, friends and even our small CHES contingent. But soon the music and dancing again took over.

About 9 o'clock the bride, accompanied by her bridesmaid, arrived and danced her way in, accompanied by her female family members and friends. Arapha wore formal, traditional Barabaig robes and a vivid blue turban. Intricate henna designs decorated her hands, arms, ankles and feet. Most young ladies enjoy using makeup, and Arapha was no exception. As well as makeup around her eyes and mouth, she had golden patches on her cheekbones that appeared to highlight her already remarkable features.

The bride and bridesmaid were installed on the thrones and then danced to by all and sundry. During a pause, many of her special friends and family danced in to drop 10,000 shillings each in a donation box. The box was then presented to the bride who, dutifully, then presented it to her mother, who no doubt used it to pay for at least some of the party we were all enjoying.

A cake was then unveiled. Actually, it was three cakes: one large round cake and two smaller ones. The bride presented the small ones to first her mother and the other to the groom's family. She and her bridesmaid then cut a large piece from the larger cake and cut it into smaller pieces. The bridesmaid fed a piece to the bride, who in turn fed one to her



friend. She then fed pieces with great ceremony to her mother and other family members and then, similarly, to the groom's family.

It was at this point that the groom arrived. I can't be sure if he was expected at that point or was incredibly late. Regardless, he was welcomed by all and no doubt especially by the bride. He did not hesitate to absorb the mood and join in with the dancing.

At some point, three hours in, the music was stopped and a substantial buffet meal was served. It was well received as it was now nearing 10 p.m.

We were anticipating leaving after dinner but as we rose to do so, the bride insisted we have our photograph taken with her. We were happy to do this, and an enormous number of flashes ensued as every conceivable family grouping was included.

We got home at 11 p.m., full of both food and contentment along with many incredible memories. With her educational success and strong family connections, Arapha truly embodies the fulfillment and happiness we would love every CHES girl to achieve.

by Chris Harker

CHES Hanang Never Misses an Opportunity

The recent rains in Tanzania have been torrential and often accompanied by strong winds. These combine to cause trees to fall and knock out power lines. TANESCO, the national power company, has been attempting to forestall this problem by cutting trees near transmission lines. This in turn has resulted in a lot of downed tree trunks and branches lying in piles.

One such pile--a substantial one--was in front of the bank near our hostel compound. Our treasurer, Naomi, never one to miss an opportunity, asked the bank for permission to remove the wood. This was readily given. Thus, just before supper one evening, all 110 hostel girls were sent to the pile where they collected the downed trees and transferred them to the CHES woodpile. Two trips each and the pile was gone.

Wood is still needed for some of the cooking and it is an expensive requirement.

Thanks to Naomi and our girls for this cost-saving initiative.



Clementina Gregory



After six years as a CHES girl, Clementina Gregory moved on to the University of Dodoma. She recently graduated with a Bachelor of Education and is now qualified to teach Chemistry and Biology.

Government funding for education is restricted at the moment. Clementina has no doubt she'll be offered a teaching job sometime in the future since high school teachers--particularly those with science skills--are greatly needed. In the meantime, she is volunteering with Yapi Merkezi, the Turkish company under contract to the Tanzanian government to build a complex system of high-speed railways throughout Tanzania. She is working in the

field as an office administrator and hopes that after six months her volunteer job will lead to her becoming a paid employee.

A Lift for Dumbeta Students

The girls who board in the Sara Williams Hostel and attend Dumbeta Secondary School have, since the hostel was built, had to walk to school each day. It is 7 km each way. This has meant leaving before dawn and having to tolerate heavy rain or searing heat en route. Walking 14 km to and from school also depletes their energy. No longer!

Arrangements have been made for them to be driven to and from school in the future. The photo shows some of the girls receiving this news. They were overjoyed!



A Day in the Life of a CHES Girl

Being a CHES girl is rigorous and demanding. Free time is at a premium and even when it is available, is often used for extra study. In Tanzania, Irene Peter, who has just turned 17, is in Form IV at Katesh Secondary. She is a boarder at the Sara Williams Hostel as her home with her mother, a seamstress, is 80 km from Katesh. From the hostel she has a 10-minute walk to her school.

On a typical Monday, Irene's schedule is approximately as follows:

5:00: The timekeeper wakes the 24 girls in her dorm. Irene follows others to the bathroom to wash, then returns to dress and make her bed. Next she heads to the dining hall for a bowl of porridge before walking to school with Rabia, her best friend.

8:00: Classes begin. Each class is more than an hour long. Irene is in a class along with 52 other boys and girls. After Biology and English there is a 30-minute break when all students are given maize (corn) porridge. Students with spending money can enhance their diet with tea, cassava or buns from the school canteen.

11:00: Literature, Math and Civics classes follow the morning break.

2:20: There is a longer break for lunch. The menu is generally makande (porridge with beans) although rice is served once a week.

3:30 - 4:30: This post-lesson period varies by day. Starting with Monday, there is general cleaning of the school campus and classrooms (custodians don't exist here). On Tuesdays, group work is designed to encourage students to work together to resolve material they did not understand in the classroom. There are sports on Wednesday, although Irene prefers to head to the library to read. On Thursdays there is what in Canada would be known as counselling; students talk through issues and problems with each other or, if necessary, with teachers. The week ends with debating on Fridays.



5:00: Irene walks back to the hostel to then deal with obligatory chores such as laundry, shoe cleaning and shamba (garden) work as assigned by Madam Raheli, the ever-vigilant hostel matron.

6:30: Dinner is served in the hostel dining room that becomes the study hall as soon as the meal is over. Students supply and wash their own dishes. Depending on the day, the meal will consist of ugali (corn porridge), makande, or rice.

7:15: Students settle down to homework, some of which is assigned but much of which involves going over notes, reading texts or extracting clearer explanations from fellow students. Students can work as long as they wish for no one tells them when to go to bed. Few leave the room before 10 p.m. and Irene admits that she is almost never in bed before 11.

CHES students are not permitted phones, and any interaction with boys occurs only during school hours. Nor are the girls tempted by TV or video games as such items are luxuries in Katesh. In any case, the power supply is so unreliable that even residents with TVs can seldom enjoy watching a show all the way through at this time of year.

Irene admits that school terms are busy but she enjoys her life as a CHES girl and looks forward to many more years of study before reaching her goal of becoming a lawyer.

by Chris Harker



Louise Paulsen Remembered in Tanzania

Louise Paulsen, a long standing CHES board member who died in 2018, is still missed by the entire international CHES community and by the innumerable East African girls whom she sponsored, supported, and inspired and who have now moved on to adulthood.

In Katesh her memory is kept alive by a touching memorial situated beneath the ever spreading boughs of what is locally referred to as the “Louise Tree”.



It is found on the grounds of the CHES compound, across from the dining/study hall and adjacent to the CHES shamba (vegetable garden).

Around the base of the tree and shaded by its branches are several picnic tables. The CHES girls use them constantly both to study and socialize, enjoying the fresh air and the serenity of the location. A monument stone has been placed beside the tree with wording that memorializes Louise and her incredible contribution to the welfare of Tanzanian girls.



Another Pandemic Casualty

Recent newsletters described how students from a school on Vancouver Island went to Katesh last year, where they helped the local community construct a hostel for girls. The 2019 project was very successful, and another group from Stelly's Secondary had planned to spend their spring break there this year to construct a school library at Dumbeta Secondary School where there are several CHES students.

Directors Chris and Catriona Harker flew to Katesh on February 27 and spent almost two weeks working with the CHES team there to prepare everything for the students' arrival. It was a lot of work, but thanks especially to treasurer Naomi and office administrator Bernadette they managed to get everything organized.

Then, on March 12, came the WHO announcement using the dreaded word "pandemic." That of course brought an end to the student trip. The Harkers had to cancel everything they had just organized, bid a sad, unexpected, and premature farewell to their friends in Katesh, and fly home on March 17.

Stelly's had raised enough funds for construction of the library to begin, and hopefully local contributions will see it through to completion. Chris McDonald, the teacher in charge of the Stelly's program, is hopeful another group can go next year but at this point, it is far too early to be sure.



The community members in Dumbeta start preparing the foundation for the school's new library that Stelly's students were planning to help build.

In Tanzania even students in a school help with the work. They were looking forward to meeting the Stelly's students and working with them on the library project.

