

Canadian Harambee Education Society

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

Fall 2020 Newsletter #71



CHES Activities in Africa During the Pandemic

CHES is so very fortunate to have outstanding people working for us in both Kenya and Tanzania, whether they are paid employees or volunteers. They truly care about all the girls and their welfare. CHES could definitely not operate as we do without these wonderful individuals.

During the past months, Rebecca (our office manager in Kenya), Bernie (our office manager in Tanzania), and Naomi (our treasurer in Tanzania) have looked after our girls even when schools were closed. The CHES board of trustees in both countries have been proactive in ensuring that CHES operations continued and that they were in contact with families throughout the closures.

In this newsletter there are several articles that will update you on what has occurred in each country and how it has been handled. Each country had its own issues and government situation to deal with, and the scenario is ever changing. Our Canadian office has received updates as to what is transpiring and how individuals are coping. Communications were challenging May through August as heavy rains interfered with the availability of power, cellular, internet and transport.

A sincere thank you goes to all those involved. We know that the girls and their families are most appreciative of both the past and ongoing efforts. Here in Canada, we are grateful as well as our Kenyan and Tanzanian staff and volunteers certainly went above their regular duties for CHES.

CHES Office: #102B - 9030 King George Blvd.,
Surrey, BC V3V 7Y3
Phone: (778) 565-5261

CHES@canadianharambee.ca
www.canadianharambee.ca
BN 13148 8017 RR0001

COVID Times for Tanzanian CHES Students

On March 17, 2020, Chris and I, at the request of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, were beating a hasty retreat to Canada after spending two and a half weeks engaged in CHES work in Katesh. We were also preparing for a Canadian Grade 12 Global Perspectives' class visit to help build a library in a local secondary school. The school visit had been cancelled the day the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic. On our drive to Kilimanjaro airport that day, the first COVID case in Tanzania was identified, and although no official lockdown has ever been mandated, all schools were instantly closed. We were on the last flight out of Tanzania and on the last KLM flight from Amsterdam to Vancouver.

Our Tanzanian Form 6 students, due to graduate at the end of June, were recalled on June 1 and sat their final exams on June 29. The successful grads are now preparing for college or university in September or looking for work to support their families.



Forms 1 – 5 students were recalled July 1. All our Form 5 students returned to school and will start Form 6 in September.

Our 260 Form 1-4 students, whose school year is January to December, did not fare so well. Twenty-six did not return to school. Some are pregnant, others were married off, and others have been kept home. As described in the July issue of the Economist magazine, this picture is typical of what is happening in Third World countries as a result of the pandemic. Teenage girls have been the group most vulnerable and most affected by not being at school. Our girls in Tanzania all come from families in the Hanang District, which has one small town and a huge area of subsistence and pastoral people living in extended family compounds. In times of trouble, the girls are desperately needed to help support and even ensure the survival of their families. Julia and Joy have been working hard in the CHES Office in Surrey to inform sponsors if their girl has not returned to school. In Tanzania, Naomi (our CHES treasurer there) and other Tanzanian board members are finding replacement girls for those we lost.

The girls who returned to school are now working extremely hard to complete their year. The July holidays and therefore our academic tutorials were cancelled and the school day has been extended by two hours. Many schools are holding classes on Saturday and even Sunday so that the students will catch up. Our girls are finding this very demanding.



Although the Hanang District has not been badly affected by COVID and no personal cases have been reported in our CHES community, girls who returned to the Sara Williams hostel in Katesh are practicing safe distancing, wearing masks and washing



their hands frequently. As Naomi writes from Tanzania: “Everyone says it is so strange and not usual not to shake hands with people when you greet them. Even when you go somewhere like a market, people are afraid even to be close to each other. Life is not normal.”



CHES has been able to purchase masks, hand sanitation stations and supplies, and extra tables to double our number of tables (so that eating and doing homework is at a safe distance) thanks to the special fundraising of Sara Williams and Willie Alexson with his annual April tomato plant sales in Saskatoon!

The knowledge that 26 of our girls have lost their chance to complete their secondary education is very hard for us to take. However, being aware that this group of teenage girls is multiplied by many girls worldwide and that this group is taking

the brunt of the effects of the pandemic in Third World countries, reinforces our commitment to continue supporting girls’ secondary education. From the bottom of our hearts at CHES we thank you, all our sponsors and supporters, so very, very much for all your caring, commitment and continued support.

by Catriona Harker

COVID and CHES Girls in Kenya

In mid-March schools closed in Kenya and all students were sent home with instructions on what and how they should study. However, the reality was that our girls had no access to the materials and certainly not to the online learning via TV, radio, computer or mobile phone. The Kenyan CHES board arranged for some materials to be printed off and given to our CHES girls so they would have something to study from.

In June, the Kenyan government reported that there were over 6,700 pregnancies in the Kakamega area alone among school-aged girls. The Canadian board was most concerned and wanted to ensure that none of the CHES girls was such a casualty due to the pandemic. The Kenyan board was asked for their suggestions as to what could be done for our girls.

Our Kenyan office manager, Rebecca, and the Kenyan board decided to run a series of workshops that the girls would be safe if they attended (small group, sanitizer and masks). The girls were put into groups of 15 and invited to the office; groups came on different days during the month of July. The sessions dealt with a variety of topics, including self-awareness, assertiveness, stress, COVID and avoiding pregnancy, as well as giving students support for their academics. A special session was held for our deaf students also. As students sat in the Louise Paulsen Memorial Shelter





they were very happy and attentive; they took notes and felt connected to CHES. All but 28 of the girls attended over the course of the month. CHEBAK members (CHES alumni) made in-person visits to the homes of the girls who missed the sessions. These 28 girls have since visited the office in Kakamega and picked up materials to use for their studies while at home.

At the end of June, the Kenyan government announced that schools would re-open on September 1. However, at the end of July that changed and the government decided to cancel the remainder of the school year and all students would repeat their school year starting in January 2021 – basically losing a full year. Fast-forward to September 21, when the government instead announced that teachers were to report back to their schools. Schools would reopen on October 19, and classes would continue until April for the current school year. For the 2021 school calendar, learning will begin in May or June.

by Joy Ruffeski



Tomatoes for Tanzania, 2020

Amid the dangers and restrictions of COVID-19, our 5th annual Tomatoes for Tanzania sale on May 15 was an outstanding success, but a very different occasion from the sometimes boisterous social affairs of previous sales. A host of volunteers (including Willie’s grandchildren) set up tables along the driveway the evening before. Because of a frost warning, the plants themselves (many going on two feet high and with flower buds) only got as far as the garage and were placed on the tables the morning of the sale.



Over 80 tomato lovers were slotted into pre-determined 15-minute slots, only four folks at a time. Our “charming but steely-eyed” gatekeeper, David Miller, did an amazing job of keeping people on time, socially distanced and happy. Robert Clipperton, David Meyer, and Bernadette Vangool kept the tomatoes coming from the greenhouse to restock the empty spaces, and Dorothy Bird was the keeper of the coin (a coffee can delightfully repurposed for the occasion).

Our largely unsung hero was Willie Alexson, who managed to grow over 1,000 plants of 30 varieties. Two weeks after the main event, sales continued, and we were able to mail a cheque to CHES for \$4,479.40.





But here's the backstory. On the morning of March 5, Willie suffered a TIA (mini-stroke) affecting his right side and was rushed to emergency by ambulance. Released that afternoon, he was placed under my care and surveillance.

Although Willie had set up the tomato lights for indoor seeding a few days earlier, I had decided not to mention tomatoes to avoid putting any additional stress on Willie. But on his second morning at the acreage, Willie awkwardly but quietly began seeding. By the second week all the seeding was done and the tomatoes had quietly germinated.

When the community assessment nurse arrived several weeks later, horticultural therapy had done its job and Willie's right side had mostly regained its former use. There was no need for

either the occupational therapy or physiotherapy the nurse had expected. A win-win situation!

by Sara Williams

Notice to CHES Sponsors

All sponsors will be receiving a printed invoice reminding them that the fee continues to be \$600 for the 2021 school year. Thank you to those who have already sent in your \$600 for the coming year.

We appreciate receiving it by early December 2020 so we have sufficient funds to send to Africa at the beginning of the school year in Tanzania.

Kenyan sponsors, we recognize that the school year for 2021 in Kenya will not start until May but if you wish to receive a tax receipt for 2020 you will need to send in the funds before the end of 2020. The fees you paid for 2020 will cover your student's fees as she finishes her current form level but not for the next school year starting in May 2021.

Funds can be sent by cheque or e-transfer. Please 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.

If you are making donations by credit card through CanadaHelps.org they charge a fee of 4.5% from the CHES portion of donations so we ask that you add an additional \$30 to cover this service charge.

American sponsors may send their donations to the Humanist Society, 1821 Jefferson Place NW, Washington, DC 20036 and they will issue a US tax receipt. The money is then forwarded to CHES and we will notify sponsors when it is received.

Additional donations are always appreciated, and CHES will issue income tax receipts for these as well.



Stocking Up

In addition to purchasing personal supplies (including soap, sanitizer and masks) for CHES students during the pandemic and for their return to school, Rebecca has been busy updating educational materials that the Kenyan students use. Revision books covering the whole syllabus from Forms 1 to 4 were obtained for math, physics, chemistry and biology along with set books for English. These books were recommended by the teachers and can be used for several years, thus cutting down on the expensive photocopying previously done so the girls had such materials.

Calculators, originally purchased in 2006 and used yearly since, were also replaced. This undoubtedly will make the students very happy, as many of the calculators were not functioning properly! Perhaps their math and science marks will improve as a result of these timely purchases.

by Joy Ruffeski



Progress at Dumbeta

Our spring newsletter showed pictures of the land on the grounds of Dumbeta Secondary School being cleared for the foundation of their library. Funds for this structure were donated by the students, staff, parents, and friends of Stelly's Secondary School in Central Saanich near Victoria.

The picture on the following pages shows that a lot of progress has been made, though the building remains far from complete.

After the Tanzanian students were sent home in March, construction proceeded but after several weeks it was deemed important to cease non-vital projects of this nature as the close working conditions of the labour force might have been too tempting to the COVID-19 virus. In addition, April to June is the period of the year when nearly everyone has to focus on their shambas (farm plots) in order to ensure a harvest that is bountiful enough to see each family through the year.





Students are now back in school and the threat of COVID, at least around Katesh, is seemingly non-existent. Funds remain in the bank that will permit construction to continue, but, to date, the contractor has his tradesmen working elsewhere. We hope very much that we will be able to provide a photo of the finished library in our next newsletter.

by Chris Harker

Grads in Kenya Give Back

The Kenyan office considers all former CHES graduates to be members of CHEBAK (CHES Beneficiaries Alumni Kenya) whether or not they have signed up as CHEBAK members. For many years alumni have played a crucial role in our operations in Kenya. During student selection they are involved with document and information verification and mark checking. They make all the verification visits to ensure that the selected students are as needy as they indicate.

CHEBAK members also help with advising current students with respect to study skills. They may also assist in the office as needed, distribute books and other supplies, or help with the orientation of agents. During workshops all the assistant facilitators are grads, as are most of the facilitators. There are many such willing individuals who readily share their work-related skills. These include Eunice Mukolwe (Assertiveness), Elizabeth Akwabi (Health Habits & Hygiene), Cynthia Shivachi (Reproductive Health), Vantor Mwelema (Self Awareness), Ruth Aleyo (Study Skills), and Edith Olwande and Rael Mulili (Youth & Technology). Even some men who were CHES beneficiaries before only girls were selected assist: Charles Munyendo (Math), Anthony Napali (Course Choices), and Bonface Mango (Career Options). Of assistance also are former and current patrons and board members who are exemplarily good to CHES and are willing to do anything to help CHES girls succeed. Rebecca reports, “We have more than enough human resources than even we need.”

The grads who assist are carefully chosen to ensure they have high moral values and show good leadership skills of being able to serve others. Patrons in the schools assist by recommending suitable trustworthy candidates. They are given training in the office, and older grads help train the new ones.

Within the community, many CHEBAK members are also helping others during the pandemic. Edith Olwande (featured in one of our former CHES newsletters) has even gone the extra mile to ensure that she reaches the homes of families in her



school. If families did not have food that day she left them with some ugali, bar soap, cooking oil, sugar and tea – whatever the organization has that she is volunteering with during the school closure. When a student goes without supper and is not sure if she will have any food for the next day, it becomes hard to concentrate on the school assignment that has been taken to that student, so providing food is necessary. Food distribution is being done by community-based groups. So many jobs were lost during the past months that it has really had an impact even in the rural areas as most rural people depend on casual farm jobs from the families that had some source of income but no longer do.

Our grads are living up to CHES' motto: *We can't do everything . . . but we can do something!*
from material supplied by Rebecca Odhiambo, CHES Kenya Office Manager

Editha's Story

When I finished Standard (grade) 7 I was so sad because I was thinking on how I can continue with my studies due to the poor living conditions at home. But God helped me when I got sponsored from an organization known as CHES which deals with educating girls only.



I was very happy because I knew that now I can fulfill my goals. My sponsor helped me to pay my school fees, pocket money and extra education during holidays like CHES tutorial, English Immersion, Basic Mathematics Immersion. They do this to improve my academic performance. Also they helped me to stay in the Sara Williams Hostel where I eat and study with the presence of light during night and without any payment.

I am so proud of CHES with all the guidance including CHES staff and matron. I will never forget these people due to their kind hearts; they support poor people. Without CHES I couldn't and will never achieve my goals.

I would like to say thanks to all the people who contributed on making sure I can achieve my goals. May God bless CHES's guidance and the sponsors for their kind hearts.

by Editha Inyasi

Something of Interest - When You Can Travel Again!

Interested in supporting the CHES program in Kakamega, Kenya? Volunteers are always welcome for short or long visits to our modern house/office facility.

Check the website (www.canadianharambee.ca) for past newsletters for agent information and exciting accounts of agents' past experiences. For further information, contact ches@canadianharambee.ca or (778) 565-5261.



Rae's Story

In the year 2001, after retiring from careers in education, and because we had taught in Tanzania many years earlier, Chris and I applied to become CHES agents in Katesh, Tanzania. We have returned every year since. Our involvement in CHES in Tanzania is primarily with girls in Secondary Schools but because I had spent much of my career in Elementary schools in Victoria, it broke my heart to see the lack of resources, inadequate overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages in Tanzania. So, as well as our volunteer work with CHES, I created partnerships between several Victoria Elementary Schools and Primary schools in Tanzania's Hanang District. Over the years, Canadian students and teachers have fundraised and sent me with money to start lunch programs, build water tanks, and buy solar panels, books, sports equipment and school supplies for Tanzanian schools. I always consult with Tanzanian teachers and principals and, on request, provide them with items they really need. Most books bought are in Swahili and depict the lives of Tanzanian children.



They are also related to their and not our curricula. In order to inspire the Canadian children, I regularly visit their schools here in Victoria, showing Power Point presentations about life in Tanzania and letting them see how I spend their money and how their gifts had been received with much pleasure and appreciation.

One of the very supportive schools is Cloverdale Elementary School in Victoria which supports Lamay Primary School (GR K-7) in Katesh. They, as usual, sent me off in February 2020 with money to spend on their sister school. Because of the pandemic and our subsequent hasty departure from Katesh on March 17, there was not time to visit the school, so the Head Teacher brought a representative group of children to the CHES House to receive the gifts. By the time we got home, schools here were closed so this years' thanks and feedback to Cloverdale was the thank you letter and photos I sent via Ms. Sandra Jost, the school principal, who distributed them to all the Cloverdale parents and students via the school website.



Much to my great surprise, in early June this year I was asked to come to the school for a special presentation. As a result of Covid, this took place on the school grounds with the principal, half of a Grade 5 class, one teacher, a young Grade five girl and her parents – all of us very appropriately socially distanced. The young girl's name is Rae Poole. Her very large heart and exceptional humanitarian spirit had inspired her to spend her enforced time off school fundraising to help fellow students thousands of miles away. With the support of her parents, she single handedly raised \$1500 Cad for me to send to Tanzania. This has translated into 2.5 million Tanzanian shillings and will be of untold benefit to Lamay School and their students. Schools in Tanzania reopened in July and much consultation and planning took place so that the money was used in the best possible way to meet





the needs of the school and students. The project finally chosen was the construction of 38 student desks which were very much needed. Each desk will accommodate 3 or 4 children.

Rae has much to be proud of and we salute her inspiration and great generosity of spirit.

by Catriona Harker

Another CHES Success Story

This morning as I walked through the gate of the office I met with a beautiful smile which has made my day meaningful -a former CHES girl who finished Form 4 in 2013 at Keveye Girls High School. She had a nice locally made bag held in her hands. She greeted me with a big smile and we walked to the office together.

She started to introduce herself but I still remembered her from the time when she was interviewed. She is Anne Musinzi Avonde. She had come to the office with all her University certificates and transcripts to show me how she had performed at the University for four years. She was very grateful to CHES.

by Rebecca Odhiambo, CHES Kenya Office Manager



Letter from Victoria

It took a long time for this heartwarming letter to arrive. However, the recipient sponsors felt it was worth sharing.

Dear [Sponsor],

It's my hope that you, your friends, family and other relatives are very fine. I am fine too and doing well with my studies.

First of all I would like to tell you about the Form 2 National Examination which I did from November 11 to 15. By my side, I tried to answer the questions as much as I studied and I believe that I will pass well my exams. [She did.]

Also, I would like to wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2020. On my side I expect to celebrate Christmas Day with my family members and we also expect to attend the English Immersion weeks after Christmas.



Thank you so much for being my sponsor and allowing me this chance to be a CHES girl because CHES helped me to study well. During CHES programmes like CHES tutorials I got much knowledge as I study together with students from different schools. I also meet with different teachers and get new skills to overcome challenges I had.

CHES helped me to improve my performance because I had enough time to study, the presence of electricity and extra solar power at the hostel, water supply and also enough food that are all important needs for students to study well.

Dear sponsor; without CHES I think I would be just staying at home as other girls who do not get a chance to go to school and sometimes get married. Some of the girls that I graduated with [from elementary school] now have two children. So without CHES now I would be suffering with terrible pain of the world.

Lastly, thank you so much that you chose me to be your daughter out of many girls who need to be sponsored. I am proud of you as you are proud of me. I promise you that I am studying hard in order to reach my goal to become a doctor. May God bless you. My great greeting to all of your family, friends and other relatives at your mother country.

Best of luck in your everyday work.

Your lovely daughter,
Victoria

Remote Board Meetings During COVID

The Directors of CHES meet 8 and 10 times a year. Hitherto, our meetings have always been in a meeting room near our office at 9030 King George Boulevard in Surrey. Directors have to travel from their various homes scattered throughout the Lower Mainland and two have to ferry over from Vancouver Island. It is time consuming and (for some) expensive.

COVID has changed all that. Thanks to Zoom, we can now meet with ease and convenience from anywhere at a pre-arranged time. Business is conducted efficiently despite the occasional interruption from barking dogs, ringing phones, or chiming doorbells. (We are all too old to have young children claiming our attention!) Clothing is casual but mandatory.

Tasks are assigned and many can be dealt with wherever there is a computer although Julia, Joy, and sometimes Nancy have duties that require them to be in the office.

This must be one of the few times that COVID has made life a lot more convenient!

by Catriona Harker

KILA KITA KINA MWISHU

A Swahili saying meaning "Everything has an end!"

May we see an end to the COVID - 19 pandemic and may our girls in Africa be safe.



Fantastic Book on the Barabaig People – Well Worth the Read

The majority of the population of Tanzania's Hanang District is made up of Iraqi and Barabaig people. The former are traditional farmers. The Barabaig are pastoralists who traditionally moved with the seasons to ensure their herds could find water and fodder.

Charles Lane is an Australian who lived with subsistence Barabaig families for lengthy periods in the 1980s. His coffee-table size book, *Barabaig: Life, Love and Death on Tanzania's Hanang Plains* (2017) is a remarkable study of this group whose lifestyle is no longer sustainable. Half the book contains wonderful pictures. The text is easy to read and full of information including details of the infamous Tanzania-Canada Wheat Project, one of Canada's more embarrassing aid debacles.

In fact, it was Canada's attempt at restitution for this gaff that indirectly led to the formation of a CHES chapter in Tanzania in the early 1990s.

Barabaig is unlikely to be found on local bookshelves but if anyone is interested, search online booksellers for price and availability. It's worth it.

CHES Annual Appeal

In late November we will email our annual appeal inviting supporters to help us cover numerous "extra" expenses we incur annually. These include student workshops, health needs (such as hearing aids, glasses and medical emergencies), salaries for our few employees overseas, office supplies and expenses, and necessary professional costs (audits, bookkeeping and insurance). Note that this appeal will NOT be contacting current sponsors.

Did you know that last year 36% of CHES sponsors gave "a little bit more" than the basic \$600 sponsorship fee? We are hoping to see that percentage increase this year, especially as we have had additional and unexpected expenses of providing COVID protection for the girls.

CHES AGM

The CHES AGM will be held online via Zoom this year due to COVID-19 restrictions regarding no large in-person gatherings.

Date: November 21 at 2 p.m. PST.

Please plan on attending as access is available both by the internet and phone no matter where you are located in the world. A link for the AGM will be sent out approximately a week prior to the AGM so please watch for and bookmark the email link or copy the phone number so you may attend.

