

Canadian Harambee Education Society

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

Fall 2023 Newsletter #83



CHES AGM – October 26, 2024

In 2020, CHES started holding our AGM via Zoom. Both online and phone access is available through the Zoom format allowing sponsors and contributors worldwide to attend the meeting rather than just those who live in the Lower Mainland.

A link for the AGM and materials for the meeting will be sent out approximately a week prior to the AGM. Please watch for the invitation and bookmark the email link or copy the phone number so you can attend.

Date: October 26, 2024, at 2 p.m. (Pacific time)

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DAY STUDENTS VERSUS THOSE IN BOARDING SCHOOLS

This was written 54 years ago but still holds true today in Africa. This is why CHES tries to have students attend boarding schools while they attend secondary schools. Unfortunately, there are very few boarding schools in the Hanang District of Tanzania but, whenever possible, we have girls stay in hostels run by the school or at the Sara Williams Hostel.

“To Makaziwe Mandela, his eldest daughter: 1 May 1970

. . . I know only too well that it is not always easy for an African child to study as a day scholar.

The average African family lives in poverty, in a small and crowded house, with the privacy that a scholar needs to concentrate on her studies, and cannot afford to employ domestic assistants to clean the house, to cook the family food and wash the dishes. All the duties must fall upon the shoulders of the child, with the result that she is never fresh enough in the evening when she comes to do her homework. By comparison, a child who studies at a boarding-school enjoys many advantages as against a day scholar. There the environment and atmosphere are altogether different. She has ample time for study, can and very often discusses problems with her classmates, get help from senior students, converse for most of the time in the medium in which subjects are taught, find plenty of recreation in games, gymnastics and music, and have a high standard of performance in her examinations at the end of the year.”

from *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela*, edited by Sahn Venter (Liveright Publishing Corporation), 2018 (p. 166-167)

THE CHALLENGE OF MARKS

For many of you long time sponsors, this article will be similar to the one I wrote when I first went to Kenya six years ago, but I feel it's something that needs to be written again for those who don't understand what's going on with their student's marks.

What CHES looks for during interviews is for a bright and needy girl; top of her class but wouldn't be able to go to school without our help. When these girls are selected, they've just finished primary school and are around the ages of 13-16 years old, occasionally older!

After each term the girls come to the CHES office with their report card and sponsor letter. They sit down with one of the office workers and each girl's marks gets recorded into her file. The marks are sent to CHES Canada, and then to you.

I know that you expect your girl to do well; the last thing you want is to donate your money and have her not reach the desired outcome of getting good grades and going to university.

If for any reason one of the girl's marks is dropping, she will sit down with Rebecca who will talk about how she might lose the scholarship and ways to improve. You would think it's as simple as that; they know they could lose their scholarship so they should study more . . . but it's not!

You should remember that these girls come from all different backgrounds. Some have a supportive parent or parents, some are from broken and/or abusive homes. A few of them are the only child but most of them have many siblings. Some will only eat one meal each day. The majority of CHES girls come from small poor rural villages and have never been away from their home, especially to a big boarding school.

As much as we want every single girl to succeed, sponsors should remember these girls are all individuals with their own personal and family struggles they are trying to



overcome in addition to the normal teenage struggles of hormones, getting older, and trying to find a way to fit in.

When you write to your girl, try to encourage her to do the best she can in her situation. Just being able to complete school, regardless of her grade, will benefit her and her family in life.

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

by Naomi Andriessen

MARIAMU ZAKARIA

I was born at Balang'dalalu village in 2004. I started primary education at Balang'dalalu primary school in 2010 until 2017. Now I have completed Advanced level at Nangwa Girls High School here in Hanang district. I am truly grateful to reach this level because CHES has put a lot of effort into making sure that I get more success in my lifetime. I feel proud to be sponsored by CHES.

At home I live with my parents, my two sisters and my two big brothers. CHES means so much to me because my parents are not able to pay my school fees. CHES supports me to reach my goals and have a good destination.



I want to explain about my life before being sponsored by CHES. Actually my school life was very difficult in primary school because my parents were not able to provide my school needs so sometimes I went to school without having exercise books and even a proper uniform. I lived in this difficult life until I completed my primary education in 2017. After getting my result of class seven examinations I was selected to join secondary education at Chief Gejaru Secondary School and that was the beginning of my CHES sponsorship.

Since I joined my secondary education, life was not tough anymore because CHES helped me much by providing and paying for my school needs. In June 2018 CHES transferred me to Katesh Secondary School and to live in the Sara Williams Hostel because there is a conducive environment there which supported me to study well.

I am so blessed to be sponsored by this organization because it was not easy to have any success in my education without CHES. Thank you so much for the kind heart you have shown to me by supporting me well

and your effort to make sure that I reach my goals. I am so grateful for the work you are doing to help me and other students. It is wonderful to get a community of people who share in the same struggles. This sponsorship is a tremendous blessing to me and gives me the ability to continue pursuing my education. Actually I can say that I am happy to be among the CHES students and I am feeling very proud of CHES.

by Mariamu Zakaria



MARTINA GHAMBAYASHTA

My name is Martina Ghambayashta and I live in Arusha Tanzania. I was born in Manyara Region, Hanang' district. I'm a girl from the Barbaig tribe who comes from a poor family.

I remember in 2012 when I finished Standard 7. After finishing I lacked support to continue with secondary education due to poor financial condition of my parents. My father did not want me to study any further, He wanted me to get married then so that he could have a cow. In my family there were six children and I was the first child. I used to cry day and night as I wished to have opportunity to study more. However, no one cared except my mother and she said that she did not have anything to give me.

I heard of an opportunity to be educated by CHES and so I got a smile. I went to do the examinations and was accepted by CHES for further studies. I started my Form one education in 2013. I arrived late as my classmates had started classes in January but I reported at the end of February. My classmates had left me far behind but that was not a problem for me as I knew I would work hard to catch up.

I studied at Mwahu secondary school from Forms 1 through 4. One of the amazing benefits I got while a CHES girl is the English Immersion course we had every holiday. When I got to live at the Sara William hostel it helped me even more in my studies as I had fellow students to study with.



When I finished Form 4 I didn't do as well as I hoped in my studies as my mother was sick and I was worried about her. However, I did get a good enough score to go to a college. I thought I wanted to become a nurse but my dream to become a nurse changed and I took a journalism and media production course instead.

Again, it was a difficult journey. I lacked any support, and I studied at a private college in Arusha. The college let me study until I finished in November 2020. However, they didn't allow me to receive my finishing certificates until now because I had to pay all of the school fees first! It was a lot of money to me.

After finishing my studies, I got received a chance to do an interview for the position of young professional reporter. I tried my luck, and I got it! I was working under BBC media action in Tanzania on the youth program, a program on gender issues. I worked hard and loved my work very much, because it was social work. I decided to be the voice of young girls and women as that also makes me happy,

We have many thematic areas, and we do research as reporters. We meet other reporters and have a project team for content planning. I give priority to Hanang' District and had the opportunity to do an interview with one of the girls who was sponsored by CHES until she went to university.

Finally, of the six children in my family I am still the only one who had the chance to study, and my family depends on me for everything. Sadly, my BBC youth program contract ended on June 28, 2024, and I am looking for new employment. However, I write this message with tears of joy for all the help that CHES gave me.

by Martina Ghambayashta



WIN AN INCREDIBLE PRIZE!

The more girls we can help, the better CHES is fulfilling its mandate. To help more girls we need more sponsors.

Such a fact may not appear to go hand in hand with the fact that recently we had a major clean-up of our tiny office in Surrey. There were files and photos galore of course. Also dust and a very ancient sandwich. But there were also many items we have used in the past as fund-raisers. These include Louise Paulsen's iconic artwork on packs of hasty notes, copies of Chris Harker's book about CHES in Tanzania (White Necklace), some lovely jewellery, numerous salad servers, some batiks, and a T-shirt that needs ironing.



As we no longer have in-person meetings and in-person fund-raisers, these valuable "objets d'art" are all looking forward to new homes. So, here's the challenge.

Talk to your family members, workmates and friends about CHES. If you can find a new sponsor and get them to sign up, we will send you not one but TWO of our long-stored treasures. Think of it as a win for CHES and TWO wins for you!

At the moment we are sponsoring a total of 567 girls. Let's see how much higher that number can be by the time we publish our next newsletter in January.

by Chris Harker

A SPECIAL BENEFITS OF BEING A CHES AGENT

One lovely thing about volunteering at CHES Kenya is meeting your sponsor girl!

Lynah finished Form 4 and was returning her books and handing in her letter. I read it, noting at the end how she said it would be nice to be able to meet her sponsor one day. I went outside to where she was waiting and told her "I'm Naomi!" Her reaction was more shock than excitement and she just stared at me! However, she realized what was happening and a week later I was visiting her family at their shamba. They were all very excited to meet me, introduced me to everyone, and made me a lovely meal. They told me I'm Lynah's second mum, which was very nice to hear! They then tried to shower me with gifts, I walked out with too much sugar cane and veggies and had to politely refuse the chicken they said they'll send over to CHES office.

I also got to see my other student Grace who's now in Meru University. We had already met last time I was there in 2017/2018 when I interviewed her and selected her for my family and friends to sponsor through a fundraiser I did. She was home for holidays so I went to her shamba to visit her family, and I also did a trip to Meru to see her while she was at university.

One memorable moment, while I was at Grace's village having a chai (tea) with her, an older man excitedly walked into the shop talking non-stop to me. At first I was a bit worried because I didn't understand what he was on about, constantly shaking my hand and introducing himself. Turns out a mzungu has not been to this village before and word got out I was there. His daughter was previously sponsored by CHES and just finished university, and he was excited I was in his village and could express his gratitude to CHES in person.

Being able to meet my sponsor students, their families, and their communities makes me realize how much CHES has changed so many people's lives.

by Naomi Andriessen

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IRENE'S STORY

My name is Irene Nasimiyu, a CHES girl graduate from Kakamega county in western Kenya. Allow me to briefly share my background and how the CHES foundation transformed my life from my childhood.

Personally, I hail from a very poor background, as a first-born in a family of 14 siblings. My late father who worked as mason was our family bread winner. However, even though his income was not stable, he became an addict of alcohol, making him neglect his family chores. Life became very hard to the extent that securing school for my siblings and me became a mirage.

At this young age of my life, I started experiencing depression since I couldn't foresee the future of our family and my education. One day I learnt of a program that was supporting needy girls with education. Without hesitating, I walked into their office which was based within our major town Kakamega and shared my story. Without any fear of contradiction, I can confidently declare that day as my life turning point.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the founders of CHES. As one of the beneficiaries, I am profoundly indebted to the foundation for the numerous contributions that it has continuously made in not only supporting my education but also helping a countless number of young girls from very poor backgrounds.

CHES supported my education from secondary to college level. I trained and qualified as a journalist. It therefore gives me pleasure to highlight some of my past achievements that I couldn't have attained were it not for the foundation.

As a Form 3 student, I wrote a story to the editor in one of the leading national newspapers known as Nation. The article was given coverage which brought jubilation to the entire high school management and my fellow students. Out of this, it was decided by the management that together with other selected students we be taken on academic trip to a famous tourist attraction point known as Thomson Falls located over 300 km from my former school. This is how my passion of becoming a journalist began.

In my journalism journey, though facing numerous challenges, I decided to pay back to the community by coming up with a mentorship program where I go to girls' schools to mentor the young girls and encourage them to be self-disciplined as they pursue their careers.

Having realized the high level of poverty that prevails in our county, which makes women and young girls vulnerable, I decided to take advantage of the opportunities that I learnt during my career to tackle the emerging climate change impacts that threaten livelihoods. The approach I developed was to bring women together--particularly the ones who are not employed, young and old--and train them on basic skills of entrepreneurship. We used locally available materials or activities on livelihood diversification, especially nature-based solutions such as kitchen garden and beekeeping.

As a result, we formed the New Recada Women Group and registered it formally. The group members were trained and equipped with prerequisite skills such as communication and entrepreneur skills. We came up with an initiative of cleaning the environment and turning organic waste into charcoal briquettes. Through the initiative, the women have adapted a cleaner source of energy that is healthier to them, saving the resources that they could have used to buy charcoal and at the same time earning an income from sale of briquettes.



Photo: Sample of products from the New Recada Women Group

Through the initiative, the women are not only able to raise funds to pay for their children's school fees but also to support their young girls especially with sanitary requirements without necessarily depending with their husbands.

In terms of exposure, learning and sharing of best practices, the women have also had an opportunity to attend and participate during county platforms such as Agricultural Society of Kenya (ASK) show and Farmers Field Day where they showcased their products. In addition through my effort as a



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journalist, the group story featured in two major TV stations in Kenya where they were able to demonstrate to the viewers the critical role that they are playing to mitigate the effects of climate change through clean energy initiatives.



Photo: Showcasing their briquettes at the Kakamega agricultural show



Photo: attending the farmers field day at Bukura

The group is proceeding on well though it's important to note that the capacity of this initiative is not fully utilized because they are making briquettes manually; this is labour intensive and therefore hindering them from meeting the demand of their customers. Acquiring a briquette machine could be a breakthrough for the group.

In conclusion, I won't say that I have done enough but with my little effort at least one or two girls can testify how change in their mother's life has impacted them positively. The link below shows the group demonstrating how they make their smoke-free briquettes using organic waste material such as paper, cow dung and sawdust.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSBuGw5uNyw>

by Irene Nasimiyu

LIFE AFTER FORM IV IN TANZANIA

In Kenya girls who graduate with sufficiently high marks from Form IV are able to transition directly to university. In Tanzania it is a bit more complicated.

Girls who receive high marks in Form IV are offered a place in a high school where they complete Forms V and VI. There they focus on three subjects known as a "combination." PCB for instance would be physics, chemistry and biology while EGM would be economics, geography and math. The girls have three choices for their combinations but the final decision will depend on how well they did in each subject. The high school they are assigned to is based on space and often on specializations related to a particular school. It could be anywhere in the country. Upon graduation, if they have done well, the graduates are likely to be offered a place in university. They may be asked what career path and subjects interest them most, but the final decision will again depend on marks.

Girls with slightly lower marks are now offered places in colleges for two to three years where the career outcome is targeted from the start. This year, 10 of our CHES girls are heading off to specialize in diverse fields that include agricultural production, banking and finance, transport, community development, information technology, local government and, interestingly, naval architecture and off-shore engineering--the latter being an interesting career for a young lady brought up 500 km from the nearest salt water.

This year, of the 63 girls who graduated from Form IV, 49 (or 78%) are moving on to post-secondary education. This is a far cry from less than 10 years ago when we considered it a good year if five graduates moved on to Form V. Teachers are now better trained and teaching methods are more effective. This explains part of the improvement. But much credit has to go to the month-long tutorial session sponsored by CHES that targets math and English.

This tutorial session occurs in June, the last holiday period before the girls write their final exams in November. Another era might have referred to this as "cram school." It may be just this. But



it works! Students who can understand what the question asks and are able to reply coherently will provide a better answer than those with less adequate skills. Keep in mind that English is the third language for virtually every girl.

CHES sponsors with girls who “move on” are invited to continue their sponsorship for two additional years. New sponsors are found for girls whose sponsors are unable to make this additional commitment.

Girls who do not get a post-secondary placement return to their families. Most of them find or create jobs and, thanks to their education and English skills, often become influential in their communities. Some girls find the funds to undertake training programs in various fields. Most will marry but will restrict their families to two or three children; these children will be well dressed and well fed and they will be encouraged to do well at the schools they eventually attend.

Regardless of whether a CHES girl is sponsored for four or six years, her life has been dramatically altered. And obviously, very much for the better.

by Chris Harker

HE DID IT AGAIN!

For many years Willie Axelson has grown and sold thousands of tomato plants to people who live around Saskatoon. The money has been donated to CHES and targeted towards improving the living conditions for the girls who stay at the Sara Williams Hostel in Katesh, TZ while they attend five secondary schools in the area. However, all CHES students in Tanzania benefit as they spend a month at the hostel during the tutorials in June/July.

Last year was supposed to be his final year of such a big endeavour but he cares so much for the CHES girls and giving them a positive future that he did it again this year. Many thanks Willie. There is a special place in the heart of each student whose life you have touched through your kindness.



SAYING IT IN SWAHILI

Every nation has its own aphorisms. Many of them are the same as those in other countries. However often the wording is altered to reflect local conditions or culture.

Below are a few popular Swahili sayings. How would you say each in Canadajun?

- When two elephants fight it is the grass that suffers.
- Only a fool tests the depth of the water with two feet.
- Luck doesn't knock twice.
- A roaring lion kills no game.
- Not everyone who chases the zebra catches it, but he who caught it, chased it.
- A beautiful person is not without blemish.

WHY SHOULD YOU VOLUNTEER?

Last September I had a last-minute change of plans, which opened up my calendar to be able to head back to CHES Kenya and help with the selection process for this year's students. I had been to Kenya once before as an agent in 2017/2018.

Recently, I was trying to decide what angle I wanted to write about my experience, since previous agents have explained the ins and outs of the selection process in other articles, and it made me think . . . what happens if we have no agents volunteering their time at CHES Kenya?

Another agent, Barbara Melara, arrived when I was there in February, and previous years Barbara, as well as Larry and Linda Huber, have helped. But if my plans hadn't changed no one would have been over there for this past year's selection period.

In the past, there used to be agents in Kenya year-round, and I've been told it's now a struggle just to find people to go for a month or two during the interviews. I understand there are many obstacles: taking time away from work and family, financial issues, the unknown of going to a country that's been known for having unrest and violence are just a few. So, I will talk about my experience with this.

I obviously cannot guarantee the absolute safety of someone travelling to Kenya. But nor can I guarantee your safety walking home at night from the train station! (Ok I'm from Australia, it might be a bit safer in Canada) You have to make smart decisions wherever you go.

CHES Kenya has a beautiful office, accommodation, and garden set up close to Kakamega town. It's fully fenced with 24-hour Askaris (security guards) and a cute dog Simba, who I hope would attack an intruder.

The office manager, Rebecca, is very diligent to make sure you understand how to conduct yourself and how it works while living there. There are several taxi drivers CHES uses if you don't like cramming into local transport or you're out after dark.

As previous agents have explained in articles, they find Kenyans to be such kind and lovely people!

You get to know everyone in the area: the lady that sells you your 30c mangoes, the boda man (motorbike taxi) sitting at the corner who gets excited when you finally ask him for a lift and he tells you how he's seen you around and been waiting for the chance to talk to you one day, the ladies at the beauty shop who wants you to stop for a chat and get a \$4 pedicure, and the kids that try join you on your morning run.

I didn't feel unsafe in Kakamega, but every country has opportunists, so I didn't do dumb stuff to put myself in an unsafe situation.

Volunteering at CHES is surprisingly cheap. Yes, you might have the upfront costs of your flights, but once there you have free accommodation, you put in little money for

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electricity, if you're game you can take public transport, you can eat 'fancy' at the golf club with \$5-7 meals and \$2 beers, be adventurous and eat \$2-3 local meals, or use the huge kitchen in the house to make something fresh with the cheap fruit and vegetables available. It's definitely cheaper than holidaying in Canada!

As a world traveller I spend a lot of time away from home, but I can understand it's not for everyone when you have a job, or a new grandkid on the way.

I met a 55 and 62 year old couple last month - she wanted to travel he didn't. After COVID and a couple of close friends passed away he decided to go for it and they sold everything, quit their jobs, and now are volunteering and travelling around the world. He loves it! Sometimes their kids have flown out to meet them for a short time as well.

I'm not telling you to do that (I'm also not telling you not to do that) but I personally think you need to enjoy yourself while you can, otherwise you'll keep putting it off until one day you'll be unable to do it.

CHES exists because of wonderful people like yourselves donating money to sponsor a needy student. But the other part of it is having people volunteering their time to help not just with CHES Canada, but at the CHES Kenya office as well.

Rebecca and her new office assistant Caroline do a great job making sure it all runs smoothly, but unfortunately, with a lot of corruption going around, locals like seeing a 'mzungu' (white person) in the office as the face of CHES to put their minds at ease. Also, it's nice to have a CHES Canada representative when doing interviews, visiting schools, and for the Form 4's graduation ceremony.

None of us are getting any younger and the world seems to be getting crazier. Get out of your comfort zone, experience something new, and make the most of having the opportunity to volunteer your time with CHES Kenya while you can.

by Naomi Andriessen

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Dr. Google reports that the most popular names for girls today in Canada are Olivia and Amelia. In the 1940s Mary and Barbara topped the list. Names change with the times. What about names in Tanzania? Among the most popular around Katesh are Neema and Paulina.

In Canada we name our kids after some months. April, May, June and Julia, for instance. This year's graduating class in Katesh included Febronia.

Often western names are chosen, but with a slight twist. In the same class were Janeth, Magreth, Winfrid, Agness, Editha, and Tiodora.

There are names that suggest characteristics that may be chosen somewhat optimistically when a child is a babe in arms, Scholastica, for example. Or how about Happyness or Gladness. Restituta is interesting, and one has to assume that Pulkeria lives up to her name, with its Latin origin of beautiful, nice, noble, glorious, happy, and lucky.

Some names are particularly endearing, at least for Catriona and myself. Several girls we have known for many years now have girls named Catriona and boys named Chris.

by Chris Harker

