Canadian Harambee Education Society

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

Spring 2025 Newsletter #85

Our Office Location Has Moved!

For the past 17 years CHES had free office space thanks to the Surrey Teachers' Association. Unfortunately, they now need that space, so we've moved to a new location which we have leased.

The new address is:

214 - 14225 57th Ave.,

Surrey, BC Canada V3K 0H6

Our phone number and email address remain the same.
(778) 565-5261 CHES@canadianharambee.ca

CHES Has Lost a Dear Friend

Robb Taylor, a former CHES agent and long-time director, passed away peacefully on March 25, 2025.

Together with his wife Jeannette (also a former agent and CHES board member), Robb worked and travelled all over the world although his actual home was in Lumsden, Saskatchewan. This included living in Tanzania, Botswana, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, and Sri Lanka working with CIDA, WUSC, Khama Rhino Sanctuary, CHES, and CUSO. He camped and hiked though North America, South America, and Europe.

After retiring, Robb was on the CHES board of directors and organized many group trips to Tanzania and Botswana to share the Africa he loved. His many passions included math. He was instrumental in developing the Math Immersion program for CHES girls in Tanzania; this has helped to improve student success in that subject in recent years.

Robb collected and maintained strong friendships with people far and wide. Those who knew him remember his instant warmth and ability to connect. He will be missed by so many individuals whose lives he has touched deeply.

Family and friends so wishing may make donations to CHES in memory of Robb Taylor.

by Joy Ruffeski

Grant Received for School Supplies

The R R Smith Memorial Fund Foundation advances public education in British Columbia and in developing countries. We are pleased that they funded our request for $2,500 which will help pay for some school supplies, texts, and uniforms in both Kenya and Tanzania.

We thank them sincerely for their generosity.

by Joy Ruffeski

Trump Donates $10 Million to CHES!

This headline may have got your attention, but not everything one reads nowadays is true. The headline above certainly isn't. One of my high school teachers proclaimed to the class one day, "Believe half of what you see and nothing of what you hear." It was good advice in 1956 and even more so today with the internet allowing anyone to say anything.

This all relates to an inquiry we received from a concerned sponsor. Wanting to write to the girl she sponsors, she sought the help of Dr. Google to learn the mailing address of her school. Several news articles popped up suggesting drug use, sexual improprieties, cheating, and teacher absenteeism were all common and that tainted meat was being served to the students.

When this was brought to our attention, we contacted our CHES office in Kenya and asked them to investigate. It seemed odd as the school in question had a sterling reputation.

Fake News appears to be the explanation. A new principal had been appointed and quickly learned that several people associated with the school were lining their pockets by providing food and services at above-market prices. Such contracts were immediately cancelled and new and honest providers found. The school even built its own slaughterhouse to cut out the middlemen who, hitherto, had provided the school with meat.

The scammers were not happy and reacted by posting all sorts of vitriol on the internet. Someone then forwarded the worst of it to the local papers who (shame on them) printed it as "news." Unhappily, such "news" becomes the truth unless someone bothers to check. Which we did.

We have been assured the school is running well and is in good (and honest) hands. For this relief, much thanks!

by Chris Harker

A New Expense

Will You Help?

For the last 17 years, CHES has had a free office, thanks to the generosity of the Surrey Teachers' Association. Besides the small room for files and office activities, we've also had access to a nearby meeting room and a washroom. We've always been grateful for this freebie but have never taken it for granted, realizing that at some point in the future the STA may want it back.

That day came, thanks to an expanding student population and the STA's need for more space.

We spent April organizing and departed our old office for the last time on May 7. Our new office is now at:

Canadian Harambee Education Society
214 – 14225 57th Ave.,
Surrey, BC V3X 0H6

Our phone and email address remain the same as will our banking information.

The new location and facilities are great. We have everything we need--a larger office and a five-year lease. However, we are now paying over $600 a month (approximately $7,500 yearly). This is an expense we didn't budget for as the STA gave us our notice in February.

We can, of course, find the necessary rent money but, as long-time CHES supporters will know, we prefer to spend money on girls, not rent. Every month's rent is almost the equivalent of a year's sponsorship for a Kenyan or Tanzanian girl.

Should any sponsor or supporter reading this feel inclined to cover the cost of a month or half-month or week, or any other amount, CHES will be hugely grateful. Any such donations receive receipts for tax purposes.

Thank you for considering this request.

by Chris Harker

Almost There

In 2019, 26 students from Stelly's Secondary School in Central Saanich travelled to Tanzania during their spring break and helped to begin construction of a girls' dorm at the remote Mwahu Secondary school, 35 km west of Katesh.

Before the students left, the foundation was in and the walls were up; soon thereafter the roof went on, thanks to the local District office. However, due to lack of funding the dorm sat unfinished until April 2022 when, thanks to two significant donations, the dorm was completed and nearly 150 very happy girls moved in. CHES Canada and CHES Tanzania both played a significant role in expediting this achievement.

When Chris and Catriona Harker visited Mwahu in January 2024 they found a lot of happy girls. Sadly, the boys were not as happy as their dorm continued to be squalid and foul. The Harkers felt they had to do something for the boys.

Realizing that they could not work through CHES Canada (whose mandate is to support girls) they discovered the Royal Commonwealth Society, Vancouver Island, another Canadian NGO, that was prepared to be used as a conduit for the funding. Family, friends, and many CHES sponsors and supporters contributed generously. Construction began in the fall of 2024. In March 2025 another contingent of 16 students from Stelly's made the lengthy safari to Mwahu to help out. As construction was, by then, well underway, their tasks were mainly plastering, painting, and installing ceiling panels.

After the students left, the windows have gone in, wiring for lighting has been installed, and the final clean-up is in process. At this writing (late April) a tower is being constructed on which will sit a large water tank. The boys will be able to wash by turning a tap instead of using a bucket!

It is safe to say that by the time you are reading this, about 150 boys will be sleeping comfortably in their new hostel. A hostel that, by the way, cost less than $100,000!

Many, many thanks to everyone who helped to make this happen.

by Chris Harker

A Visit to Remember:

My Spring Break in Katesh

Sara Prouse

In March 2025, I was one of 16 students travelling from Victoria, Canada, to Katesh, Tanzania. We all had an incredible time exploring beautiful Katesh and meeting so many kind and welcoming people. Many of the sights we saw were very new and astonishing for us.

As Canadians, we have had a very different experience with education. In Canada, school is publicly funded, ensuring that no matter your financial situation, every student will be able to receive an education. This is sadly not the reality for many young children—especially girls—in Tanzania.

In preparation for this trip to Katesh we were aware of the differences and similarities between the school systems of each country. We read stories and heard testimonies; however, meeting the CHES girls on our first night in Katesh changed everything. The sullen scene of quiet suffering we were expecting was replaced with the joyful faces and excited smiles of the CHES girls. Their happiness was such a wonderful thing for all of us to see. These girls were intelligent, kind and funny. We loved getting to know each of them personally and learning their stories.

This first meeting was an incredibly impactful moment for us. We were so excited to play volleyball, play soccer and talk with these girls, getting to know them. It was gratifying to learn that the money we had raised was going to so many wonderful girls. Girls that were about the same age as all of us. Girls who dream of becoming doctors, teachers and soccer players. Girls who deserve the best possible education.

Interacting at the CHES compound

As we said our tearful goodbyes to the CHES girls, I will never forget the strength and resilience these girls displayed. These young women were a true testament to how vital education equality is for all people around the world. These bright students have taught all of us from Stelly's so much about the beautiful country of Tanzania and about the importance of gratitude in our lives.

I am incredibly thankful to the many people who made it possible for my classmates and me to visit these girls—especially Naomi, Bernadette and Maggi. The time we spent together will always be remembered and cherished.

by Sarah Prouse, a graduating student from Stelly's Secondary School

Agent's Report on Kenya

My few weeks at CHES Kenya in Kakamega were a really good experience. I arrived in Kenya on Friday, February 7, and at CHES on Monday, February 10, having first spent the weekend in Nairobi. Two CHES graduates now at university nearby came in to spend Saturday and Sunday with me. Before I left home some friends gave me some money to take them dress shopping and that was a lot of fun.

CHES compound in Kenya

Rebecca and Caro at CHES had been working full-out for weeks before I arrived. There were no Form 1 students coming into secondary schools this year because of a change in the education system. The class that formerly would have been Form 1 are now senior elementary students and will stay in their elementary schools for an extra year. So, scholarships were given to girls already in the old Form 2 designation but who meet our criteria of being bright and needy. The latter criteria were determined by them having been sent home during their first year for lack of fees and the same thing happening during this current year along with their marks and placement in Form 1. Schools were asked to suggest girls who fit these criteria. Regular-style interviews were held in November, December, and January, and when I arrived at CHES on February 10 there were still six scholarships available.

Orientation for new students and parents

Meeting with students at one of the schools

I was warmly welcomed on arrival and on February 11 began the process of visiting schools to pay the fees and meet with our girls. In each case we met with all the girls and then had an extra visit with the new girls.

There was a really poignant moment when one of the Form 4 girls came and asked if she could talk to me. She told me that she had seen me the previous two years and had always wanted to talk to me. When she left to go to lunch, she realized that if she didn't talk to me this year she never would as she was graduating so she came back! We just sat together, spoke softly and we both enjoyed the visit.

Almost all, if not all, of the schools now have sophisticated camera systems which allow the principal to observe all areas of the school from the office on a television-type screen. This also allows other individuals to observe what teachers and students were up to.

There were some schools where we were not able to meet the principal due to out-of-school meetings but in most cases, we did meet with the principal.

One principal spoke very emotionally about what it meant to her and her school to have CHES involved. Other principals lobbied to have more CHES girls join their schools. However, the progress of the girls is monitored carefully, and new girls are placed according to what is hoped to be the best fit. As a result, some schools have a large number of CHES girls and others not many.

When we met with the girls, we took the opportunity to encourage them, recognize some really good work, and also to really push them to do better and to remind them of the rules of their scholarships.

Caro and I met with all the girls and parents when they returned to school at the end of their half-term break. I had been given the task of speaking with the girls and had a list of several points I was to make. I worked on what I wanted to say but as is often the case that changed. The Patron was my interpreter and she was an excellent one. I opened the talk by saying I was in front of a

Form four graduation ceremonies

room full of smart people and that the only difference between the girls and their parents was OPPORTUNITY. The girls have been given it while their parents never received it. This was a good opening and caught everyone's attention.

At the CHES office there were full days followed by more full days, and Rebecca and Caro manage all the tasks and all the visitors very well. One of the big events was the Form 4 graduation party. This year each girl was able to invite a parent, and this was a great success. The parents were so proud of their girls. Both the graduate and her parent came to receive the Certificate and this was really touching. While some girls hadn't done as well as they hoped and their marks were not high enough for university, we decided that this day was about celebrating and it was a special day for all regardless of their marks. The speakers this year presented ways to navigate the university and college application process. The speakers representing government, NGOs, and Absa Bank were really well received. The girls and parents were fully attentive to all the speakers as they all wanted that information.

We held a morning meeting for Patrons which was well received. Patrons in schools that CHES students attend play a most important role in that they make certain that the girls are doing well with their studies and adjusting well to life in a boarding school; they help to organize support if they are not. Madam Olvia was the guest speaker--she had been a most successful Patron some years ago and she shared with the group her way of doing things and her understanding of and approach to the job. In the Q & A period Patrons, some of them new, had the opportunity to ask about the things they found challenging, and many spoke about the things they would adopt and adapt

Patrons meeting

The CHES Kenya board met the last weekend I was there. Serious matters were discussed including the orientation sessions which are seen as essential and just a few suggestions were made. The Auditor's Report was ready and

accepted by the board. The board was pleased that the new constitution for CHES Kenya was going to be delivered to the NGO board and to finally have that task completed.

I am hoping to go back to Kakamega in the future. I have so enjoyed being an agent there for CHES several times.

by Barbara Melara

CHES Delays Early Marriage

I was recently given a copy of COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING, a magazine published by Global Affairs Canada. In it, an article quoting UNFPA, states that the prevalence of child marriage in Tanzania is one of the highest in the world. Almost two fifths of girls will be married by the time they are 18. Some are as young as 13 or 14. In the regions of Dodoma and Lindi, the 'married-by-18' figures are 51% and 48% respectively. Most have their first child within a year.

It would be interesting to learn the figures for Manyara Region. The Hanang District – home base for CHES – is found there. All our girls who graduate from Form IV are at least 18 and none of them are married. Those that move on to Forms V and VI and later, to university, are well into their twenties before they graduate. Some may marry at this point, but others wait until they find a job. Often, that's where they meet their husbands-to-be.

If nothing else, CHES permits girls to grow up before they marry and bear children. But CHES of course, does so much more than this.

by Chris Harker

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"Harambee" is Swahili for "pull together"