

Canadian Harambee Education Society

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

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Canadian Harambee Education Society

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Big Changes to the Kenyan Education System

Kenya has a new school curriculum as well as the new grade structure. This new curriculum is called the Kenya competency-based curriculum (CBC). The grade structure is now six years of primary, three years of junior secondary, and three years of senior secondary.

In the old educational structure, the focus of the national examinations was on the ability to memorize huge quantities of information in all subjects of study. The new assessment is a shift away from memorization to demonstration of seven major competencies: communication and collaboration, self-efficacy, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy, and learning to learn.

At the end of the three years of junior secondary, all students take a national examination that determines which stream they may enter in senior secondary. CHES will be supporting students in all three tracts (STEM, Social Sciences, and Arts and Sports Science) as long as they achieve a certain level on the national examinations.

The Kenyan government is calling the senior secondary school classes as Grades 10, 11, and 12. Learners will be assessed in seven subjects, of which four are core subjects – English, Kiswahili/KSL, Core Mathematics/Essential Mathematics, and Community Service Learning (CSL). The remaining three subjects are to be selected from the pathways and tracts of choice.



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Here is an explanation of the three pathways:

1. STEM Pathway: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics with subjects including physics, chemistry, biology, computer science, aviation technology, and geospatial technology. Potential careers would be in engineering, medicine, IT, and research.
2. The Social Sciences Pathway: humanities, business, and social studies with subjects to include languages, literature, humanities, business, and accounting. Potential careers would be law, economics, management, and social work.
3. The Arts and Sports Science Pathway: creativity, media, and athletics with subjects including music, fine art, performing arts, media studies, physical education, and creative writing. Potential careers would be in art, music, journalism, professional sports, and acting.

For more detailed information on each stream and a comparison of the old 8-4-4 system to the CBE pathways: <https://edupoa.com/blog/understanding-cbe-pathways-a-guide-to-kenyas-senior-secondary-education-choices/>

NOTE: CHES' support is limited to students in the new three years of senior secondary and all Kenyan students will attend boarding schools. For identification purposes, rather than referring to Grades 10, 11, and 12, we will identify students as being in Form 1SS, Form 2SS, and Form 3SS.

By Joy Ruffeski

CHES AGM

The AGM was held on November 1, 2025, with members attending via Zoom from many places in Canada and the United States. CHES currently has 581 girls being sponsored: 248 in Kenya and 333 in Tanzania. Students in both countries continue to do well with over 80% in both countries automatically qualifying for university due to their high scholastic achievement.

Joy Ruffeski, executive director of CHES, chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone. The financial reports were reviewed, and thanks were extended to the many sponsors who gave extra funds, especially as we had the unexpected costs of now having to lease an office after 17 years of free rent. All the reports had been sent out with the agenda, and questions were answered from those in attendance at the AGM.

Anne Norman chaired the election for the 2025/2026 Board of Directors. The following individuals were elected to be members of the Board:

Orrie Babiuk	Dwight Dracek	Becky Finley	Bev Ford
Catriona Harker	Chris Harker	Wendy Horan	Karen Kilbride
Mandy Klepic	Nancy Mann	Laura Parker-Jervis	Joy Ruffeski
Chris Taylor	Jeanette Taylor	Lorrie Williams	

The meeting ended with a sincere thank you to all sponsors and contributors for their continued support.



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Introducing Two New Members to our CHES Board

Laura Parker-Jervis

I am a 47-year-old high school teacher-librarian living in East Vancouver. Fun Fact: I've been sponsoring CHES girls since I was a youth (that was our Christmas present from Chris). Once I started teaching, I have tried to sponsor a girl every year through fundraising initiatives with our Global Issues Club through a bi-yearly coffeehouse music event.

I love to travel and try to go somewhere at least once a year; this past year I went to Portugal, Mexico and Kauai. I am writing this from Madrid! I was lucky enough to get to Tanzania for a trip to Zanzibar and a safari with Chris and Catriona in 2023--it definitely was the trip of a lifetime for me! I also do school trips to Europe every other year.

Other passions of mine include reading, writing narrative non-fiction, journaling, camping, hiking, kayaking, and going to concerts--I am obsessed with music. I am also very social and love going out for delicious food and drinks, and I love a good deep conversation about life and love and reflecting. I live with my partner, Fraser, and my dog, Hops, both of whom join me on many of my adventures. I'm excited and a bit nervous to be part of the board of CHES.

Christopher Taylor

My family has been involved with CHES in Kenya, Tanzania and Canada for many years. I lived, worked and have family in neighbouring Malawi, and I have travelled in Tanzania so I am familiar with the region.

My educational field is geography but my career has been in information technology. I am a lifelong learner, having also studied computer science and business analysis while working at the University of Regina. As a new member of the board of directors, I hope that my skillset, knowledge and experience will provide me with the wisdom needed to help keep CHES operational for years to come, until ideally the charity is no longer necessary. The fundamental purpose of CHES is to empower students and facilitate academic success. This is a collective effort involving the boards in Canada, Kenya, and Tanzania, the sponsors, the local staff in Kenya and Tanzania, the families and surrounding communities in each country, and most importantly the hard-working students we are all supporting.

Please join me in sponsoring a CHES student.





Joyce Jacob

I was born 16 years ago in Endasak, Tanzania. I have one brother. My father passed away in 2009 so I lived with my grandmother as my mother left us to return to her family home in Arusha. She stayed there a long time and she got another husband, so in total we are now six children.

I started my primary education as a boarder at Katesh primary school. It is a government school so there were no payments. But life was hard as my grandmother could not afford soap and toothpaste and other needs although food was not a problem.

I finished my primary school and was selected to continue with secondary education. At that time, I did not know about CHES but then I heard about it. My primary teacher sent my name to CHES. By the grace of God, I was one of the students called to CHES for an interview. Later I was told I was to be sponsored by CHES. Before I was selected to be a CHES student I stayed at my primary teacher's house from January to June. Then I went to the Sara Williams Hostel. When I was at the teacher's house, I faced many problems as I was sick and my relatives disagreed about sending me to hospital. They complained that they had no money for my treatment.

I always thank God for blessing me with his grace because I got a sponsorship to CHES to support me. My dream is to become a journalist. I like this career because I want to know much about my district, region, country, continent as well as the world and I want to travel to different parts of the world in order to know what is going on. I will study hard to get a good performance so that I can reach my dream.

I would like to thank you for your sponsorship and for supporting me in my education. I promise you that I will study hard in order to reach my dreams because for a person to succeed in life he/she must struggle in order to get a good performance or good results.

May almighty God bless you.

Anitha Augustino

I am 14 years old and am the second-born in a family of two children. My brother is called Avit. My mother left us when I was young. We lived with my father but he could not afford our basic needs. We all lived in one room.

When I was in primary school I faced other problems. I walked a long distance from home to school. Sometimes when I went back for lunch there was no food. My father told me to believe in God in order to reach my goals. When I was in Standard 5 my father told my head teacher about our life. Then my brother and I moved into the Katesh primary school dormitory so that me and my brother have a chance to study well and to reach my vision of becoming a doctor.



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When I finished Standard 7 in 2023, I passed my national exams and was selected to continue to secondary school. Although sometimes I want to give up, I remember that I must study hard but I worry and fear how I will continue. But I was selected to be sponsored by CHES, which supports me to continue my education up to now as a Form 2 student.

Finally, I would like to thank CHES for giving me this opportunity and I promise I will study hard in order to reach my dreams.

Witness Marcel

I am 20 and the firstborn of four children. Our names are Witness, Winithea, Wilson and Waydael. I began my primary education in 2012 and completed Standard 7 in 2018. I then heard from my head teacher about CHES, an organization that helps girl students. I wrote to CHES about my difficult life. Since 2014 my mother was suffering from a paralytic disease on one side of her body. Due to that we can't do anything because of the many costs used in her treatments at different hospitals. I had challenges too with my studies because before school I must get up early in order to help my father with my mother.

I became sponsored by CHES for my Ordinary Level and although it was difficult, I completed my Form 4 at Bassodesh Secondary in 2022. After that, I stayed at home to help my father look after my mother because always she was going to hospitals for different checkups.

When the secondary results were announced, I learned that I passed with a Division 2 (only a Division 1 is higher). This permitted me to continue to Advanced Level. I am now in a High School in Geita Region and CHES continues to pay for my school and personal needs. But when I was at school, I lost my mother due to her condition. We were then together with my father for about four months, but one day when he was going somewhere he got in an accident and died on April 8, 2025.

When I came back from his funeral, I had a hard time as I had lost both my parents within six months. But I had to return to school to prepare for my exams for Form 6. I thank God that He has been with me through my Ordinary and Advanced Levels of education. May God make me live a long and successful life.

Once again thank you (CHES) from the bottom of my heart for everything that you have done for me, because without your help I would not reach this stage. May God be with you for sure because your kindness has really touched my life in a meaningful way.



CHES Girls Love Your Letters

CHES girls love to receive letters from their sponsors. Your letters are learning tools; often the girls learn not just about you and your family but, depending on what you write, about Canada as well.

We too learn about Tanzania and the lives of our girls for they provide us with a glimpse of their lives when they write to us.

Here are some comments recently received:

I was so glad to hear my name mentioned among those students whose sponsors had written to them.

I am very happy to know your national animal of Canada and I am amazed to hear that an animal can cut down trees with its teeth. This is my first time to know about this though sometimes I hear that elephants can do it.

Literature is the work of art that expresses human realities. This subject promotes the culture of people and makes people self-confident. Sometimes this subject criticizes people in our society.

I hope to perform well in these [science] subjects as I am thinking of becoming a nurse before trying politics. I wish to be one of the representatives of the people in the government.

I am a member of the school's netball team.

Our school has 18 classrooms with 45 students in each class on average. The classrooms together with other buildings like laboratory, kitchen, library, and toilets are arranged properly in an attractive manner.

In our school environment there are different types of trees with fruits like avocados and mangos. The school garden has vegetables that include tomato, onion, and spinach. The school flower garden includes roses and hibiscus. In short, our school environment is very attractive.

I listen about our environment and the way to keep my environment clean. The environment will keep my health safe and good. My home environment is surrounded with beautiful flowers and a vegetable garden which is clean all the time. This vegetable garden and the beautiful flowers I prepared myself. I wish you could see the flower garden.

By Chris Harker



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New Friends of CHES

Recently CHES was approached by the Zoie Gardner Overseas Fund (ZGOF); the fund's committee was interested in the work that we do in Kenya and Tanzania as it aligned with their criteria for support. Applicants must be a Canadian charitable organization and must ensure that faith is not a requirement for participation. Funds may be used for such things as scholarships, tuition fees, skills training, workshops, support groups, and goods and services that support education and empowerment of girls and young women. <https://victoriaunitarian.ca/zgof/>.

ZGOF is a fund of the Unitarian Universalist Community of Victoria, initiated in 2014 with a bequest from Jim and Bunny Hackler. The fund supports education of girls and young women in low-income countries. The fund is named after Zoie Gardner, who dedicated her life to caring for hundreds of children and youth with physical and mental challenges.

CHES applied for funds and consequently in 2025, ZGOF sponsored 10 girls through CHES, five in each country. In 2026 ZGOF is adding 10 more students in each country. We thank them for supporting education for girls.

By Joy Ruffeski



Kenya CHES girls



Tanzania CHES girls

Repairs and Upgrades to the CHES Compound in Tanzania

The CHES compound will be receiving several upgrades and repairs in the coming months as weather has taken its toll on perimeter walls, paint, aluminum roofs, doors into the dorms, and other areas. The batteries for the solar panels are no longer functioning so they must be replaced as there are almost nightly power outages in Katesh. Within the dorms, many mattresses need replacing.

The washing and shower area for the girls has been upgraded with metal doors on the shower stalls for privacy, and there is running water in the handwashing area.



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The fruit trees in the garden at the hostel are nearing the end of their lifespan. As replacing trees can be expensive, Naomi Saulo (agriculturist and CHES Hanang treasurer) has grown replacement trees from seeds for several varieties we have in the garden and these will replace the current ones. The girls in the dorm ensure that the trees are watered so that they have fresh fruit! Unfortunately, due to the prolonged drought in the region, there is not enough water for growing vegetables and the ground is too dry.

Of recent concern is the security of the CHES compound as the bus station was relocated nearby after the disastrous landslide of 2023. Shops are being built by the bus station, causing a lot of transient traffic. Currently, the back and side walls allow people passing to see in the compound or climb the walls should they so wish. The side and back walls will be extended several feet upwards and topped with the current spiked metal sections to prevent viewing and entry. We are also installing an emergency siren should there be trouble from outsiders trying to enter, and as the police station is across the road our girls will continue to be safe.

By Joy Ruffeski

Celebrating the Finish of Form 4

Due to the national election in Tanzania and ensuing protests, schools were closed for two weeks; consequently, the school year was extended accordingly. A grand celebration is usually held by CHES Hanang in which the girls receive special certificates showing that they have completed their studies and were helped to do so by CHES. These certificates are most important for when they go on to university (after Form 6) because they then qualify for additional government assistance in the form of lower fees.



At this celebration, which includes a meal, there is a special cake and each girl receives a small morsel, served to her on a toothpick. Although the Form 4 girls still had one final exam to write when I was visiting, we decided to purchase a cake and have a little party anyways for those at the Sara Williams Hostel. An enjoyable afternoon was had before they went back to study! The “real” ceremony will be held in January when the results from the national examinations are received.



By Joy Ruffeski



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Student Selection in Kenya

Before COVID, agents from Canada went to Kenya for up to six months (usually between November and April) and oversaw all operations there, including the selection of girls who would receive scholarships. However, that changed with COVID and now all such responsibilities are handled by the Kenyan board and our office manager, Rebecca Odhiambo.



December 2025 was an exceptionally busy time in our Kenyan office as student selection for the new Form 1SS students took place. Prior to the actual interviews, new interview sheets were needed with the change to three educational streams and grading method for Forms 1-3SS. The Kenyan board was actively involved in designing these and assistance was provided by the Junior Secondary School teachers as they were very familiar with the new streams and the necessity of guiding students into appropriate streams. Former CHES girls were trained to help as well.



The only days between December 15 to January 2 when there were no interviews were Christmas and New Year's Day due to the record number of students applying! CHES alumni, board members and CHES patrons did the interviewing after the initial screening (which ensured academic qualifications were met). Verifiers were sent out after the interviews to see that the family was truly needy and there was no other financial assistance available. Student selection done in this manner ensures that only the most intelligent and needy students receive CHES scholarships.

By Joy Ruffeski



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A Day in Katesh



In early November, I organized and escorted a group of 14 to Tanzania. Although my husband Robb and I had taken many groups on safari in the past, this year I was on my own, but that was not the only difference. A national election was called October 29 with unpopular results leading to the shutdown of the internet and other media, closure of banks and foreign exchange facilities, dusk-to-dawn curfew, road blocks and violent protesting. We were lucky to be on Ethiopian Airlines, which continued to land in Tanzania as European airlines did not, resulting in many safari cancellations.

We had several days on safari before going to CHES House in Katesh. We had a couple of days staying on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. We then went to the northern national parks in Tanzania, Lake Manyara and Serengeti and spent an afternoon in Ngorongoro Crater on our way to Katesh.

When we arrived in Katesh on November 12, we were warmly welcomed at CHES House by Naomi, Bernie and Raheli. There was room for three of us who were CHES sponsors and our travelling companions to stay in the comfortable accommodations there, and Naomi had arranged for the remaining eight to stay in the new and very lovely Domel Inn, just a five-minute walk away. Naomi had also arranged to have dinner catered at CHES house by Mama Kabwogi's Hoteli (restaurant). It was a delicious meal of local foods such as beef stew, local greens, chicken, samosas, chips, rice and fruit. The askari (watchman) walked those at the Domel back to their accommodations after the meal.



After breakfast on November 13, everyone gathered at CHES house for a tour of the grounds--the Sara Williams Hostel, which can house up to 100 students, the dining hall, the kitchen and the gardens. The students had all done their chores, had had their breakfast and had gone off to their schools hours before this. Then we piled into the safari vehicles and headed for Mwashu Secondary School, where Chris and Catriona Harker, CHES board members, had been instrumental in raising funds through CHES to build a girls' dormitory and had recruited grade 12 students from Stelly's secondary school near Victoria, B.C., to assist local volunteers and workers in the construction. Realizing that the boys' dormitory was also in a poor state, the Harkers found a way to channel donations through a society in Victoria. (CHES could not do this as the mandate is to only support girls' education.) Again, Stelly's students came as volunteers and in July, the new dormitory



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for 150 boys was opened. However, we learned that many boys could not move in as they could not afford to supply their own mattress. My group stepped in with enough money to buy 100 mattresses, with Naomi agreeing to make sure the money was spent on this. She is on the local school board.

Before returning to Katesh, Naomi directed our drivers around Mount Hanang to see the destruction caused by a landslide almost two years ago. Because it happened in the middle of the night, people were sleeping and many lost their homes and their lives. The main business centre of Katesh was also wiped out. This was a very sobering drive around the mountain. As we drove, one of our safari group was making the steep day climb to the summit at 11,000 feet with a local guide.

Back in Katesh, Naomi had arranged for Cindy Ranieri to meet with her sponsored student, the student's mother and a friend. We were delighted to have our tour operator, Adelina Michael, a former CHES student, join us for dinner. She explained to everyone how she had progressed from being a sponsored secondary school grad to high school grad to university grad, to work in tourism and finally to own her own tour company. Naomi also arranged for Bob Neufeld to meet his sponsored student, Devotha Sungura, who is in Form 4 at Katesh Secondary School. I was pleased to meet with Elizabeth Daudi Gidawo, a student in Form 1 at Ganana Secondary School, who is sponsored by my daughter Kim's family. Both girls live at the Sara Williams Hostel. Naomi and Bernie presented my group with bracelets that had the Canadian maple leaf beaded on them.



On November 14 we said our farewells all too soon and drove to Tarangire National Park. After an overnight at the lovely tented Safari Lodge, we drove to Arusha Municipal Airport, said our goodbyes to our drivers, and boarded our flight to Zanzibar, where we would spend a few days before flying home.

I am so happy I was able to share my love of Tanzania with this wonderful group of travellers and was able to connect with so many Tanzanians I had gotten to know over five decades!

Jeanette Taylor



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The Untold Story of Anthony Napali and CHES

Anthony Napali was the final male student to be assisted by CHES in 1992, when its policy changed to accept only female students. Anthony Napali has been the chairperson of the CHES board of directors in Kenya for many years. He tells about how CHES changed his life.

I came to know about CHES through a pastor in 1992 when I visited two ladies, CHES agents Norah Harrison and Peg Klesner. I did not know how to approach them; however, I made a plan that was to bear some fruit. Peg, who was on reception, welcomed me and asked how she could help me. I quickly asked if I could get a scholarship. By then Norah came and said that there were no scholarships for boys as the organization now concentrated on girls. I did not leave and persisted, and I made a request of my work being corrected. They accepted, and my 15 km journey every Saturday taking my creative writing began. Among the stories I wrote was my life as a criminal. I wrote about being arrested for brewing illegal changaa brew. My mother and I were taken to a cell and the brewing items were smashed and confiscated. I had to appear to the two agents after my disappearance of two weeks. After narrating to them what happened they empathized and decided to make me a “ghost” student. What that meant was that they used some available funds to clear my fees at Shikokho Secondary School.

After high school I joined the teacher's training institute and my fees were paid by Brenda Neibour, who came in to sponsor me at ACCES (African Canadian Continuing Education Society). After training I joined my local school, Shihalia, and worked so hard in academics and infrastructure. I remember when Bev Ford came, the school did not have an office. We baked bricks with students and put up an office. During my time students got involved in music and drama events. We visited other schools like Imusali, Matundu, Isulu, Musoli Mixed and Imbale and those visits exposed the learners to other parts of the country.

I married Margret Aleyo and we have been blessed to have six boys: Harrison, Bev, Graham, Owen, Douglas, and Alvin. The three oldest have finished training and are awaiting job placement: procurement officer, criminology, and teaching. Owen just sat for his grade 9 assessment and had 56 out of 72 points. Douglas is in grade 8 and Alvin in grade 6.

Kenya has a lot of potential but if not tapped it can produce very dangerous people in the society. I have been able to climb the ladder of administration to the level of principal. I have undergone training to the level of Masters, but above all have taken some other courses: Diploma in ICT, Diploma in Education Management, Certificate in Guidance and Counselling, just to mention a few. I have been able to present papers on competence-based education, and I am master trainer with the Ministry of Education. I have served on many boards of management, starting with CHES, where I have served for a long time, and on the boards of Shikunga High School, Shichinji High School, ACCES (as a Kenya advisory member for community projects), and Kenya Education Endowment Fund (as a workshop coordinator). I have been given a Leadership Award from ACCES and Peg Klesner of KEEF.

I have been able to improve the living standards of my parents and children; at least we can have three meals. CHES has created for me a network of friends and exposure, something that I would not have dreamt of. It has sharpened my interpersonal skills and raised my self-esteem more so with workshops.

By Anthony Napali



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