

The Richmond Charitable Trust

December 2017

Dear friends,

Here is our attempt at a first-ever Newsletter for Richmond supporters and stakeholders. Although the Trust has been going since 1971, its first stage of existence came to an end this year, happily coinciding with our search for a charitable home for work with deaf children and youth in Uganda and Rwanda. We are on the verge of publicly launching the new Richmond, so it is a good time to bring you up to date with events as they are moving fast.

History

The Trust was established by Mrs Joan McKinnon to provide money for deaf and deafblind people in the UK for material needs and services not available from the state. We have always been volunteer-run and twice a year since the early 1970s, the trustees have met to award grants to applicants needing specialist toys and equipment, holidays and days out, home visits and support from guide/interpreters for example. The money which totalled about £5000 each year came from wise investment of the initial settlement, and this finally came to an end in 2016. The former trustees were very pleased that the trust was able to have a new life as an international development charity. It continues to be volunteer-run, with trustees and supporters meeting their own expenses, which means that 100% of our income can be spent on our mission, other than for a small amount required for such things as audit, website, printing etc.

We have a new group of Trustees: Isobel Blakeley, Rod Clark, Anthony Eaton and Susan Tindall.

Projects

Our first projects are in sub-Saharan Africa and our principal partners are Umutara School for Deaf Children in Nyagatare which is in the north-east of Rwanda, and Signhealth Uganda, based in Kampala. The main focus in both countries is on deaf children and those young deaf people transitioning between education and employment.

Uganda

While the work in Rwanda will be our main project in terms of size and scope, there is an urgent need for our support in Uganda. Signhealth Uganda (SU) was established by the UK charity of the same name in 2009 and it has established a wide range of services and activities for deaf children since that time and is now well-known and highly respected across the country. It is also well-supported by other UK agencies who partner on major programmes of work.



Pre-school class at Uganda School for the Deaf, Ntinda, Kampala

These include Signal and Deaf Child Worldwide. Sadly, the support from Signhealth UK came to an end over a year ago, and so we have been working hard to help it continue with its vital work, principally the pre-school programme.

It has long been recognised that schooling for deaf children needs to start at the earliest possible time, ideally from diagnosis, but in most African countries, there is no money for education until the statutory age for school entry. SU fully finances two early years' classes in Kampala and provides support to 10 others across the country. Happily, we have been able to raise over £25,000, a substantial percentage from our Trustees themselves, to ensure the survival of this vital work which is now funded until the end of April 2018.

Rwanda

The decision to work in Rwanda came about as the result of a strategic planning exercise for SU. Two exploratory visits were made in 2016 and 2017, and it has been decided that we will partner with Umutara School for Deaf Children. Unlike other countries in Africa, the Rwandan government does not provide special needs education, and so there are a range of private schools catering for those pupils lucky enough to get a place. Some, especially those run by churches, are better supported than others. We have decided to work with Umutara since it has arguably the biggest funding challenge of any that we have come across. Isobel spent 18 months as a VSO-sponsored volunteer teacher at the school and has returned on a number of occasions, the last being this autumn when she and 4 other colleagues delivered training there.

There are 118 children in the school, 86 of school age (6-18 years) and 32 in Vocational Training (18-25). There is capacity for more, but the school is unable to accept them as their budget is stretched, and many families cannot afford to pay the fees, which while small, are essential to keeping the school open.

The school wishes to develop its work, both fully funding the school and growing the Vocational Training Department.



Pupils at Umutara with Elevation Kamana, the founder of the school

Thanks to a good friend, Karen Finch and Ipswich Rotary, the school has just opened a goat farm with 40 goats and smart new buildings.

HT

A wonderful friend and colleague of ours, HT, who is currently working for Deaf Child Worldwide in India, has agreed to spend the next 2 -3 months in Uganda and Rwanda, helping both SU and Umatara with their business planning. HT is undertaking this assignment on a virtually volunteer basis and we are hugely grateful. He will take out with him some much needed supplies together with a grant for Umutara to cover teachers' salaries and food for the children for the next two months. HT hopes to be able to report back by the end of February which will then enable us to determine our funding (and hence, fundraising) priorities for the foreseeable future.

Website, Fundraising etc

We have established the new Richmond as a member organisation. We will only be seeking members and launching the charity and the fundraising campaign once we have finished our first-ever website and know what our projects are going to be. Target date is the end of March 2018. However, if anyone wishes to join up as a member, or make a donation now, please let us know and we will provide all the necessary information.

Finally, all good wishes for the coming celebrations and for a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

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