



April 2019

Dear friends,

There has been a great deal of activity in DeafReach since our last Newsletter at the end of 2018. Our volunteer Africa Director, Howard, has just completed a 3-month stint in Rwanda, providing support to our partners, Friends of Handicap in Rwanda (FHR), with developing their Business Plan for the Vocational Training Centre, and providing training in Organisational Management and Income Generation. Howard's other task during this time was to support a charity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with Business Planning.

This charity, CENYESED, is run by Rev. Botanyi Kamonyo. Kamonyo, and his recently deceased wife, Beatrice, established 3 schools for deaf children in DRC. Being the uncle and aunt of Eleanore Kamana, it was with them that she went to live during the Genocide period, and it was there that the plan to open a school for deaf children in Rwanda (Umatara) was born. This CENYESED Business Plan is approaching completion and we will include a report in a future edition of the Newsletter.

At the end of February, a group of us made a visit to both Rwanda and Uganda. We were Isobel and myself, plus a new trustee, Teresa Quail, who, like Isobel, is a Teacher of the Deaf, and also an Audiologist within Education. (See Teresa's blog on our website: www.deafreach.org)

We were to have been accompanied by Anne, our Uganda lead, but sadly she was unable to join us at the last minute because of illness within her family.

Our purposes in making this visit were many and varied, not only to develop the projects we have already begun to support, but also to get a better understanding of the work of our partners in both

countries. Both Isobel and I have written detailed reports of our visit. Do ask for copies.

With all good wishes, and many thanks for your support

Rod

Nyabihu Demonstration School for the Deaf

While DeafReach's first partner in Rwanda is FHR and its work at Umatara School for the Deaf (USD), we are also closely linked with this school, since Isobel worked at both institutions during her time as a VSO volunteer. The school, which is run by Empowering Children with Disabilities (EmCD), was started by an inspiring man, Louis Ngabonzizi, and is situated in Rwanda's Western Province. It has been hugely supported by another UK charity, Chance for Childhood, which has recently taken the lead in building an entirely new campus of buildings for the school, as the previous ones were in very poor condition. DeafReach has now adopted Nyabihu as a formal partner, and we are supporting the school with the construction of water tanks, the acquisition of mosquito nets and contributing towards the salaries of their art and IT teachers.

Friends of Handicap in Rwanda

During our visit, we held a round-table discussion with both the Board members of FHR and the managers of the school. At this time, we signed 2 Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with FHR. An MOU is effectively a contract, though not legally enforceable, but with all parties agreeing to abide by it. The first MOU relates to our financial support for Umutara School during the 3 years, 2018 – 20. The second refers to our joint project to build a Vocational Training Centre for FHR (See below). As part of the plan to develop both the senior management of the charity and its income generation, we identified the need to augment the resources available for this work. Howard therefore assisted FHR in the appointment of a Development Officer for the charity on our behalf. Please see on the final page the pen-picture of Gisele, the successful candidate, who began work on 1st February.

VTC now to be called TVET

In Rwanda, centres for Vocational Training are called TVETs, ie Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Howard and the FHR team having completed the TVET Business Plan, our first engagement on arrival was to be present when it

was submitted to the government, ie the Workforce Development Authority, a department of the Ministry of Education. The outcome of this meeting was that the project should be conducted in 2 phases, with the first phase being developed on the UDS campus, and the second at a later stage in Kayonza, a large town much closer to the capital, Kigali.



Pupils at Umatara helping out

Thanks to the immense generosity of one of our trustees, we are in a position to proceed with this first phase, and have given the go-ahead for the works at UDS. A tender document has been drawn up and it is hoped that a contractor will be identified within the coming weeks. Both the FHR team and the DeafReach team are drawing up a fundraising plan for furniture, equipment and revenue support which we will report on in the next edition of the Newsletter. We will also begin now the major task of fundraising for Phase 2 in Kayonza, which we hope to start building before 2019 is out.

Umatara Baptist Church

Readers will recall that Dominique, the Chairman of FHR, is also the local Baptist Minister. Following Government edicts requiring firstly, all churches to have toilets, and then more recently, running water and boundary fences, DeafReach supporters rallied round. We are delighted to report that all of these are now in place, and the church saved from closure. We were pleased to be present at a Service of Thanksgiving at the church during our visit.

Omar Kayigi

Readers will remember the immense difficulties we encountered in bringing Omar, together with Louis and Elie from Nyabihu, to the UK for a Study Tour last autumn. Omar is Deputy Head Teacher at Umutara, and has been appointed Head Teacher as of later this year. We decided to maximise the value of his visa, which was for 6 months, multi-entry, by

supporting a month's English language training for him in Cambridge to be held during this May and early June.

Signhealth Uganda

Following our visit to Rwanda, we flew the short distance to Uganda, where we are supporting the work of Signhealth Uganda (SU), principally the vitally important pre-school programme for deaf children plus SU's family support project. The first day was spent renewing acquaintance with the wonderful St Anthony's School on the road between Kampala and Maska. St Anthony's was established by a charismatic Roman Catholic priest, Father Anthony, and it was fantastic to see how much the farm serving the school had grown, providing its pupils with a great diet and also earning money to help meet the school's costs.

Unsung Heroes

Another renewal of acquaintance was with Noelene, whom we have known for about 10 years. It was a first meeting for Teresa and Isobel, and Isobel has written as follows:

"During my travels in Rwanda and now in Uganda, I have met many wonderful modest and passionate people who in difficult conditions, are determined to do something for those marginalised by society through no fault of their own.

Noelene is undoubtedly one of the most amazing. Born into a very poor family in Uganda with a physical disability which means that she walks on her hands and knees, she never attended school and so is illiterate and never had the opportunity to learn English. At the age of 19, she started caring for her first disabled child at her little village hut. Now, not yet 40, she is caring for 48 children with a variety of disabilities at her home. Thirteen of the children are deaf, and everyone uses sign language!



Noelene on the left in blue with some of her children.

Disabled children are often abandoned or mistreated here. Her youngest child was brought to her by local police at the age of 3 days – having been found abandoned. The Police knew that she would take care for the child, who is now over one and in the foreground with pretty beads in her hair. Many of her children also have lower limb abnormalities as she does, and a lot of the living goes on at floor level.

Three years ago, Noelene took one of her little ones who was ill, to the local hospital and met a volunteer doctor from the Charity Wellspring. (www.wellspring-outreach.org). She went to visit Noelene at her home and was astounded to find her caring for such a large group of disabled children. She decided to do something. So she bought a piece of land and has built Noelene a new house to live in with her family. They moved in last October.



Lovely play area for the children



Some of the children with Noelene and Rod Clark, one of our DeafReach Trustees

The most impressive thing about Noelene, is that she didn't hang about waiting for someone to help her in her disability. She decided to help others like herself. She knew how they felt, she knew what

they needed. The feeling of love, acceptance and warmth at this home was palpable.

It was International Women's Day this week. Noelene is an amazing woman that will never get international recognition, but in one small corner of Uganda, she has changed the lives of a group of rejected and unwanted children.

Isobel Blakeley. March 2019

Deafblind Education

One of the unexpected outcomes of our visit was the discovery of the intention by colleagues to develop 3 school units for deafblind children, 2 in DRC, the other in Rwanda. We are actively researching this as a future DeafReach programme, having discussed it with Rev Kamonyo, a new colleague Ismael Byaruhanga (who has a Masters in Deafblind Education from Groningen University in the Netherlands) who is also based in DRC, and with Alice, the wonderful consultant from Sense International Uganda, who is already working with a deafblind group in Rwanda. We will report in due course.

Signhealth Uganda, Signal and True Colours Trust

One of the most impressive aspects of our visit was in and around Arua, in Northern Uganda, where Signhealth Uganda with funding from the True Colours Trust through the UK NGO, Signal, is running a fantastic programme in the refugee settlements and amongst the local population. We visited the Bidibidi Settlement, serving almost 300,000 refugees from South Sudan. Here the Outreach Programme has identified many children with disabilities and, working with the local Education Dept, has established units for them in local primary schools. In addition, they work with the families, having established Parents' Groups for mutual support, and funding Employment Training. We went to one village and witnessed the work of one such parent, who has made a living making liquid soap.

Gisele Mukandayisenga



My name is Mukandayisenga Gisele. I grew up in a small town called Cyahafi within Kigali city which is the capital city of Rwanda. I grew up in a family of three children, two boys and me being the only daughter in my family and the youngest. At the age of seven during the Rwanda genocide, we were separated from my father - from then we have never seen him so I don't know whether he is alive or dead. At the age of eleven, I was taken to Uganda by one of my uncles where I studied. At the age of sixteen, I lost my big brother the first born who had physical and mental disabilities. I am now living with my mother. My other brother is now married with three children. I am also a single mum of two children, a boy and a girl. Losing my dad and growing up away from my mum - it was really not easy for me.

Accustomed to being around adults, I was always mature for my age. Even my own friends often annoyed me during my adolescent years. I excelled at most of my many and varied hobbies. I did well in school, often good at maths problems. Looking back, I'm sure I was quite proud, although I didn't realize it at the time. Unfortunately, self-awareness wasn't something I learned until many years later.

In high school, I came back to Rwanda for my senior three. I stopped my extra-curricular activities, including music and literature, which I intended to continue with even at university but when they brought me back that did not happen. I had to study a lot since in Rwanda, their ordinary level national examinations were done in senior three and I did perform well where I became the second best student in the whole school. And then I chose a good private school to continue with my advanced level where I studied History, Economics and Geography which I also passed well with good marks. After that I wanted to go back to Uganda

where I went for my university. I wanted to be away from the pressure at home. At the university I did Business Management which was ok for me for the three years I studied at university.

In high school, I was involved in different activities. I was the Interact Club President and the health prefect. I also enjoyed playing volleyball in my free time. After high school, I managed to get a job in a telecommunication company called MTN where I worked as an advertising and sales agent which helped me so much since I didn't have to ask my mum for everything because being both a mum and a dad for us was so hard for her too so this helped me to get some responsibilities out of her way. I worked for one year then went to study at the university. After university, I managed again to get an internship in the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda which I did for three months and this was an added advantage towards my studies too. From there I kept on working in small different jobs and also helped my mum with her restaurant when I had no job. I finally went to work for a large communication firm called Isonbpo as a customer care executive and marketing agent. I continued the trend of just meeting my potential, only taking on new challenges when someone brought it to my attention that I'd be perfect for the opportunity.

I was not satisfied with this job, always feeling that I have to do something more, more helping, more active.

And so I saw the job announcement of Friends of Kandicap in Rwanda. I was so happy like as if I had got the job at that moment because when I read about the organization I really felt like that is where I belong, helping disabilities. My mind just flashed back to my brother and I said this is what I can do for you brother. I applied I did not know if I will be called for the interview but I believed I would and I will pass. God being so amazing and knowing what we desire, all this went well and I was called for the interview where I found very welcoming people and this all added to my confidence and the feeling that this is where I belong. I left and waited for a call telling me to come to work.

I became the new Development Officer and Company Secretary of FHR on the 1st February 2019.

I was well welcomed by Dominique the CEO and Howard who helped me a lot through my induction training.

Working with FHR, i have managed to learn a lot of things that build my strength and give me hope for the future. The people at FHR are nice and friendly I found a family here and I am thankful to God who made it possible for me to be part of this organization and I hope that working with me and also me working with them we shall both aim to achieve what is good for the organization.

Again I am so thankful to DeafReach who thought of hiring a Development Officer and Company Secretary because if it was not for you I wouldn't be here. Thank you so much.

I will conclude this by saying that am proud to say that this new role suits me and will, I feel, enable me to discover and achieve my own true potential. I once read a quote saying that "The world is before you, and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in." That always sounded like something I always wanted to do but just didn't know how. All thanks to DeafReach and Friends of Handicap in Rwanda for making my heart's desire a reality. Thank you.

For further information about any aspect of our work, do get in touch.

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Hearing Testing

Our trustee, Teresa, is researching the possibility of a nationwide Audiology programme in Rwanda.