



April 2024

Dear Friends,

This edition will mostly concentrate on our work in Rwanda, the first country with which DeafReach was involved way back in 2016. See below for a funding opportunity for Nyabihu Deaf School. But firstly, some updates:

Signal/DeafReach merger. We have been undertaking the very many aspects of a charity merger since our last Newsletter. Mitch Payne, Signal's Executive Officer, transferred to DeafReach at the beginning of this month. Our target date to complete the process is 31st August, which is also DeafReach's year-end.

Karurama Deaf School, Cibitoke Province, Burundi. Given our size and fundraising capacity, we can only contemplate one major capital project at a time. Since we last reported, we are proud to report that, thanks to two of our supporters, we were able to advance funds for the completion of the building works. As a result, the school will open formally in June and open its doors to pupils in September. We are still seeking funds for equipment, books and other essential materials.,

CENYESED. The insurrection in DRC is worsening and the rebels are getting closer to Goma, where CENYESED is based. Many of the families of the pupils of its Rutshuru School are now in displacement camps which have a shortage of food and other amenities. Again, thanks to supporters, we have been able to send out funds to meet this emergency situation.

Rwanda Odyssey

We have two long-standing partners, Friends of Handicap in Rwanda (FHR) and Empowering Children with Disabilities (EmCD), which run two deaf schools, respectively Umutara and Nyabihu. They were introduced to us by our former trustee, Isobel Blakeley, who had spent a year and a half working at both schools as a VSO volunteer in the mid-2010s. Umutara was our major programme over the subsequent years as it was the setting for our first major capital project, the construction and equipping of a Vocational Training Centre, while Nyabihu was substantially supported by another UK international charity, Chance for Childhood.

Over the past 8 or so years, we have been able to fund a range of capital and revenue projects: a chicken farm, food, teachers' salaries, national conferences of deaf schools etc. When we were first involved, both schools had major challenges, mostly around resources. We have been continually amazed at how they have managed to run their operations "on a wing and a prayer". Some of the challenges we came across included a lack of Government support for private schools, difficulties with English, the disparity in teachers' salaries between state and private schools, over-reliance on funding partners, time-limited grants and a lack of experience in the wide range of potential income generation activities. But the purpose of this

Newsletter, apart from introducing Nyabihu's own funding campaign, is to report on the fantastic progress both organisations have made since our initial involvement which we could never have foreseen.

For whatever reason, at some point in the last 30 years, Rwanda took the decision to replace French as its second language with English and to join the Commonwealth. For school-aged children, this language change was no problem at all, but it was a huge challenge for older people, not least with those with whom we interacted during the early days of our involvement. Whilst the move from private to semi-private status which was a no-brainer to the outside observer as it would open the door to Government funding, there was a natural fear that this would lead to a loss of freedom.

Since that time huge strides have been made and both schools are on the verge of semi-private registration. Both now communicate in English to a very sophisticated level, and their fundraising plans are far more advanced than we could ever imagine. Much of this must be down to the emergence of the younger generation within the families who run the schools. At Umutara, this was in the person of Kevin Amani, the son of Dominique and Eleanore, who founded the school. At Nyabihu, Eric Ngabo, the son of founder Louis who sadly died earlier this year.

Two of our trustees, Simone Banks and Veronika Thorvardarson, both Teachers of the Deaf, have just returned from a 10-day visit, calling at both schools and at a third, St Gabriel's in Butare, our latest partner. We will report on this visit in a later edition.

At Umutara, Kevin Amani devised and ran a fundraising event, Harmony of Hope, which took place on YouTube on 29th March. His report is attached.

At Nyabihu, the sudden and unexpected death of its inspirational founder and leader, Louis Ngabo, has been a massive blow. The school is also faced with the inevitable reduction of the substantial support it has received from its UK patron, Chance for Childhood. Nothing daunted, Eric has set about the job of developing new income streams to meet this situation. Two of their long-term supporters, Kevin and Sandy Holmes, visited last month and joined our trustee meeting on Zoom to report on the overwhelming quality of the educational work there. They have funded the salary of the IT teacher over many years and continue to do so.

Eric has launched two online fundraising campaigns using an American organisation "gofundme". The first which is in Euros has come about following the 3-month placement of a volunteer from Spain. This campaign is for revenue for the school and has almost achieved its target.

The second is for the acquisition of neighbouring land for EmCD's project of establishing the first secondary school for deaf children in Rwanda. Deaf children who are academically gifted usually get no further than primary education, and for those few that make it into a regular secondary school, the challenge is immense, particularly if no special support resources are available. This is the project that DR is supporting. The cost of the land is £12,000 plus associated costs and our members have already made donations totalling over £5,700. The target for this project is £7,000 and the fundraising material that EmCD have designed is attached. DR will be receiving the proceeds from gofundme for transfer to EmCD.

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