

Healing Focus Orphanage Centre



Our trip to deliver your donation. Jan. 2008.

Healing Focus Orphanage Centre is a registered Ugandan charity founded by Tom Bagoole and Esther his wife, to care for the orphans of his home district, Iganga. There are two types of orphan in the Ugandan definition, single or double, both are present at the **Healing Focus Orphanage Centre**.

Iganga is a rural district lying across the main highway linking Uganda and Kenya. This road is being upgraded and road communication between the capital, Kampala, and **Iganga** is good. **Iganga** trading centre, a large village, lies about 2 hours east of Kampala. As well as servicing the road traffic, the village is the district centre. The main agricultural industry is sugar cane production and refining. As with all of fertile Uganda, subsistence farming is ubiquitous.

Tom is a Bank employee in Kampala and **Esther** works for Foundation for Human Rights, a Ugandan NGO, where she met Lucy. They have a six-month old baby, Prominent. **Tom** and **Esther** are both orphans. They survived very difficult childhoods. **Tom**'s hand built bricks and dug plots to pay for his education and eventually attended University. **Esther** is an MA, homeless from a young age, she undertook serving position to pay for her education, before receiving a scholarship to attend university. When **Tom** and **Esther** came together, they felt moved to do something to address the conditions of orphans in Uganda.



The Healing Focus Centre was set up with some friends and is funded from their own salaries. Tom travels to Iganga once a month to pay for the upkeep of the orphans, carry clothes to them and maintain communication. They are desperately overstretched, currently caring for about 100 orphans divided between three centres.



The first, in Iganga, consists of a one-room **workshop** in a house, where older children and young women are taught machine sewing on 8 treadle machines. Some of the students travel 10km on foot to attend. The **workshops** provide vocational skills and students graduate with their machines, which enables them to provide for themselves and their dependents. They have already certified a number of students, who are now able to make a living and who have returned to their villages to teach others. The **workshops** are designed to be sustainable. Students produce school uniforms for local schools under the instruction of a local teacher.



When we arrived at Iganga, there were no sewing machines. They had been stolen during the Christmas recess. Bolt cutters had been used to cut the padlock on the steel door. 3 of the machines are with the Police who are demanding a fee for their return. Security for the **workshop** premises and tools may be solved with the provision of the caretaker, but security guards, armed, are extremely common and BENIGN in Uganda. This sounds daunting but the wages in Uganda are not equivalent to European wages, a security guard may earn under £10/month.



The second centre is almost an hour away on dirt road; the home of **Tom's father**, a retired 56-year-old former sugar factory worker, now farming bananas on a small scale.

This is where Tom grew up, as is evident as he waves at everyone as he nears home. His brother, Peter, lives next door with his wife and two babies. The brick houses are larger than many of the other mud and wattle constructions in the village, but small nonetheless. Here 10 orphans live, with **Tom's father** whom we didn't meet. This is an ad hoc arrangement. Tom had been asked to help these children and turned to his **father** out of desperation. Tom pays for their clothing, rags really, and the **Tom's father** feeds them. Several of them look ill. Tom has now been able to afford to place two more, of school age, in the local school, St. Andrew's.



From Tom's home to the school, the third centre is a further 15 minutes drive on dirt track. **St. Andrew's** is a large school, a barn really, with bench seating for at least a hundred people and in quite a large village on a larger track.



I imagine it also serves as village hall, meeting place, perhaps church. It is a pleasant, cool building because of the enormous gaps in the wallboards and has no decoration. Of the 100 pupils, 30 are orphans registered by Tom.

Officially, Uganda provides free primary schooling for all children, the Universal Primary Education scheme, however, the accessories to teaching have to be found, (paper, text books, pencils, uniforms, etc.), as does food. Approximately 50% of schools in Uganda are residential. These schools also require payment of maintenance. There are not enough state-run schools in rural areas. There are private schools, which require fees. Thousands of children in Uganda go without basic education.

St Andrew's is a private school so fees

are payable, they are used to pay for the teacher's salary and food for the children.

None of the children in the school would be in education of they were not attending

St Andrew's.



We met Hannington, an elderly respected man, who has the title of co-ordinator and was clearly superior to the Headmaster, a very pleasant, smart young man and his deputy, Joseph

After the speeches of welcome - a certain formality is necessary in all dealings in Uganda - a choir of 7 teenage girls, the only ones in uniform, sang three songs for us.



I gradually realised they were all three songs about **AIDS** and it's devastation. Most of the children and young people helped by the Centre have been orphaned by **AIDS**. I reciprocated with "Teddy Bears Picnic".

Your donation amounted to £**630**, which with the low dollar, (the Uganda shilling is tied to the US Dollar), gives a handsome sum of **2,205,000** USHs.

That's enough for **7** of the children living at Tom's father's house to attend school for a year including food, clothes, accommodation, tuition and books.



THANK YOU.

We loved Uganda and it's people and I think you'll find Uganda one of the best introductions to sub-Saharan Africa. There are photographs of the visit and further information about the orphanage, including more ways to get involved, at www.healingfocusorphanage.org. The orphanage's own website is currently suspended pending funding.