

Turning Leaves Uganda

Newsletter 20, April 2022

Dear friends and family,

Greetings from Mbale, where it is very hot indeed! We had begun to have some rain, so farmers started preparing the soil for planting, but the weather seems to have gone dry again. We hope it begins to rain again soon so that people can harvest their crops at the end of the coming planting and growing season.

Apologies that it has been so long since my last newsletter. I returned to Uganda on January 21st, with the initial plan of completing my degree by the end of May. However, on reaching Mbale, I found that it was going to take a lot longer than that (i.e., I would not finish before the end of next year) and I was beginning to struggle with keeping on top of everything. I, therefore, decided to withdraw from the course so that I can focus on my work (not an easy decision!) Those who know me well will know I have been trying to get a degree for a long time, but sometimes you just have to recognise and know your limitations, and trust in God.

Therefore, I am now fully committed to the work of Turning Leaves, which is very exciting and has opened up a whole range of possible new activities, including an education outreach programme in Namabasa. There is also the possibility of doing a workshop for the three schools/centres in Mbale we are now working with. As I was looking for a place to undertake my secondary school practice (while I was still planning to work on my degree), we got into contact with a special needs school in Kamonkoli (a village just outside of Mbale). Although I do not now need to do this particular placement, we had already begun to work with their nursery class. This is something we hope will continue and we can build on. I will include more details below.

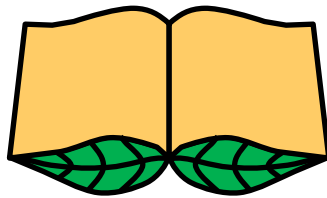
On a personal note, I have moved house and now live in a compound with a UK doctor, Dr Jan White, and a Ugandan family. I now have my own small house, although share the kitchen and bathroom with Dr Jan, which she has very kindly offered to me. Of course, I continue to see Joseph, Irene and the children on a regular basis.

Below are some more details of the various schools/centres we are now working with, along with our plans for an education outreach in Namabasa. For this newsletter, I will focus primarily on the education component of our work, and will provide more details about the demonstration farm and its activities in the next newsletter.

Musoto Christian School, Musoto

We are continuing to work with Musoto Christian School, which now caters for a very large number of nursery children indeed! The sheer number of children in each class definitely presents challenges, but we always try to find a way around them. We are almost coming to the end of the first term. Maggie and I have mainly been in Baby Class (3–4-year-olds, with an occasional 2-year-old), working with Teacher Annet to try and provide a more holistic learning experience for the children, with a range of activities following the main, whole class lesson each morning. This works well when there are a few of us in the room, but it is a lot more challenging if Teacher Annet is alone or with only one assistant. We try and find solutions wherever possible, and have discovered that the easiest method is to divide the children into smaller groups and rotate them around a range of activities. These activities include: sand and water play, playdough, looking at storybooks, playing with wooden blocks, painting and a pre-prepared written activity.

Because of some very generous donations, we have been able to resource all three classes of the nursery school, and also to hold a one-day workshop. We were also able to assist the school in buying a photocopying machine, which will enable the teachers to quickly produce learning materials (e.g., worksheets) for the children, and to prevent class time being wasted on activities (especially homework activities – an expectation) being written into the children's exercise books. Many thanks to all who made this possible. Next term, I hope to do some more work with Middle and Top Classes, with a focus on helping them to implement the Language and Phonics programmes. Learning to read and write is the biggest challenge children seem to face here, in terms of their educational journey.



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Overcomers Special Needs School, Kamonkoli

As I mentioned above, we began working with Overcomers as I had an initial need to do a placement with secondary school aged students. However, we very quickly also became involved in supporting their nursery class, which is a composite class made up of Baby, Middle and Top Classes, along with the children who have severe learning difficulties of multiple forms. They are keen to use our programmes (in a creative way, I think, given the composite nature of the class) and we have been able to provide them with some learning resources: big basins for sand and water, crayons, pencils, ingredients for playdough, storybooks, flashcards, small blackboard slates, etc., as well as the programmes themselves. We are very much looking forward to developing this partnership.

Loved Children's Centre, Namatala

At the end of last year, we began to work with Loved Children's Centre, although slowly, because of the Covid-19 restrictions in place at the time. Loved is not a school but a centre devoted to caring for children up to the age of three years from the Namatala slum area. They are using a part of our programme as a tool for preparing the two- and three-year-old children for Nursery school. They have reported that the programmes are helpful, and enabling them to create positive learning experiences for the children. We look forward to visiting Loved and working with their staff in the coming year.

Education Outreach, Namabasa

In order to get to know the community in which we will be opening Turning Leaves Nursery School, we have decided to begin a small outreach programme with the aim of providing three-year-old girls who are unable to access nursery school with some literacy learning activities. We are selecting thirty children who will then be divided into two groups, each with fifteen children. We will spend two hours with each group per week for twelve weeks, with one hour dedicated to language and phonics and the other hour dedicated to numeracy. We are looking for a possible venue for this activity, and there are currently two possibilities. We currently have UGX 1,000,000 (£220) for this programme.

The Education Outreach programme will be carried out by myself, Maggie and Irene.

Possible Workshop

During the second lockdown last year, I wrote a week-long workshop for nursery teachers, covering the following core areas: child development, play, learning differences (ADHD, Autism and Dyslexia), phonics, numbers and creating an interactive classroom. As there is a three-week holiday coming up, we are looking into holding this workshop with staff from Musoto Christian School, Overcomers Special Needs School and Loved Children's Centre. We could hold the training at Musoto Christian School, as they have a suitable room and facilities for cooking. We would need some funding in order to carry this out, although we currently have UGX 500,000 (£110) to get us going. Any additional support would be gratefully received!

Model School, Namabasa

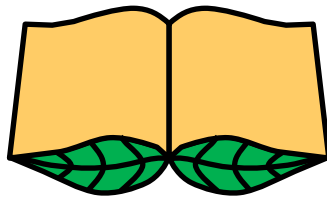
We now have over three acres of land on which to build our model school! The plan is to start with the first year of nursery, possibly in January 2024, and then add on a class each year, so that the school grows with the first group of children we take on. Dad is visiting in May, at which point we can make more concrete plans about how this project will progress. Nonetheless, we have plenty to do in the meantime to keep us busy!

Conclusion

As always, thank you so much for your continued interest and support. We are appreciative of all that you do to support us and always love to hear from you. I wish you all a wonderful easter, when it comes!

With love and best wishes,

Emma



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Photos of Musoto Christian School, Musoto: Resources



Photos of Overcomers Special Needs School, Kamonkoli: Children Playing with Playdough

