

Schools for Refugees NEWSLETTER

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Greetings to the Friends of Schools for Refugees and St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School

The 2019 school year has ended on a high note! Charlie Roscoe visited the school in late October, and delivered 13 more Dell computers donated by Norway (Maine) Savings Bank. He also delivered first aid supplies requested by the teachers for their own use, as well as for refilling the school's first aid kits.

The 846 students completed their final exams, and await the results of the national tests. During term break, the teachers will be honing their computer skills, and will be ready to use computers with projectors in their classrooms, primarily as research tools. Also during term break, the new three-room classroom block will be completed and ready to accept classes that previously had been meeting in bamboo-walled temporary classrooms. Construction of this block, and wiring the campus for electricity, completes this phase of classroom upgrades.

We are overjoyed with the way the teachers have embraced the computers and the RACHEL local area network software programs. The teachers are preparing to take a giant step and prepare for interactive classroom teaching. It is exciting to dream of what might be accomplished next.

We have started to plan for raising funds in 2021 to renovate and electrify an old on-site clinic building to house a computer learning center and expanded library. Negotiations to resolve ownership



Charlie with the St. Bakhita teachers.

of the building have been underway for several years between the Catholic diocese and the camp commander. It is now clear that the community which operates St. Bakhita has full rights to use the building. As a part of the same negotiations, we may also convert to teacher housing an abandoned residence used by the sisters of St. Bakhita several years ago.

The availability of on-campus teacher housing will greatly assist those teachers who do not live in the settlement close to the school but who commute from the town of Bweyale, about a one hour walk or a shorter bicycle trip if they are fortunate enough to have a bicycle.

Sophie, one of our graduates, teaching her own class.



Holding class outside the classroom.



A few of our enthusiastic Primary 7 students.



Nursery school graduation — all possible because of Schools for Refugees.

CHALLENGES ON THE HORIZON

Possible Cessation of Food Distribution

Due in part to the crowding of 60,000 refugees into the settlement, parcels of land previously used for farming have been reallocated to housing for newcomers. To replace the maize and vegetables planted and harvested by long-term residents, including most of the St. Bakhita community, the World Food Program, with UNHCR funding, distributes food to all residents. This program may

be at risk if the UNHCR determines that the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement is a mature community where the residents should be able to fend for themselves, and food distribution ceases. If this happens, many parents of the St. Bakhita students may not be able to pay the \$14 per term tuition and would have to send their children to a government-run school.



Government-Imposed Requirements

The Uganda Ministry of Education and Sport established guidelines for teacher-student ratios which are not met by many, if any, government schools. Numbers of school-age children are increasing out of proportion to the government's ability to fund schools to the stated guidelines. At this time, the government has not imposed

costly regulations on community schools beyond those they enforce for government schools. If the Ministry chooses to enforce costly regulations on St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School, the required tuition may put education at St. Bakhita outside the resources of the refugee parents.

Returning to South Sudan Homelands

Most members of the Acholi community served by St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School want to return to their homeland in southern South Sudan. Unfortunately, the political, economic and revolutionary unrest make that return highly unlikely for the next decade. Therefore, St. Bakhita will continue to be called upon to provide

education to nursery- and primary-age students. Ongoing improvements in facilities and educational resources continue to be wise investments. When the current students return to their parents' homeland, they will be well prepared to assume positions of leadership in the professions and trades they chose.

