



The Mary Wood Trust Spring Newsletter 2022

It's been a wet and cold Spring here in the UK, but the sun is actually shining today which makes a lovely change.

It is good to be able to report that after all the disruption caused by Covid the students at Nyakabungo Girls' Secondary School (NGSS) are just about to finish their first term of this new school year. 192 girls have enrolled, and we are proud to say that the MWT is sponsoring 42 of them. As most of you are aware the majority of the girls we sponsor are from very challenging backgrounds and without our assistance it is unlikely that they would be able to proceed with secondary education.

It was in 2002 when Mary Wood and two friends, Ann and Kath, first formed the charity, at that stage under the umbrella of Christ Church, Lothersdale. It was called the 'Nyakabungo Girls Secondary School Scholarship and Development Fund' and the initial plan was to raise enough money to provide 10 scholarships at the school.

Ann and Kath visited the school together in 2002 to do an audit of need. It is interesting to hear their personal reflections and reactions on that first visit.

"There was a very limited water and electricity supply. Kath and I stayed with Bishop John in what was a very desirable residence where there was electricity and running cold water. Water from the 'shower' went straight from the shower through a hole in the wall to the garden. Every night I put a bucket weighed down with a large stone over the hole to deter any visitors of the reptilian variety from visiting. Each morning a jerrycan of hot water was left outside the door for our use. The jerrycan having a banana plugging the spout in lieu of a cap. The electricity was on for only a few hours each day and during those hours everyone rushed to charge their phones and any other appliances. Many people relied on hurricane lamps or candles.

*At the school a standpipe and a couple of grass screens in the banana plantation made do for the girls bathing facilities. There were often complaints from neighbours about girls in various stages of undress! Everyone lived on a kind of bean stew as meat was very expensive and reserved for special occasions and bread a treat as the nearest bakery was two hours' drive away on the main road. All in all, the hospitality of the people and beauty of the surroundings made up for any shortcomings". **Ann Gover***

"The bread! Like Ann I remember stopping that day to buy bread and also fresh fish from a nearby lake. Tied to the back of our pickup, the fish attracted every fly for miles. The sliced bread, a real luxury, then continued to appear every morning at breakfast and it grew greener and greener. Jocelyn, the bishop's wife, cheerfully picked all the mould off and ate it with her banana! Luckily, I loved bananas.

We arrived in Kampala at night. Unsafe to drive then, we began the 8-hour journey to Nyakabungo very early the following morning on mainly unmade roads. There were "potholes" throughout the route that could have swallowed a bus. Ezra, (now the bishop's driver), transported us. He was exceptional!

The whole school greeted us on arrival. Together with Bishop John we processed from the main gates led by the school band. We were treated like VIPs! The day became one of greetings, speeches, singing and dancing. I was lucky to be able to video much of our visit.

Our tour of the school revealed that the new Mary Wood block was still incomplete. No flooring, plaster, windows or solar, and the dormitory roof leaked like a sieve.

This is an extract from my newsletter on our return:

"Imagine, 4:30pm, School is finished, its going dark. You have a hurricane lamp but not much fuel for it. You still need to eat, wash, and do homework. Outside there are no streetlamps; inside there are no lights. It's 15 hours until daylight.

*You go to bed and wait for morning. In the night it rains heavily. So now your bed is wet too, and the clay floor has turned to mud again. Pretty miserable! But worth it, for the chance of an education". My memory is one of huge need but amazing optimism". **Kath Smith***

What a long way we have come since then, with more than 100 students having benefitted from our sponsorship at NGSS and 23 from support to pursue further education through university, technical college, nursing school and tailoring courses.

20 years on the girls at school now have shower cubicles (no running water in them though) and the dormitory roofs no longer leak. Bean 'stew' is still the main source of protein but there are now cows on site giving occasional milk and 'greens' are grown nearby to supplement the diet. On Mary Wood Day we provided a cow so that the girls and staff could enjoy some proper meat. There are some solar lights at the school and the water supply is now protected and along with rain collection tanks there is no need for girls to traipse out of school to collect water in the dry season.

The new kitchen, with wood burning 'ovens' is now up and running and able to cope well with providing food for the whole school. The school has a sick bay and a resident nurse, the male staff have new accommodation, the girls sleep in more spacious dormitories and are provided with mosquito nets and there is a dedicated sewing room and a dining shelter. However, the general ongoing maintenance of the school falls short mainly due to lack of money.

This lack of money is evident also in the girls whom we support and often they struggle to buy the 'necessities' that are needed when returning to school each term. Bearing this in mind and after receiving a donation from St Bartholomew's Church in Wilmslow, we decided this year that we would provide sanitary towels throughout the year to all the girls and also the female teachers. This decision was announced at the Mary Wood Day celebrations on March 8th (to coincide with International Women's Day), and you can see how well this was received by the smiles on the faces of the girls as they received their packets. I believe that we are the only school in the district to offer this. We hope that we can continue to provide these regular necessities for many years to come.

On this special day the Mary Wood Trust cup was awarded to Trust, one of our sponsored girls. According to the headteacher she is *“well behaved, smart in appearance, very hard working in class, good in other co-curricular activities and her bed in the dormitory always has a mosquito net on”*. Well done Trust!

23 of our sponsored girls are supported by private individuals. The cost per month is now £20 (a slight increase from previously because of increased food costs). If you feel that this is something you might like to help with then please do get in touch. Or maybe you would like to help pay for some of the sanitary towels? £5 would buy 6 packets of sanitary towels.



News from Ruth Memorial Nursery School (RMNS) in Kihiihi is also good. The director, Ephraim, tells us that everything is going on fine with the 70 children all happy to be back in school again, coping with wearing face masks. He is very grateful for the laptop which we have bought and hopefully this will help in running the Nursery. We are also providing solar lighting at the school which will make a huge difference and we will endeavour to buy the stationery that is needed throughout the year.



During the pandemic the Mary Wood Trust has been very blessed with the continuing support that we have received from you all. This has meant that we have been able to offer limited financial support to teachers and workers at NGSS and to teachers and children’s families at RMNS, while the schools have been closed. We sincerely hope that now all the schools are up and running the coronavirus won’t rear its ugly head again and all being well, Clare and Oliver will be able to visit Uganda next March to join in the Mary Wood Day celebrations once again.

We are most grateful to you all. Thank you.

The Mary Wood Trust trustees (Clare, Peter, Kath, Ann, and Pippa).