



Family Empowerment

The Vulnerability of a Child Starts at Home

By: Pamela Brannon

The first time our Ugandan staff met Florence Batenga, she was struggling to feed herself and her 4 children—none of whom were able to attend school. Florence’s husband abandoned the family and she was left to provide for the children. This story could have ended here. A sad, but all too familiar scenario for Ugandan mothers who have no means to send their children to school, as well as to feed them adequate, nutritious food. Thankfully, this is just the beginning and her story is one that has inspired our organization to establish the Family Empowerment Program (FEP).

Earlier this year, Florence sought support from Children of Uganda (COU) for her eldest child Michael—who joined our 2012 primary school recruits. Around the same time, COU was rolling out the FEP pilot with the intention of empowering vulnerable women who had children in our program. Florence was a natural fit given her situation and how desperately she wanted to properly

care for her children.

We invited Florence and 10 other mothers to join the pilot this year and in the months since—the women have become a strong unit of support for one another. Each woman brings a unique set of talents and skills to the program and they have been able to encourage one another and increase their overall confidence. Individually, they have each initiated their own income generating project in an effort to become more independent and self-supporting. They also formed a FEP working group with elected officers (of which Florence is Chair) and together they hold weekly meetings. Here, they share their successes and challenges in managing their own business while caring for their families.

Participating in a savings and loan component is an important part of the FEP and all of the women are required to make a weekly deposit in a group savings account. They are allowed to borrow from the savings, but must repay within 30 days



Want to relive the 2012 Tour of Light? Turn to pages 4-5

or else their interest will be doubled. No one has ever paid late. This has given the women newfound respect for managing their money, borrowing wisely and holding everyone in the group accountable.

Florence has taken great pride in her achievements—growing her produce business, saving on a weekly basis, chairing the FEP working group—and above all, being able to provide daily necessities to her children. She once struggled to feed them one meal a day—now they eat

See **Empowerment** page 2



The beautiful, resilient women who participated in the pilot of our Family Empowerment Program (FEP) this year. Pictured second to the right is Florence Batenga.

Inside

In Loving Memory of Karen Baxter Rodman	2
Meet Harriet—A New Recruit’s Transformation	3
A Letter of Thanks to My Sponsor	3
2012 Tour of Light	4 -5
The Journey Continues for a Bright, Young Star	5
The Domino Effect	6
Joy in Simplicity	7
Message from the Executive Director	8

In Loving Memory of Karen Baxter Rodman

Karen Baxter Rodman devoted her life to helping others—working in the field of philanthropy for over 30 years. Africa was her greatest passion. She went many times as a Children of Uganda Board Member and also as a consultant with Uganda Christian University. She was planning to serve the Batwa Pygmies in far western Uganda this summer as a Community Health Worker before she was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year.

Karen worked as the Development Associate and Executive Director for a number of noteworthy Dallas-based charitable organizations and ended her career as CEO

of the International Psoriasis Council. She was also an active community volunteer and served on various non-profit boards with remarkable dedication and passion.

Karen passed away peacefully surrounded by family (including her only daughter, Emily Elizabeth Baxter) and friends on October 1, 2012. In lieu of flowers, her family graciously requested that memorials be directed to three of Karen's favorite charities including Children of Uganda. Over \$5,000 has been received in her honor. Karen will



Africa was Karen's greatest passion and her love for our kids was beyond measure.

be deeply missed, but her profound legacy will never be forgotten.

Empowerment *from page 1*

3 well-balanced meals a day. She also had no means to pay for school fees. Although still in installed payments, she is now able to pay school fees for her other children who are not directly sponsored by COU. Florence used to pay her rent (for both her business plot and home) late—up to 4 months in some cases. Today, she proudly pays her rent on time.

When asked what being a part of the FEP has meant to her—Florence shared that she is thankful to be making it on her own and to be supporting her children the way she always envisioned. She is also grateful for the skills she has developed—including the desire to save money on a weekly basis. This has greatly diminished the family's constant vulnerability.

She has also been inspired to ex-

pand her produce stand and hopes to one day soon purchase a refrigerator to help keep her fruits and vegetables fresh. In turn, she will be able to offer a wider variety of goods for sale. Florence has had some challenges along the way. Her produce stand is located only a few feet from the unstable structure where she and children reside. She must store her produce inside the home at night and this has created hygiene concerns for both her home and business. She is making efforts to improve—though it has been slow going.

As for the future, Florence is now saving up to buy her own piece of land where she and her children can live safely and securely. The idea of having a home of her own was once a dream that Florence could not possibly imagine realizing in her lifetime. Thanks to the Family Empowerment Program—her dreams are starting to come true, as are those of the other women in our pilot.

We could not be more proud of the strides made by these remarkable women—who have sacrificed so much and worked so hard

for the survival of their children. Today, these women are thriving and managing successful businesses, they are providing for their children and they have genuine hope for the road ahead.

In 2013, we will begin rolling out the FEP for more families with children in our program. We are honored to invest in these vulnerable families who are merely looking for a hand-up—not a hand-out. We believe that these families will be the source of tremendous change and growth within their communities and that one day they will no longer need support from organizations like COU.

The vulnerability of our students begins at home with their families, so by empowering guardians we can better serve the children in our sponsorship program, as well as their brothers and sisters who equally deserve a chance. We believe that teaching these women both life and business skills will help rebuild families and restore hope in struggling communities throughout Uganda. One of our university students—upon hearing about FEP—perhaps said it best. We are not just helping children—we are helping a nation.



Florence proudly stocks her vegetable and fruit stand – an income generating project supported through the Family Empowerment Program.

Meet Harriet—A New Recruit’s Transformation

By: Nicole Moorman

When Harriet Nakisekka joined Sabina Primary Boarding School in February 2011, she was very timid and lonesome. Our staff found Harriet living in an isolated area of Kamuganja village with her 80 year old grandmother—so



Before

naturally, she became very overwhelmed in a crowded school environment. She refused to play with her fellow classmates and retreated to herself.

After Harriet’s father died of AIDS, her mother disappeared. Therefore, Harriet and her siblings were taken under the care of their elderly, widowed grandmother who sheltered them in her semi-permanent, mud wattle home. For survival, Harriet and her siblings helped their grandmother by working in the garden and selling beans. It was a difficult life—but it was all that she ever knew.

Day by day at school, Harriet grew in confidence and was fortunate to receive a sponsor

shortly after recruitment. She began making friends and started participating more in group games and activities. Sadly however, earlier this year, Harriet’s grandmother was tragically murdered. It was very difficult for Harriet to understand that her grandmother—the sole breadwinner and guardian of her family—was now gone.

Gratefully, Harriet has taken comfort in her new family at Sabina. Today, she is a different little girl. She is happy and outgoing despite the many hardships she’s faced. Her teachers all speak highly of her and were proud to announce that she has remained in the top 10 of her class this year. Harriet’s resiliency is remarkable and through the support of our sponsors and supporters we are confident that she will continue to grow and thrive in our program.



After

A Letter of Thanks to My Sponsor *University Graduate, Frank Mugema*

Dear Dad Keith,

For many years I wanted to be what I’m becoming now, but I had little hope because there was not enough money to go to a good school. It’s your generosity Keith that has transformed my future. The amount of support you gave me was simply overwhelming.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to Aunt Pamela and the staff who connected me to your family after spotting my potential. I will always remember to try to help others as I get the chance because I feel that God has given me many blessings and I want to pass them along.

I dearly give thanks to the almighty God who has kept you as I pray for his blessings upon every bit of your endeavors. I will continue to seek your advice and direction as I work towards my goals.

Your son always,
Frank Mugema

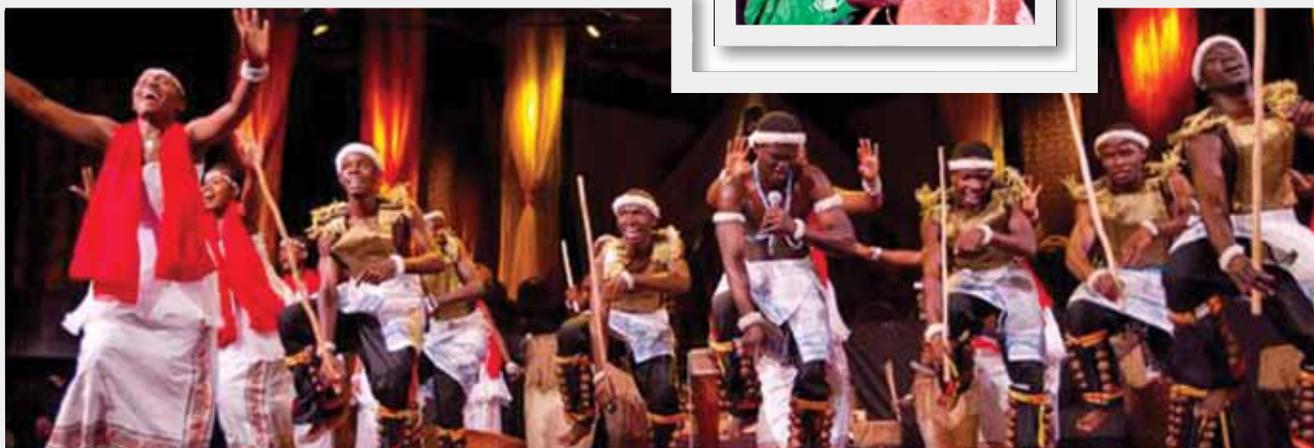
Frank (pictured right) graduated this October with a First Class Bachelor’s degree in Civil Engineering from Ndejje University thanks to his sponsor’s support over the past 4 years.



HIGHLIGHTS

from the 2012 TOUR of LIGHT

Photos by Eric Politzer



Relive the 2012 Tour of Light

A Journey that Delivered a Message of Hope

By: Pamela Brannon

When we departed Uganda on January 7th for the *Tour of Light*, none of us really knew what lay before us. We were excited to share with American audiences the East African cultural music, dance and traditions that are so dear to the Ugandan people. We also understood how critical this tour would be for the organization in terms of recruiting new donors and child sponsors.

Extensive rehearsals, transportation and accommodation arrangements, and other related preparations were made in advance of

“ I was so happy about the tour and have seen many changes in me since coming home. I tell all my friends and family stories of the things I saw while in America. The tour has changed my life. I feel I am more confident of myself now. Thanks, Children of Uganda, for everything you do. I love you.”

—Winnie
(featured on our cover)

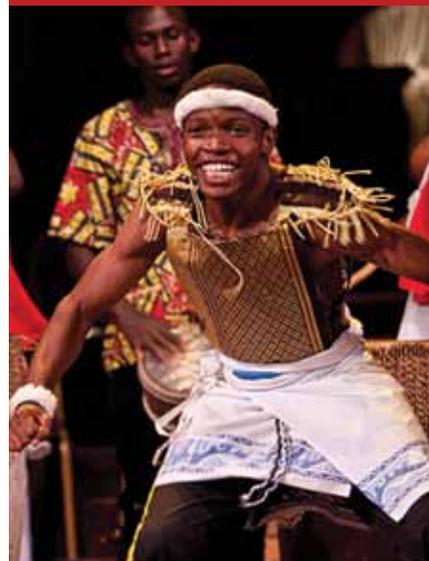
our arrival, but nothing could have prepared us for how remarkable our experiences would be and for the

outpouring of love we received everywhere we went. On every leg of the tour, we were introduced to so many kindhearted individuals and groups who we believe will remain lifelong friends. We can never fully repay those who housed, fed, clothed, drove, loved and supported us at each stop. No one felt like a stranger because we all shared a common mission.

For me personally, the *Tour of Light's* exceptional live performances are only a small part of what the troupe accomplished this year. More importantly, they introduced countless Americans to Children of Uganda's vital work and helped build a new generation of friends and supporters. Our performers this year are also helping pass the torch to our newest recruits who may one day grace the same stages to continue advocating for those in need.

I have been associated with this organization for more than 12 years and I have never been more proud to be a part of it; in particular, I am so grateful to the 20 Ugandan ambassadors who performed throughout 12 states over 2 months to carry a message of hope in spite of adversity. The seeds they planted will no doubt bear fruit for their fellow classmates and our youngest new recruits.

The Journey Continues for a Bright, Young Star



Gerald Ssemaganda (pictured above) joined Children of Uganda's program when he was only 7 years old after losing his father. Two years later—his mother also passed away. Over the years, Gerald's remarkable talents became evident. He recently toured the United States on the 2012 *Tour of Light* and wowed audiences from coast to coast with his spectacular dancing. Gerald studied Music, Dance and Drama at Makerere University and just recently received a 3 year scholarship to study performance arts in Norway. Gerald said that he was proud to perform on the *Tour of Light* because it “uplifted me and uplifted my talent”. Gerald, we are so proud of you and know that you will find great success in this new adventure.

Next Step - 2014 *Tour of Light!*

Music and dance troupe training will begin soon on the ground for Children of Uganda's 2014 *Tour of Light*. For more information or to learn how you can become involved, please call (800) 531-9612 or e-mail us at info@childrenofuganda.org.

An exciting, new journey awaits!

The Domino Effect

How One Sponsorship Changed the Lives of Many

On May 12th, 2006 my friend Herb Levin and I went to a wonderful Philadelphia venue called *The Annenberg Center* to see a *Tour of Light* performance. During intermission, we went into the lobby and saw books containing photos and histories of Ugandan children in need of sponsors. We decided it would be a blessing for us and the child to take on this responsibility, so we began looking.

I quietly asked God to guide our choice so that our sponsored child would bond with us even over long distance. I remember turning only a few more pages and getting a warm feeling from Paul Zaake's picture—a young boy who lost both of his parents to AIDS.

So, our long distance "parenting" began. As time went on we looked forward to receiving Paul's letters and I (who love to write) got so much joy in responding. I recall after about a year that Paul began referring to me as "Mom" in his letters, which made me feel so good. My friend Herb never married or had children of his own, so he was also delighted with Paul. Together, we even discussed traveling to Uganda to meet him.

Unfortunately, my dear friend Herb died unexpectedly in November of 2006. I decided to alert my friends that I wanted to partner with someone else to continue sponsoring. I did not want to abandon Paul as he had already suffered enough loss in his young life. And so, without hesitation, my friend Rita Roitman lovingly joined my adventure.



Paul Zaake (pictured above) entered COU's program after losing both of his parents to AIDS. Today, thanks to his devoted sponsor Georgia Ward, Paul is thriving at university.



Paul graduated secondary school in 2011 and was accepted into Gulu University last September to pursue a 3 year course in agriculture. Rita and I were so happy for him! Paul informed me that he would be visiting COU's office in Kampala to finalize his university admittance. The thought occurred to me that I could possibly talk to Paul for the first time, and then on a bright Monday morning I received the best surprise. I had a voicemail message

from Pamela Brannon that Paul was with her and to call back ASAP. That phone call, full of smiles and tears, was one of the best gifts I've ever received.

To cover Paul's university expenses, Rita and I reached out to our network of family, friends and neighbors for support—together, we made it possible! Today, Paul is thriving and he has kept us all informed of his studies and adventures through letters and photos.

I learned at a very young age that when we reach out to those in need, the domino effect is a positive one and those black and white disks create a beautiful design. I believe that God brought the right people together on life's stage to create this story of love and outreach that has many more chapters to be written. In fact, at the top of my bucket list is still a trip to Uganda to meet my far away adopted son. I know God will provide the means and the way.

Love and Peace to you Paul,
Mom (Georgia Ward)

Stay Connected All Year Long

Sign up to receive COU's Mini-Pearls—a quarterly 1 page newsletter designed to keep our most loyal friends informed about our programs, news and events. You can also join our *e-Pearls* mailing list to receive monthly e-mail updates. Message us at pearls@childrenofuganda.org with your name and contact details to start getting *Mini-Pearls* at your doorstep and *e-Pearls* in your inbox!



Joy in Simplicity

By: Catherine Easley, Founding COU Board Chair

I recently spoke with a friend who returned from a mission trip to Honduras—I myself had just returned from Uganda. She spoke of a vacant look on the children's faces, the poverty stricken homes they were housed in and of an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness.

My trip to Sabina Primary School in Rakai Uganda was not without sadness in seeing what the children lacked; but, I was also struck by a profound realization of all that they had. They lack the abundance and variety of meals we enjoy in the U.S., but are served three meals a

day consisting of rice, beans and posho or matoke (both starches similar in appearance to mashed potatoes). They also receive a hardboiled egg, fruits and vegetables at least once a week.

The children only have one or two sets of clothing besides their school uniform, but they keep what they own clean and well mended. Although in crowded classrooms, with two or three students sharing a desk, they are learning and earning some of the highest marks on their primary "leaving" (graduation) exams in their geographical region.

During our time there, we distributed over 2,300 pieces of donated clothing and underwear (many supplied through former Board member, Jeanne Koenig's "Knicker Drive") and 150 small stuffed animals. The men and boys in our small group of twelve replaced window screens to keep mosquitoes that carry malaria out of the dorms at night. They also installed an outdoor shower with a tank that can be filled with water in the morning so that the temperature is warm by late afternoon. We then all pitched in to revamp the bathing stalls where the kids wash using a basin, a bucket of water and a bar of soap. Our seemingly small efforts were met with exuberant joy and gratitude by the children and staff alike.

On Saturday, we held a carnival in the dining hall for the children. We treated them to face painting, a new experience that brought "ooh's" and "ah's" as they looked at themselves in the mirror. We also made braided and beaded jewelry, colored paper masks and other handmade crafts. When they were finished, glitter, feathers, beads



Catherine Easley, her daughter Isabella and son Zachary make two new friends at the library on the grounds of Sabina Primary Boarding School.

and paint were everywhere; so were smiles painted on their faces!

What I saw in the children over the course of the week that we stayed with them was a spirit of joy and thankfulness. They don't have all the riches we enjoy in our privileged lives, but they are so grateful that they have a bed to sleep in, food to eat, a place to learn, friends at school and sponsors far away who feel like family. Without COU's dedicated supporters—their stories could be as tragic as those of the children my friend met in Honduras.

So, on behalf of the hundreds of children who live at Sabina, thank you for your faithful generosity, your love and your prayers. It is making a visible difference in these young lives.

Wabale,
Catherine



Photo top: Volunteers installed an outdoor shower with a tank that can be filled with water that is then heated by the sun. **Photo bottom:** Thousands of clothes, gifts and underwear—or "knickers" as they are called in Uganda—were delivered to our delighted children.



Thanks to Catherine and her fellow volunteers, our kids enjoyed a carnival day with crafts, games and toys—including new beanie babies!

Message from the Executive Director

I once read that we do not accomplish anything in this life alone. And whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry and all the weavings of individual threads that come together to create something unique and beautiful. This has been my experience with



Children of Uganda (COU) for over a decade and at no other time has this been truer than in 2012. Each of you—whether you're a sponsor, volunteer, donor or 2012 *Tour of Light* attendee—has been an integral part of our tapestry over the last 12 months.

While the holidays are traditionally a time to reflect—this year, I find myself wanting to share with you our future. I witnessed two remarkable events this year—the 2012 *Tour of Light* and our new Family Empowerment Program (FEP). It was through these two exciting endeavors that I clearly saw our future—one that is both sustainable and that will allow us to serve more children with a significant and measurable impact.

The *Tour of Light* introduced the U.S. to 20 remarkably talented Ugandan ambassadors. They brought thousands of people to their feet with their extraordinary live performances of traditional East African music, song and dance. This inspired a new generation of supporters to sponsor children, lend their time and talents throughout the journey and even offer to help us plan the 2014 *Tour of Light*.

One new friend approached me after a performance and asked how the dance troupe children could be so happy and full of light after surviving such dramatic losses. I shared that they had already gone through the worst experiences a child could sustain and that those very life experiences were what made them strong and resilient. They can see their own potential in a promising new light and have hope for the future of their fellow COU brothers and sisters.

I also had the opportunity this summer to meet the women participating

in our Family Empowerment Program (FEP). I visited several homes and witnessed poverty unlike anything I'd ever seen before. And yet—like our dance troupe children—these women were filled with light and so much gratitude. I remember vividly the joy and excitement in their eyes when they spoke of the positive changes they have made since joining our program.

Many also shared their heartaches of not being able to properly nourish their children, provide medical care when they fell sick or have the ability to pay for school fees. That's all changed now. With a small financial investment that provides skills training, support for income generating projects and counseling—the women participating in FEP have created big changes in their lives and the lives of their beloved children. As do I, they finally see their future.

You have been a rich part of our history and have touched the lives of so many. Yet, we know that there are more than 8 million orphan and vulnerable children (OVC) living in Uganda today. Less than 10% of these children are receiving support from organizations like COU. So, our work does not end. We continue to seek and rely on the passion and support of friends like you who are making a lasting difference in the lives of the hundreds of OVCs we serve.

Thank you, again, for being a part of this remarkable year and believing in the vital work we do. As 2013 approaches and we prepare for a new school year in Uganda—we invite you to continue the journey with us and to help us celebrate what promises to be a very bright future.

Pamela Brannon
Executive Director



The mission of Children of Uganda is to support and empower hundreds of orphans and vulnerable children to lead successful and productive lives. Our vision is that all children in Uganda receive an education to become healthy, productive members of their community who assume leadership roles and positively impact Ugandan society.

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