

THE BIG BREAK

Orphans win Buikwe school 15 computers

By Jackie Nambogga

It is a cold Wednesday morning as I get into Rays of Grace Junior School located at Kirugu village, Wakisi division, Njeru municipality in Buikwe district.

The school provides free education to 182 vulnerable children, out of the 473 pupils.

Among the 182 beneficiaries are two brothers, Elijah Ngorobe, 14 and Elisha Purity, 7, as well as their sister, Honest Nabwire, 12, whose parents are both deceased.

Whereas Ngorobe is the eldest, Nabwire seems more confident to share their plight and her brothers are content listening to her narration.

Nabwire says their father died when she was nine years old and their mother, Juliet Nabwire, succumbed to cancer three years later.

She says they were at crossroads when their mother left them in a room they had been renting in Mutundwe, a Kampala suburb.

Their mother had a disability that confined her to the wheel chair. However, she always managed to fend for them.

Their church mate, Penninah Nansirumbi, who works with SBI International Holdings - Uganda branch, had introduced her to their organisation for consideration for financial support.

SBI is an international firm that deals in road and bridge constructions, among others.

Their mother trained women in crafts at Little Light Children's Centre located in Namuwonge, until her life deteriorated and she died.

Since she had not passed any skills to her children, her demise marked the beginning of their suffering.

Nansirumbi approached the construction company, which kept meeting their house rent, but she soon realised that it was not the best option.

She then approached an orphanage of the Daughters of Charity, which is run by nuns at Kiwanga in Namanve, Wakiso district, and asked to keep the children.

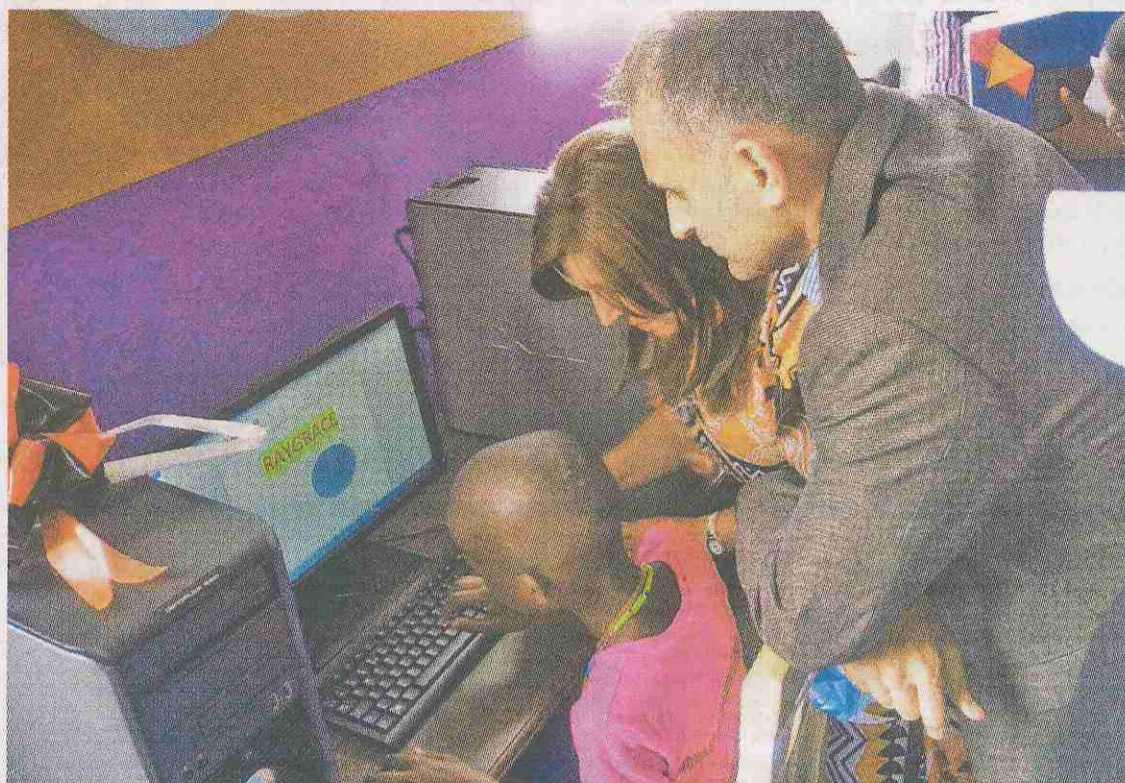
A ray of grace for the trio

While the three children were at the orphanage, Roberts Kiwanuka, the director of Rays of Grace Junior School, visited to offer food and other items to the charity.

Kiwanuka, who himself was educated by the same charity after losing both parents, was in the company of Tami Hoffman, the executive director of Rays of Grace. His mother died when he was seven years, so he lived with his grandfather. Since his grandfather could not afford paying his tuition fees, the charity took up this responsibility.

"This charity means a lot to my life. It educated me. That is why after every three months, I raise some money to buy food and other basic items to take to the children. We get the opportunity to bond and share developmental ideas to restore their hope," he says.

While at the home, Kiwanuka and Sr Thereza Basenere, the nun in charge of the charity, discussed multiple challenges and, in due course, she mentioned the three children who have just joined them.



A pupil typing her school's name on one of the computers that were donated to Rays of Grace Junior School in Buikwe district. Second-right is Hoffman and Hameiri (right). Photos by Jackie Nambogga

seeking for guardian consent, SBI asked the school where they needed intervention and, in response, Kiwanuka asked for improvement in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) system.

The firm considered furnishing the school's computer laboratory with 15 computers and furniture.

The gadgets, which were handed over by SBI's operation manager, Dotan Hameiri recently, gave Rays of Grace more recognition as the first to acquire a computer laboratory among the over 30 primary and secondary schools in Wakisi division.

Call to support community

Keith Ssemakula, the Njeru municipality principal education officer, said it was only St Noah Mawagali that had computers in the municipality. He said headteachers and teachers have been going to the school for basic computer training.

However, Ssemakula notes that many headteachers in the region are not computer literate.

"Some of the headteachers cannot even use the keyboard. We hope you will allow them to train on your computers," he urged.

Ssemakula said he bought a laptop because his secretaries kept asking for money whenever they typed his reports.

"I did not go for training, but kept touching the buttons. I am now a self-taught expert in computer," he said.

He cautioned the beneficiaries against misusing the computers.

"They have brought us computers. Let us use them as dot.com people," he urged.

The commissioner of private schools at the Ministry of Education and Sports, George Mutekanga, said the initiative was in line with Government's strategy to promote science and technology.

Mutekanga who was represented by the Njeru municipality inspector of schools, George William Nsumba, said the 473 pupils at the facility would be their technology ambassadors in their respective villages.

He urged the school management to ensure that the pupils use the computers ethically. He insisted that the equipment should not be a platform for promoting pornography.

Jane Frances Kagayi, the Buikwe Resident District Commissioner, said the Government was prioritising food security at household level through agriculture, industrialisation and ICT.

She said ICT is crucial for survival in the modern globalised world.

Turning the facility into a resource centre

Kiwanuka says he hopes to establish a resource centre to serve the 150 villages in the division.

He says they will give opportunity to the schools around and local communities as a strategy for transformation through ICT.

Hameiri, said they would return after six months to establish the impact of the gadgets on the learners and the community.

Hameiri says they will give the school an ICT trainer for six months to enable all pupils acquire ICT skills.

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY



The Rev. Fr. Maurice Kigoye, Kanguzumira parish

We are in an era of ICT and the establishment of a resource centre is the best alternative.



Mawazi Menhya Tasuuye, LC1 chairperson for Kirugu

The resource centre will help our unemployed graduates to find jobs online.



Zam Nakyeyune, parent

Our children will be exposed to the entire world and we thank the school management for thinking ahead.



Honest Nabwire, pupil

I have some skills in computer, but I am eager to learn more in our big computer laboratory.

Recalling his past, Kiwanuka quickly shared the children's plight with Hoffman, who agreed to relocate them to their school.

"I share the same background with the trio. The reason we started this school was to transform the lives of vulnerable children and give them a bright future through education," Kiwanuka says.

As Kiwanuka interacted more with them, he got to learn that their deceased mother was a crafts trainer, on SBI's payroll.

He immediately embarked on tracing Nabwire's background, to secure guardianship of the children.

'They did not trust me'

Kiwanuka officially wrote to the firm and delivered the letter to their offices in Bugolobi, Kampala, to confirm that they knew the mother.

Kiwanuka lowers his voice as he

"I share the same background with the trio. The reason we started this school was to transform the lives of the vulnerable children," Kiwanuka

narrates how he was not trusted when he sought for the guardianship consent from the contractors.

"They did not trust me. They could not believe that at my age, I would be working with a successful school project, where I could relocate the children," the 33-year-old says.

Kiwanuka says it took about two months to convince SBI officials to conduct a background check to ascertain if the school, indeed, existed.

"The officials later drove to Buikwe and when they arrived, they were impressed," he says with a smile.

Whereas the school is located in a remote area, it is as good as urban schools as it boasts of beautiful storeyed structures equipped with CCTV cameras.

Ngorobe, Nabwire and Purity said they feel comfortable in the school and have no regrets after relocation.

During holidays, they will be returning to the orphanage at the Daughters of Charity.

Tripple blessings

Even if Kiwanuka was merely