

A young child with yellow and green face paint, smiling, with hands framing their face. The child is wearing a green sweater. In the background, another child with face paint is visible, and a hand is reaching towards the child's head.

20 YEARS OF THE ST. ANDREW'S TY

UGANDA PROJECT

UGANDA 20 YEARS

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FOREWORD

Since its inception in 2005, the St Andrew's College Transition Year Uganda project has grown in stature and importance. It's hard to believe that it was more than 20 years ago, when we contemplated the first trip and associated events. Since then, the St Andrew's College community has embraced the multiple aims of the project with enthusiasm and wholehearted commitment. It is not an overstatement to say we have transformed lives and communities both here and in Uganda. By now we have raised well in excess of half a million Euro and brought more than three hundred students and over twenty staff to Uganda. Twenty different year groups of Transition Year students have planned, sang, baked, run, decorated and been creative in support of our Ugandan friends. It is important to emphasise at the outset: the project we have built is not supported by any external agency. It lives and thrives on the back of the generosity of our school community, the abundant enthusiasm of our Transition Year's, and the commitment of our local partners in Uganda. The entire St Andrew's community can be very proud of all that we have done and achieved together.

The two main events we organise as fundraisers have become firm fixtures on the St Andrew's College calendar. The Winter Fair is a popular part of our Christmas programme and has come to signify the end of exams and the start of the holiday season to many in school. The U-Live concert is a wonderful night and a great showcase for all things Transition Year: musical talent, teamwork, community, altruism and of course, energy and fun. The ownership of the 'good works' we do and the 'sense of duty' to help those less well off than ourselves has become firmly established in successive Transition Year students and that is something that we are rightly proud of.

The College has benefited enormously from the publicity and good will that the Transition Year Uganda Project has generated, both locally and nationally, in word of mouth and print, radio, and television media. From RTE's Nationwide programme to the Irish Times, East Coast Radio to Newstalk, the demonstration of the St Andrew's social conscience and on-going commitment to communities less fortunate than our own is very gratifying. It should also serve to remind us to be proud of the difference we are making amongst our own students and families, as well as those folks who are the focus of our assistance in Uganda.

We are extremely proud of the many achievements of the Uganda Project. Over the past twenty years, the project has transformed Rubirizi Senior Secondary School, funded the education of hundreds of Ugandan children who might have dropped out otherwise, provided health insurance to some of rural Uganda's poorest, contributed to the provision of feminine care products to girls at risk of abandoning education, built an exam hall, classrooms and dorms in Rubirizi, helped construct the outpatients department at Kisiizi Hospital, provided a bus to transport children at Good Shepherd's Fold (GSF) Children's Home, and donated countless volumes of clothes and supplies. Moreover, the project has launched numerous careers in medicine, healthcare and development among St Andrew's College graduates. These are achievements that can be seen and quantified. What cannot be measured is no less impressive. The smiles of sick children in Kisiizi Hospital whose hardship lessens for just a moment thanks to some bubbles and ballons. The students graduating from Rubirizi having passed their exams in the St Andrew's College Hall. The Transition Year students who get involved, quietly at first, and have their school experience transformed. The warm connections made between two groups of people whose lives are so remote from each other and yet discover they have so much in common after all.

Thanks to the fundraising of the St Andrew's community, the Uganda Project has delivered a range of essential hard projects and soft programmes. But it has also delivered smiles, friendship, and new perspectives both in Uganda and here at home.

This publication aims to commemorate the extraordinary achievements of the Transition Year Uganda Project. This is not an outlet to debate the merits of development projects or the socio-political climate in Uganda. These are important conversations that we will continue to have. This magazine, however, is focused on exploring the origins of project, highlighting the many people whose lives have benefitted from it, and celebrating with pride that we have sustained it for over two decades.

We are sincerely grateful to Ms Marshall and the St Andrew's College Senior Leadership Team, and Mr Sam Saarsteiner and the Boards of Governors and Management for their steadfast support and warm enthusiasm for the Uganda Project. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Ms Caroline Meenan, Mr Tristan Wood and the St Andrew's PTA Committee for so generously facilitating the printing of this magazine and always supporting the project. Finally, we extend our deepest thanks to you, the St Andrew's community, whose kindness helps make it all possible.

In the pages that are about to unfurl, we will tell the story of the different aspects of the project. But it can probably be summed up in one word: people.

Waybale Munonga.

*The Uganda Project Team, St Andrew's College, Dublin
September 2025*



IN THE BEGINNING

AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW HICKMOTT AND KIM GING

What was the origin of the Uganda Project? Was it when two relatively new teachers with a recent history in East Africa came together with a daring pitch to bring a group of TYs to rural Uganda? Was it when the Headmaster Mr Godsil gave his assent to the idea or when a group of students expressed an interest in participating, turning an abstract proposal into a concrete plan? These all seem like plausible and justifiable origin stories, but to really pinpoint the provenance of this remarkable undertaking one must travel back a bit further to the late 90s when a newly married couple decided to go on an adventure.

The fog of turmoil had scarcely lifted over Africa's picturesque Great Lakes. Uganda was still recovering from its long bush war. The unimaginable horror of the recent genocide in Rwanda reverberated throughout the region, while devastating conflagration still burned in the newly named Democratic Republic of Congo.



It was against this backdrop that a young Kim Ging and Matthew Hickmott took a leap of faith and applied for opportunities abroad that would allow both development work and an “unknown adventure”. Kim, who had recently qualified as a physiotherapist, was able to apply for jobs funded by the Irish government, one of which was in a hospital deep in rural Uganda that was looking for a physio.

At the time, dial-up internet was just becoming commonplace in Irish homes. In Kisiizi, however, the nearest usable public phone was seven hours away. The only way to connect with Kisiizi Hospital was by letter and so a letter was sent and a few weeks later a reply was received. The hospital offered Kim the position, but there was little information about logistics, accommodation, or what to bring. It was, they recall, “daunting, completely unknown, but very exciting.” There may have been doubts but they paled in comparison to the lure of adventure, the prospect of something new, and the hope of being some help. With that, they put their lives on hold, and in their own words: “we just went for it.”

Today we take for granted the ability to communicate in real time with anyone, anywhere. Back in 1998, Matt and Kim stepped off the plane in Entebbe hoping that their “plan hatched through a series of letters would fall into place.” A Land Rover awaited and they were off on the bumpy Entebbe road – where today stands Uganda’s only expressway – before turning south for the long drive over swamps and savannah into the verdant highlands.



Hours later they arrived in the Kisiizi Valley, having travelled up the red dirt road that has become so familiar to St. Andrew’s, excited, filled with anticipation, and somewhat relieved to learn they had accommodation. The only problem was the house was unfinished and home to a substantial number of roosting bats. In the end, as Kim said, “the house ended up being a blessing.” Most Europeans lived inside the hospital compound. Matt and Kim settled about one kilometre away – halfway as it turned out to Rubirizi school – nestled in the middle of the Omuchondo community, who welcomed their new Irish residents with warmth and affection, and years later became the lifeblood of the TY Uganda Project.



Kim began her essential work as a physiotherapist in Kisiizi Hospital. The challenges were immense. As Kim pointed out: In rural Uganda, having a disability or recovering from injury could be catastrophic for people who work with no safety net for their livelihoods – this could endanger a family’s income stream and expose them to abject poverty. In the region, employment usually entails hard, physical labour and life necessitates navigating mountainous terrain. When Kim arrived in the hospital, she encountered a therapy unit that was rudimentary at best and completely lacking basic resources. Kim recalls describing what a wheelchair and other physical aids looked like to the hospital carpenter and when her descriptions were met with confusion, she got out a pen and sketched these support systems on paper. What Kisiizi Hospital lacked in resources, it made up for in resourcefulness and determination. The carpenter was able to fashion a wheelchair entirely out of wood, even with wooden wheels. This is symbolic of the extraordinary drive of the hospital and its mission to provide the best possible healthcare to this remote region.

From there, the physiotherapy unit improved step by step, and Kim went on to help found the rehabilitation ward where many children with disabilities or injuries are given life-changing assistance. The rehabilitation ward has since developed a strong relationship with CHEEERS and UCDVO. It is flourishing 25 years later.

For Matthew Hickmott, the two years spent living in the beautiful Kisiizi Valley were no less fortuitous. In between helping with the administration of the hospital, odd jobs in the Omuchondo community, and going on daily runs up the infamous hill that St Andrew's visitors now trek to get to Lake Kimbugu, Mr Hickmott became Teacher Matthew, a rare European educator at Rubirizi School. This is the source of our long-term partnership with Rubirizi. While working in Rubirizi, Mr Hickmott witnessed firsthand the extraordinary lengths local teachers traverse to support their students in packed, underequipped classrooms. He also learned how to explain solutions in a different vernacular. In his first few weeks, he scratched his head wondering why none of his students would ever provide the answer to problems on the blackboard when they were so vocal in neighbouring classrooms. After observing his colleagues, he realised a small change in syntax was in order. When he asked, "what is it?" he was met with blank expressions and silence. When he asked, "it is a what?" the classroom lit up.



Many of the names that populate Matt and Kim's stories of their time in Kisiizi are the same people who form the local backbone to the Uganda Project, 25 years after the Irish couple returned home to settle again in South Dublin. Moses Magume, the indefatigable Kisiizi Hospital Administrator. Jackie, the hospitable host of the Kisiizi Guesthouse. Nahabwe, the ever smiling and always resourceful Omuchando man who helps St Andrew's navigate Kisiizi both literally and figuratively. It is always worth remembering that the TY Uganda Project is run by St Andrew's staff without the assistance of an external agency. This would not be possible without our local friends and partners, many of whom are old friends of Matt and Kim's.

By living in the local community, Matt and Kim became immersed in the life of the valley. Kim's vital work in the hospital put her at the heart of the community, while Matt learned the fundamentals of mud brick construction and the vagaries of subsistence farming, which has provided him with ample opportunities to teach the suburban Andrew's students about the bucolic way of life. Reflecting on their time, they offered heartwarming anecdotes of immersion in the Omuchondo community: visiting the market, attending church services, being invited to Nahabwe's family compound for dinner – a privilege still afforded the St Andrew's group every year. Their door was always open, as village children would come in and run around, the adults would chat in the kitchen, and on occasions when the generator was working, the neighbours would gather to watch 30 minutes of an old Irish TV show. They became accustomed to the relaxed, welcoming Ugandan approach to life, where people celebrate what they have rather than coveting what they don't.



In addition to Nahabwe, who was always on hand to help, Jackie became an indispensable presence in their lives. Proposed to be their “house girl” [a colloquial term], Matt and Kim were initially reluctant to hire someone to work in their home, as many from the West might be. However, their neighbours had a different perspective, bluntly saying: “You have the problem, not us. You’re refusing to give someone a perfectly respectable job.” Jackie had recently given birth to her first-born Fortunate, who is now herself married with children in Kabale near the Rwandan border, and both mother and child became crucial to the Hickmott home. While Kim and Matt worked long days, Jackie kept the household functioning by making meals, lighting lamps and creating a calm environment in an unknown setting. “She benefitted from us being there,” Kim recalled, “but we couldn’t have managed without her either.”

Another lady, Awori, also became a central figure, acting as local guide and mentor. She gave helpful advice, explained local customs, and guided them away from cultural missteps. Between Jackie and Awori, Matt and Kim were supported and welcomed. They were very clear to us: without these women, their experience of Uganda would have been completely different.



Matt and Kim are planning to visit Uganda together next year, their first combined trip in over 15 years. They last visited when their two sons were small and a photo of the four of them still adorns the wall in the rehabilitation ward. As hundreds of St Andrew's students and quite a few staff have seen, the visit of Mr Hickmott to Kisiizi always generates quite a stir. The local people love the smattering of Rukiga he offers at the hospital chapel and the inspiring speeches delivered at the Rubirizi assembly. Passersby regularly stop him on the road to Rubirizi which for our students is a striking reminder of the importance of the St Andrew's connection. There is no doubt the long-awaited return of Kim to Kisiizi will create an unprecedented wave of excitement.

In 2000, Matt and Kim returned to Dublin with a new sense of purpose and a broader understanding of the world. It was a difficult adjustment, especially returning from scarcity to abundance, but their experiences in Uganda inspired their next steps. Kim continued her work as a paediatric physiotherapist, working with children in great need of support, while Matt became the Mr Hickmott we know, taking a post as a physics teacher in St Andrew's, and before long co-founding the Uganda Project.

In fact, it was just about five years after returning from Uganda that Mr Hickmott and Mr Micallef came up with the idea, secured backing from Mr Godsil and the College, and somehow got a group of TYs and their parents to consent. The rest of that story will unfold across subsequent pages.

For now, it is worth noting that the essence of what makes the Uganda Project so special is contained in Matt and Kim's 1998 adventure. Be brave and don't be put off by something daunting. Take the opportunities life presents you. Discard stereotypes and open your heart and mind to life in different parts of the world. And always remember, our shared humanity breaks down barriers.



FROM KENYA TO KISIIZI

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR MICALLEF

Geography teacher. Deputy Principal. Acting Principal. Parent. Uganda Project Coordinator. Mr Rob Micallef has worn many hats in St Andrew's since he joined the College in 2002 having recently arrived in Ireland after two years living in Kenya, where he met his Irish wife, Claire. Mr Micallef quickly found a home in St Andrew's teaching IB geography and in the intervening two decades, he has impacted every aspect of the school, touching the lives of students, staff and parents with his kindness, love of learning, and friendly presence at the gates every morning. It is these precise qualities that our resident Maltese geographer brought to the Uganda Project.



Mr Micallef was one of the founders of the Uganda Project alongside Mr Hickmott back in 2005. Together they had the fantastic – and brave – idea of bringing a group of Transition Years to Africa, before settling on Uganda where Mr Hickmott had lived. They pitched the idea to Mr Arthur Godsil, the Headmaster, and he was supportive. They then proposed the idea of raising money for Ugandan communities to the Transition Years. There was a group of interested students and from that the St Andrew's College TY Uganda Project came into being.



For Mr Micallef and Mr Hickmott, the essence of the idea wasn't about bringing the TYs on an exotic trip but rather connecting our students with a meaningful project in Africa. Fundraising efforts soon followed the first pitch and over time the Uganda Project evolved into something far bigger than anyone could have conceived: a legacy of partnership that has endured for twenty years.

Mr Micallef is adamant that his goal today is the same as it was in 2005: to build a strong relationship between our community and communities in Uganda. He wanted our students “to visit that community and not go there telling them what they needed, but instead ask them questions such as: What do you need? What do you want? What's a priority for you?” This remains the objective: to facilitate infrastructural improvements or increasing student enrolment because they needed it, not because we wanted it.



It is not widely known that each year several meetings take place between the St. Andrew's Uganda team and the staff at our partner institutions to discuss how best to use funds that have been raised and ensure that St Andrew's retains some oversight. In Rubirizi School, where a significant proportion of our funds are donated, there is a joint committee comprised of Rubirizi and SAC staff which assesses requests for funds and provides clear oversight of how capital projects are progressing. Some of the early requests like the St Andrew's College Hall, which is used for assemblies and examinations, and the Head Teacher's accommodation, have been very beneficial in helping to retain students and leaders. The project, Mr Micallef emphasises, also has a goal for our TY students: it gives them something worthwhile to fundraise for, that they can also assume ownership over, and it helps them make connections with a very different part of the world. These benefits extend to all TYs, not just the fortunate group that visits Uganda.



"There will always be some challenges with projects like this," Mr Micallef readily accepts. These challenges are pronounced when taking a group of TY students across the world, "not just because of the cultural differences but the logistical issues too, as we come from different cultural backgrounds, different laws and customs." Gender roles in Uganda, for example, are different to what we are used to. Another challenge that Mr. Micallef highlighted was how Ugandan societal views on LGBTQAI+ rights don't align with ours. However, we have always approached these challenges with respect and understanding. The key, he thinks, is listening and learning rather than imposing our views. Mr. Micallef also mentions the cultural differences between the way we dress compared to the people in Uganda, particularly in GSF, which he notes is a Christian community that has done a massive amount of good for the people in their local area. He firmly believes that it is important that we're respectful of the Uganda people and their social mores.





The Uganda Project has clear and tangible benefits to the communities we support. Mr Micallef cites a number of areas where this is particularly apparent, such as school fees. This support, he believes, will generate the greatest long-term impact. Many of the students we support have done well in their exams but wouldn't have been able to stay in school were it not for our contributions. Now they are able to continue studying and thanks to their success, they attract more students to Rubirizi. In Mr Micallef's words: "It's the opposite of a vicious circle. It's a self-perpetuating success... Our fundraising during the year goes towards giving those students a future, a job, a better standard of living." As Mr Micallef stresses: "It is important that all 160 students in each year group feel proud of themselves for this fundraising and not just the 18 or so students that are lucky enough to travel to Uganda." He adds that our school has formed important friendships, for example, with Nahabwe in Kisiizi and Jovent in the school. "We've known them for 20 years. So, they're not just people who we go over and see once a year. They do feel like part of a wider St Andrew's community and that's good for them as well.

Mr Micallef beams with pride as he discusses the many successes that have arisen out of the Uganda Project. But perhaps the greatest success is its longevity. This project has not just given our partner institutions better infrastructure; it has also given them the certainty of a long-term connection, which is something often lacking in Western links with Africa. Mr Micallef thinks of the people whose lives have been improved along the way. Rohindi, who lost his father in the Congo war and was attending the odd lesson in Rubirizi, is now in teacher training. Another child, who Mr Micallef met 20 years ago as a HIV+ toddler, is now a 23-year-old graduate. As a community, we should be proud of this impact. The Uganda Project has not just constructed buildings; it has built a bridge between two different worlds. This is a legacy imprinted in the mind of every TY student who fundraised or just got involved. Although Rubirizi may be thousands of kilometres away, thanks to the project started by Mr Micallef and Mr Hickmott, it will always be intertwined with the St Andrew's College family.

THE WINTER FAIR

What could be better than face painting stalls, delicious treats and intriguing raffle prizes all enjoyed on a Thursday afternoon with Christmas around the corner?

The Transition Year Winter Fair has been an adored mainstay of the St. Andrew's College calendar since 2007. This event is organised and run exclusively by TY students. All proceeds go directly to the Uganda Project supporting families, students, and patients in Rubirizi, Kisiizi, and Jinja.

With the exciting festive feeling leading up to Christmas, the atmosphere in the school is filled with joy and anticipation. The Winter Fair marks the first Uganda fundraiser of the school year, and it plays a vital role in contributing to the project. The walls are transformed with imaginative and creative decorations created by the talented art students. The Senior Hall is recast as a bazaar full of TY students hawking t-shirts, raffle tickets or all manner of curios at the Tombola stall. These are just a few examples of the enormous effort and passion that our students bring to the fair. While fundraising is a vital part of the evening, the event also offers participants a great opportunity to create new friendships.





The Transition Year students eagerly prepare for weeks at the start of the academic year to make the fair as successful and enjoyable as it can be. Each student signs up to run a stall of interest to them. Once the groups are put in place, students collectively work as a team to ensure that their stall is run properly by planning, gathering supplies, and coming up with ways to attract customers. This creates a spirit of collaboration amongst the year group. While some stalls change with each group, there are a few constants: the bake sale, the tombola, the popular raffle, and the now signature Uganda t-shirt stall.

The Winter Fair has become a highlight, not just of the Uganda calendar, but of the school calendar, bringing joy after the Christmas exams, an infusion of festive spirit, and some much-needed fundraising for our partners in Uganda.



U-LIVE THE UGANDA CONCERT

Every February, an incredible array of musical acts drawn from across the St Andrew's student body comes together for U-Live, our annual Uganda benefit concert. Since the inaugural concert in 2008, U-Live has proudly showcased the extraordinary musical talent of our school community. Not only is it one of the most important events on the Uganda calendar, it is a firm favourite. Whether you are a performer, organiser, teacher, or proud parent in the audience, U-Live is a memorable night every year. What's more, the event directly supports our partners in Uganda. With a roster of 30 plus acts and hundreds of spectators, U-Live would rival a small festival. Producing such an event is a considerable task made all the more impressive by the fact that it is organised and run exclusively by Transition Year students – although they get by with a little help from a set of ageing rockers on the staff.

Since its inception nearly 20 years ago, U-Live has provided TY students with a powerful platform to not only shape that year's Uganda Project, but also to develop invaluable skills in areas such as production and marketing. Furthermore, the show provides our students with a medium through which to express their musical talents. Each year, numbers range from soft-sung ballads and energetic soulful classics to powerful rock performances with a few dances thrown in for good measure. One moment spectators can be moved to tears by a singer's beautiful voice, the next, they are on their feet dancing to lively renditions of *We Are Family*, *Hey Jude* or *Highway to Hell*. By providing an outlet for students at St Andrew's to express their musicality, U-Live may even have played a small role in launching a few musical careers.



Most student performers will agree that there are huge benefits to getting on stage, having a go, and putting yourself out there. For those interested, we have received a few tips from a student who has lit up the stage in the past. Liam O'Mahony says: "it is vital to begin practicing early, especially if performing with a larger group. That is to ensure everyone has a chance to rehearse." Of course, most people will want to be comfortable performing, but veterans of U-Live say it is important not to shy away from the crowd regardless. As Liam added: "Even if you don't play an instrument or sing, you can still perform. One year, my friend and I taught somebody else how to play five notes on the bass guitar so they could be part of a group on stage." We'll leave you guessing who the bassist was, but it certainly lends weight to the adage: *if you want to be a rockstar, learn to play bass.*



Participating in U-Live is a wonderful experience. Even for those not musically inclined, there is a myriad of roles for Transition Year students to undertake in the organisation or presentation of U-Live, whether it is backstage, front of house or even on stage as MC. The most important thing is to get involved.



People in Ireland and Uganda share a profound love of music. It is fitting that music is the centrepiece of one of our biggest fundraisers. Those who visit Uganda see how performance plays a vital role in Ugandan culture. Recently, we had the pleasure of meeting Matthew in GSF, a boy who is nonverbal but has an extraordinary talent and passion for music. He composed multiple songs for the other children to sing at the local church, which was incredibly moving to watch. As Matthew's story shows, the love of music is common to people across the world, further emphasising the importance of U-Live in the school calendar. This immense event has been brightening dark February evenings in Booterstown for nearly two decades, giving our students an opportunity to perform and audiences a reason to cheer. U-Live is all about getting involved and being part of something worthwhile. This is the heart of the Uganda Project.



“FORWARD WE MOVE”

RUBIRIZI SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

For most St Andrew’s College students, it is hard to fathom the reality of schooling in rural Uganda. What would it be like to learn in classes of fifty students? To walk home for many kilometres every day along the rusty-red murram roads under the equatorial sun? Would they interact with their friends in the same way? Would their mindsets be different? And what about their hopes for the future? Twenty years ago, a group of St. Andrew’s College students became the first of many groups to confront these questions directly when they visited Rubirizi Senior Secondary School.

A collection of maroon-coloured classrooms and dormitories set around lush green fields, all nestled in the remote highlands of Rukungiri District in southwestern Uganda, Rubirizi school is a special place which defies expectations. The setting is idyllic, the vistas breathtaking. The students are smartly dressed and eager to learn. The teachers dispense algebra, Shakespeare and Swahili in equal measure using only blackboards in their packed, dusty classrooms. Rubirizi is a place of proud standards. Yet, the challenges are many and real.

Over the years, school enrolment has risen with student attendance now sitting around four hundred and fifty students. The Uganda Project team is hoping that this number will continue to increase with the generous help of the St. Andrew's community. Rubirizi school is about three kilometres from Kisiizi Hospital. The hospital staff in Kisiizi send their young children to the local primary school. Unfortunately, when it comes to secondary school a lot of students don't continue due to the low level of income earned by parents who do not work higher up in the hospital.

The life of a student in Rubirizi has undergone remarkable changes over the past twenty years. The school never received funding or other support from European donors. Mr Hickmott was one of the first Europeans to go and work in Rubirizi School. In the early 2000s, Rubirizi was an underdeveloped school that faced many obstacles. There was no running water, so students had to collect water every morning before classes began. The school lacked electricity and basic facilities like bathrooms. Sadly, this lack of essential functions that we take for granted contributed to low enrolment. In Rubirizi, regular school sometimes finished before the end of term because finances ran out and they could not buy food for the boarders. For many years the school only had external assistance and funding from St Andrew's College. However, in the last decade they have received additional support from the government as it is now seen as a school that is improving and full of potential. As a result, Rubirizi is in a better position today, but there are still advancements to be made to make this school the best it can be for the students, staff and local community.



The incredible bond between Rubirizi and St Andrew's is one of the first things our visitors notice. Whether it is the warmth of the reception we receive, or the commemoration of our bond symbolised in the St. Andrew's College Hall, the affection the Rubirizi community has for St. Andrew's is palpable and moving.

Our partnership with Rubirizi first began by focusing on school facilities. This resulted in significant improvements including the expansion of the library, and the construction of bathrooms and accommodation for the boarding school students. Recently, we have built teachers' accommodation, which is important to help Rubirizi attract and retain talent. In the last eight years we have begun assisting with funding challenges in the school. This enables Rubirizi to subsidise school fees which helps buttress several different activities and projects. One of our biggest concerns is children who do not attend school. We contribute to a hardship fund which pays school fees for children in need. Additionally, the Uganda Project has provided financial support for academically successful children, helping to raise the grades and profile of the school overall.



This year there is a new Head Teacher at Rubirizi, Ms Angela Kakobyu Kabarungi, the first female to hold the position at Rubirizi. This is a sign of further progress in a school that has made significant advancements in the last two decades. At St. Andrew's we want to continue helping Rubirizi as we believe it is a unique and wonderful place that makes an enormous contribution to the local community. Our continued partnership can assist this determined school unlock the potential of hundreds of Ugandan children, one talented student at a time.



KISIIZI HOSPITAL

Nestled in a verdant valley, one-hour up a dusty murram road, is the village of Kisiizi, a vital slice of bucolic African life and the improbable home of one of southwestern Uganda's most important medical institutions.

Kisiizi Hospital, a community-based mission hospital, that practices faith-based healthcare, is one of the main institutions the St Andrew's Uganda Project is very proud to support. The hospital is the lifeblood of the Kisiizi community providing healthcare, hydroelectric power and education to the surrounding area, while also being one of the largest local employers.

The hospital originates in the East African Revival movement, the spread of evangelical Christianity across East Africa from the 1920s onwards. As part of this movement, mission hospitals were established across Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, with one of the first hospitals set up by Dr Leonard Sharp in Kabale, 50 km south of Kisiizi. After its closure, the Church of Uganda requested the founding of a new mission hospital in 1958, this time on the site of a closed flax factory in Kisiizi. The first doctor sent out to set up the soon-to-be thriving institution was Dr John Sharp, son of the man who had spearheaded the initial wave of mission hospitals in Uganda.

In March 1959, Dr Sharp and his wife Doreen set up camp in the old flax factory, seeing patients within a week of their arrival. It was not until March 1960, however, that the conversion of the original site into two wards, an operating theatre, a labour ward, sterilising rooms, and a variety of support rooms was completed. Dr John Sharp unfortunately passed away from a brain tumour just seven years after arriving in Kisiizi. Doreen continued to return to Kisiizi on a regular basis until her death in 2022. Their grandson visited in 2023 and met the St. Andrew's students and staff.



Since 1959, this rural mission hospital overlooked by the picturesque Kisiizi falls, has grown into a powerhouse of community healthcare. What was once a humble collection of renovated factory buildings performing basic procedures, is now a thriving hospital providing a multitude of medical services to the local community. The hospital departments include maternity, gynaecology, paediatric, mental health and rehabilitation wards, HIV and infectious diseases, a dental clinic, ophthalmology clinic, neonatal care unit and several operating theatres. One unique feature of the hospital is its 'mothers in waiting ward', the only one of its kind in Uganda, which cares for and educates expecting mothers for weeks before labour. This ward was established after two pregnant women died after arriving in the hospital with complications and has been key to improving outcomes for mums and babies.



Another unique amenity is its modern approach to mental health and psychiatry. The Ahumuza mental-health centre, opened in 2017, is one of the newest additions to the hospital. The word 'Ahumuza' means "a place of comfort" in the Rukiga language. The Ahumuza centre aims to provide treatment and rehabilitation for those with mental health issues in the surrounding areas, while fighting the damaging stigma around mental health in rural Uganda. The centre ensures that Kisiizi Hospital is the biggest not-for-profit mental health care provider in rural South-West Uganda, providing free services to more than 400 people per month, treating patients with neurological and mental health conditions, through clinics, community outreach programmes and health promotion activities. The establishment of the Ahumuza Centre was funded by a number of partners, most notably the UK-based charity 'Jamie's Fund'. Jamie's Fund was established in 2013 in memory of Jamie Devaney. Jamie died while on a visit to Uganda with his parents, who were keen that people should continue to be inspired and blessed by Jamie's life.



Outside of medical care, Kisiizi Hospital provides a number of services to the surrounding community. Kisiizi Hospital Power Ltd is an electricity provider, owned by Kisiizi hospital which harnesses the hydro-electric power of Kisiizi Falls to generate electricity. The Kisiizi Hospital School of Nursing provides sophisticated nursing training for aspiring nurses. Kisiizi Hospital Primary School, located adjacent to the main hospital buildings was first built to allow for the education of the children of employees of the hospital and now has an enrolment of around 350 students.

St Andrew's College has a special connection with Kisiizi Hospital, originating when Matthew Hickmott, and his wife Kim lived and worked in the community. The St Andrew's College Uganda Project has made many significant contributions to the hospital. In the early years we supported infrastructure projects, such as the building of a new outpatient's department, laundry room and staff accommodation, as well as funding new surgical equipment for the operating theatres. More recently, the project has contributed to staff training, outreach support and equipment.

Since the Covid 19 pandemic, our main focus has been to support the hospital's 'Good Samaritan Fund' which is used to pay the expenses of the poorest in the community, who cannot themselves afford healthcare. Most especially, numerous St. Andrew's students who have been fortunate enough to visit Kisiizi will recall with fondness their time spent in the children's and rehabilitation wards (the latter was partly established by Kim Ging) where they have spent hours singing songs, blowing bubbles, and bringing joy to the admitted children.

Kisiizi Hospital navigates an immense array of challenges. Traditional community practices often contradict modern medical advice. Malnutrition, burns from floor-level cooking, road accidents, and infectious diseases create profound public health difficulties. On top of that, the logistical issues inherent in running a hospital in remote rural East Africa are too many to fathom. Yet thanks to its industrious people and many committed partners, Kisiizi Hospital doesn't just endure, it thrives.

Every morning at dawn this tireless, rustic village arises to the beating sound of the goatskin drum. Nurses and surgeons, engineers and technicians, porters and boda-boda drivers, all wake to the play their essential roles in helping the people of the beautiful Kisiizi valley live "life in all its fullness."



VIEW FROM KISIIZI HOSPITAL

BY MOSES MUGUME

My Name is Moses Mugume. I am the hospital administrator and have lived and worked in Kisiizi all of my life. In fact, I was also a student in Rubiriizi school many years ago. I remember when Matthew Hickmott and his wife Kim Ging came to work in the hospital and school back in 1998. Since then we have become good friends and now work together each year in partnership. The links between St Andrew's college community and Kisiizi are now well established and very deep indeed. I myself have visited Dublin and St Andrew's College, as well as St Paul's parish in Dun Laoghaire.

The St Andrew's College community have supported a variety of different projects and initiatives here in Kisiizi over 20 years including helping us to construct a new Outpatients Department in the early years, assisting with the construction of staff accommodation or bringing over surgical equipment and lighting for our operating theatres. Indeed, they have also supported staff training, community education initiatives and continue to contribute to the medical expenses of some of our most needy patients. The funds and resources you donate make a huge, often life changing difference to the communities we serve here in Kisiizi valley.

The longevity of our relationship with St Andrew's College is truly a blessing. When we suffered flood damage to our electricity generator, St Andrew's College sent support, as they also did during Covid. Every year when the students come to visit, the hospital is glad to see new faces and renew old bonds of friendship. I must also say that many of those TY students come back to Kisiizi in later life as qualified or trainee healthcare professionals. We often welcome SAC alumni who did not visit as TYs but know of us through the Uganda project. A notable and much valued connection that arose after the very first SAC Uganda project visit is with Mr Stuart Garrett who created the CHEEERS project and made connections with UCD. These two initiatives continue to flourish here in Kisiizi and back in Ireland. As you and the St Andrew's college community celebrate 20 years of the project, I wish you all well and thank you on behalf of the Kisiizi hospital community for helping us with our mission to support life in all its fullness.



THE EMPOWER PROJECT

For a moment, place yourself in the shoes of a young schoolgirl living in rural southwest Uganda.

Your family has committed to your education, making you an asset to your community, boosting your chances of escaping the subsistence lifestyle of your rural surroundings, and increasing your value to prospective suitors.

School is enjoyable and interactive. You like mathematics, history, languages, and spending lunch breaks with your friends. You are excited to further your education, go to boarding school, and maybe move to the big city. Then your first period arrives. Now you have been introduced to the secret world of women's reproductive health, a furtive reality that so many women and girls in Uganda and rural Africa struggle through on a monthly basis.

Your mother teaches you how to use ashes and leaves, or possibly a rag, to prevent this secret betraying you and seeping through your precious skirt. With no access to painkillers or sufficient care products, school becomes more difficult, and you start taking days, even weeks off. Your grades plummet. With financial pressure an ever-present reality for your family, your falling grades mean completing school is no longer a viable prospect. Your family makes the heartbreaking decision to end your education.

This is reality for too many girls in Uganda. According to Unicef, over 40% of Ugandan girls will not complete their schooling. The Ugandan government puts the figure at just under 30%. Either way, a huge number of Ugandan girls are forced out of education and denied a future of financial independence due to monetary pressure and/or lack of access to sanitary pads. This in turn leaves these girls vulnerable to early marriage, teen pregnancy, and sexual predators who use the high cost of sanitary pads to exploit young women. These girls face barriers to school attendance which would be unconscionable in Ireland.

Having a period is not a choice. It happens every month to almost every woman whether she can prepare for it or not. However, with a large number of Ugandans living an agrarian, subsistence-based lifestyle, the financial cost of period products becomes immense and unattainable.

Education provides the only opportunity for people to escape this vicious cycle. It is a tragedy that so many girls face barriers to access this basic human right due to factors beyond their control.



Heather St John, an English woman who spent several years living in Kisiizi with her physician husband, Barak, and their three children, first noticed this issue on her original visit in 2017. She became determined to take action to ameliorate the problem.

In 2021, Heather, who was now living in Kisiizi, teamed up with Sister Monica, a good friend and colleague to start the Empower Project, a local initiative that aims to keep girls in school for every day of the month. To that end, Empower provides washable sanitary pads to schoolgirls and vulnerable women.

“We started small, sewing ourselves at home and making a few sample pieces, and have grown to the point where we employ three local tailors and employ Monica part time as the project manager,” Heather said, as she reflects on the origin and growth of the project.

As Empower expanded, they focused on employing local women in the community who have children with disabilities as often these women face great financial hardships and cannot work whilst caring for their child. The sewing teams work together to create the washable sanitary pads. Heather explains that these pads are distributed in “packs of four pads, a wet bag and a pair of knickers.” Each pack is provided for free and can be washed and reused for up to five years, empowering girls to stay in school and hopefully escape the cycle of poverty.



This small, startup project has been a tremendous success. Empower has now reached nearly 6,000 girls and women with pad packs and they have also taught hundreds more how to make their own washable pads. Empower visits schools and local communities to educate education women on their sexual and reproductive health, a topic that can be stigmatised in Uganda's traditional rural villages.

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Recently, the St. Andrew's visiting team were fortunate to attend a community outreach with Heather and Empower. The female students and staff visited a local school to distribute pads and help educate the local girls about reproductive health. As with the entire Uganda Project, the educational benefit is always mutual: in fact, it was a learning experience for our students to see how life-altering it can be for girls of their age to have their basic needs neglected.

Empower is growing consistently and getting requests to visit more and more schools, even as far away as Kampala. With the continued support of our school and other communities, we can help ensure that Empower continues its essential work. It costs just fifteen euro to provide a pack to a girl, giving her the opportunity to stay in school and with it the prospect of financial independence in the future.

A project designed by women for women, Empower began with an idea that seemed small and has grown to impact the lives of thousands of women in rural southwestern Uganda. "Empower can be a part of bringing life in all its fullness to our Ugandan sisters," said Heather St John. It is our hope to help the project grow and continue to empower young women across rural Uganda, one pack of pads at a time.





GOOD SHEPHERD'S FOLD HOME FOR CHILDREN AND BABIES

Good Shepherd's Fold Home for Children and Babies, located outside the town of Jinja in the east of the country, is one of the key institutions supported by the St Andrew's Uganda Project. Surrounded by sugarcane plantations and dense forestry, GSF Children's Home provides much needed assistance to children from across the region, and to local communities.

GSF was founded in 1994 by American veteran, Wayne Walker. After losing both his legs as a young Marine serving in Vietnam, Walker turned to religion and began missionary work. He and his wife Bonnie Sue, moved to Uganda in 1994 and set up GSF as a home for orphans and destitute children. GSF is now led by executive director Mark Gwartney who lives on-site with his wife Amy, the director of childcare and advocacy.

The original work of GSF has now expanded to impact entire families and communities, with the current mission focusing on holistic development through three main initiatives: childcare and advocacy, education, and community development.

The Childcare and Advocacy Department seeks to help families by meeting the unique needs of every child in residence at GSF while strengthening families in the community through counselling, empowerment, and medical support. While there has been a shift in recent years towards helping children by keeping them in place within their family and community settings, GSF do still take care of children on-site. The home is a family-based model with nine separate houses, each containing a family group with a primary caregiver. Every child in residence in the home has a designated social worker who strives to counsel and empower his or her relatives with the goal of reunification. There are currently around 30 children in residence in the GSF children's home.

The GSF Education Program aims to provide and promote Christian education through the Nursery & Primary School, Special Education School and Scholarship Program. The Nursery and Primary School provides quality primary education to around 300 students from K3 to Primary 7 (3-12 years old). In addition to this, GSF feeds all school children breakfast and lunch every day. The GSF Special Education School works to meet the educational needs of students with moderate to severe disabilities, through a specialized curriculum focusing on both life skills and academics. The special education school joins with the nursery and primary schools in social events, sports, celebrations and many other aspects of school life outside of the classroom. The scholarship program, which is offered to those who previously resided at GSF provides access to higher education, vocational training, mentorship, and medical care to former GSF students.



The GSF Community Development department seeks to transform communities by engaging, supporting, and empowering the members of surrounding villages. GSF accomplishes these goals through a number of community development programs including: infant and elderly feeding programs, therapy for children with special needs, agriculture support, empowerment and discipleship trainings, and educational scholarships. GSF's approach to community development is tied closely to local churches which are at the centres of their respective communities

The Good Shepherd's Fold Children's Home, an important benefactor in so many lives, is proudly supported by the St Andrew's Uganda Project. The consistency of our fundraising and assistance allows the organisation to undertake ambitious projects and touch the lives of so many in need. The honourable work undertaken by the GSF community is a constant reminder of the importance of the Uganda Project, and we sincerely hope that we can continue this support of such vital initiatives long into the future.



MR DEREK WALSH

THE VIEW FROM GSF

BY MARK AND AMY GWARTNEY

There is something to be said about a relationship that endures for many years. In a world of constant change, and in a place like GSF, where children reside because their lives have been marked by upheaval, consistency is essential and significant. Having the staff from St Andrew's College, with whom we are all familiar, come every year and bring a group of students, along with one or two new staff members, brings something to look forward to. If you ask any child who lived at GSF for a significant period about the "Irish team," they will respond with a beautiful smile and a list of names and memories. The relationships and the opportunity to look forward to new and old friends are something St. Andrew's College has brought to not only the kids in residence but also the staff and students at the primary school. The visit from St. Andrew's College is always a highlight.

There are also the much-appreciated gifts and items they bring every year, as well as the funding for multiple projects that have helped the ministry continue. The impact of this funding on our ministry cannot be overstated; we are deeply grateful for it.

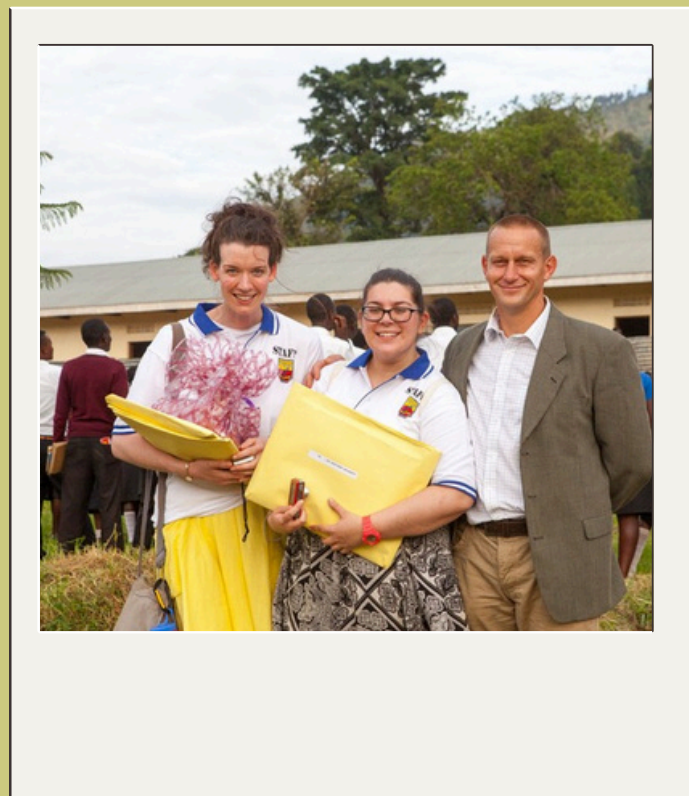
We look forward to continued partnership with St Andrew's College for another 20, 30, or 40 years! Thank you, St. Andrew's College, for your love for GSF, your generosity towards us, and the energy and memories you bring!



REFLECTIONS FROM STAFF

Since 2005, 22 St Andrew's College teachers have been fortunate to visit Uganda, supporting our students, continuing the work of the project and deepening this powerful cultural and educational exchange. Here is a collection of reflections from some of those teachers.

Mr Quinn: "One image I'll never forget was on my third trip: a boy, maybe three or four years old, lying on the sidewalk in Kampala. He had a very large growth on his spine, and I don't know if he was paralyzed, but he was just lying on the curb while people walked around him. That image is imprinted in my memory. When you come home to our relatively privileged lives, it's very hard to forget things like that. There's no way around it, but you readjust eventually. Life is tough out there. And you do feel guilty. But what sustains you is the positive—the warmth, the interactions, how much everyone there loves life. They're so grateful for what they have. The singing, the dancing, the palpable joy. That stays with you more than anything.



Ms de Courcey: “I remember I was in a geography class and it was chalk and blackboard - I remember sitting in there and the students were so engaged and I remember looking going *oh my god they're learning so much* and they didn't need all the stuff that we had or anything.”



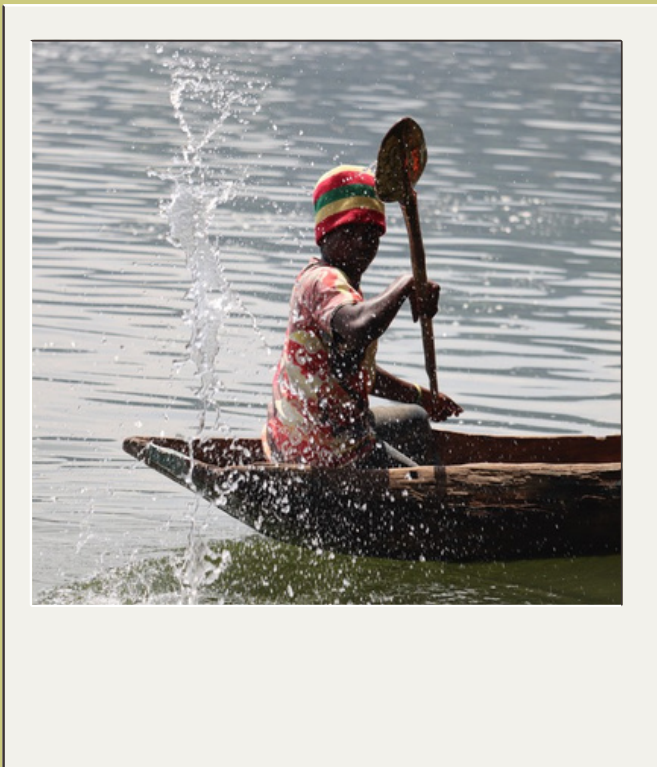
Mr Williams: “I think we have seen firsthand the gratitude in the faces of the people when you go out there. To be able to walk through Kisiizi Hospital and see that some of the equipment has been bought by St Andrew’s College, to see that certain buildings are being partially funded by St Andrew’s College or past graduates of St Andrew’s College, I think is really important as well because there's a whole legacy has been built from this. Some of the people who went 20 years ago are now leading other projects. This project has instigated other projects. And this project has made a significant impact on the lives of the people out there. But if it keeps creating other projects and you know, if it's a snowball like that, then the impact is far more significant.”

Ms Taylor: “When I came back, there was a mental bit of being very grateful for what I have and I would have missed my family when I was away and the slower pace of life and taking time over preparing dinner, like we did instead of rushing always to do jobs or to do stuff, just to slow down.”

Ms Moran: “I went in 2014 so it's a long time ago now but I still have a vivid memory of that first day in the market, I think I was more overwhelmed than the students by all the new sounds, smells and busyness of it all. My takeaway from the whole experience was how grateful and appreciative the Ugandan people are. They share their joy and anything that they have with you despite having so little. I still get embarrassed when I think about the school assembly when I was pulled to the front of the stage and handed a microphone to 'say something'. Hideously unprepared, I mumbled something about it being my first time in Africa and how grateful I was for their hospitality (all rather incoherently) while trying to avoid Mr Micallef's camera lens. I love to think about the times when our students got together with students their own age for football, swimming, assembly and class time. Watching them all interact and laugh together was a highlight.”



Ms Noone: “I just think it's a really special connection between St Andrew's and the projects out there and it just showcases, you know, a little bit of money can go a long way out there. A thousand euro can like build something substantial out there or it can contribute towards a really substantial project.”



Ms Burke: “For me, it's just continuing all the amazing work that's already been done and making sure that it never dies and that Andrew's always has that connection with our partners in Uganda.”

Ms Costigan: “I had the opportunity to visit Uganda in 2007 and 2008 as part of the project. I was a teacher seeking a new experience, but what I got was so much more. I was welcomed with kindness, warmth, and generosity, and left with humility, insight, and a deeper understanding of what truly matters.”

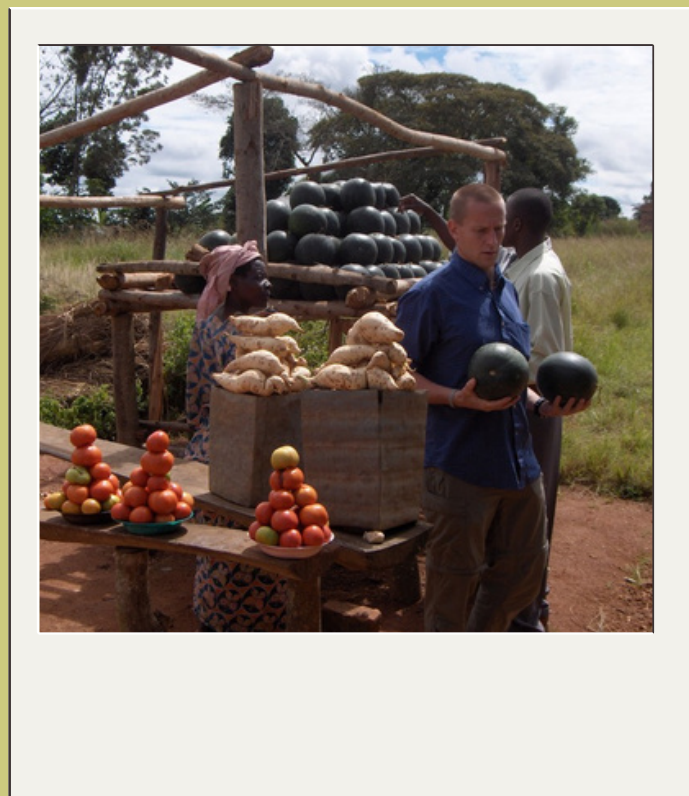
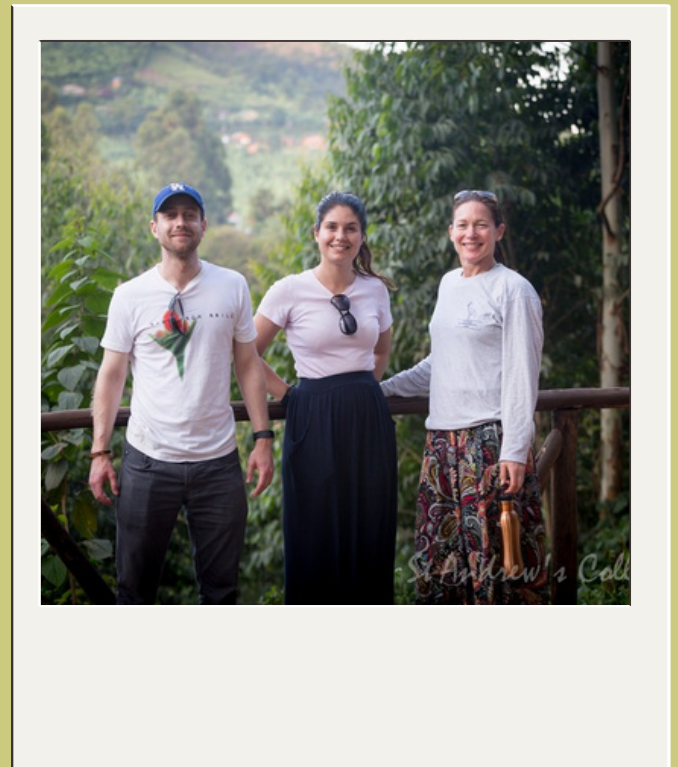
Mr Quinn: “You look back on all we've done—playing music in the children's ward, visiting the rehab ward, bringing balloons and bubbles, teaching at GSF, going to classes—all of those moments just crystallize into one powerful feeling. It's a profound sense of satisfaction that we've done something meaningful together.”



Ms Devane: “A stand out memory for me is getting to see inside the incredible facilities in Kisiizi Hospital. The compassion for patients, innovation in practice, and commitment to providing exceptional care was immediately evident as we toured the campus. Ms Gilmore and I were invited in to view the operating theatres. The head surgical nurse insisted we come in - she was exceptionally proud of what they achieve in those theatres, where they perform often life-saving surgery for their community. The week we were there, the team of doctors and nurses saved the life of a young child who had fallen into a fire and suffered very bad burns. We even got a glimpse of a surgery being performed that very moment. I will never forget the kindness, integrity and generosity of the staff we met in the hospital, nor the afternoon I got to pretend I was an extra Grey's Anatomy!”

Mr Williams: “Everything that you experience in Uganda is something to consider and reflect on and it's phenomenal. just around every corner, there's something else. I also don't think that every person who goes has the same experience... I expected to see poverty, misery, people upset, people not having what they needed to succeed or thrive and actually what I was greeted by was one of the most joyous communities I have ever met in my life. People who are celebrating life, having a much slower and considered pace of life, people who take everything in and love every single moment of their lives.”

Ms Taylor: “You don't expect it to be so verdant, lush and green... it was flourishing. That was unexpected, the lushness of it. It was a really nice moment on the bus when we were like playing games with all of us, there was a big, big group. Then we suddenly stopped for a photo opportunity somewhere and it was on a cliff that looked out at these beautiful views. If you had all the money the world you couldn't pay a travel agent to plan that trip, it's so special and year on year, it's just built on the back of a human connection.



Ms Burke: “I found out more about the Project and I was like, how do I get involved? I took it to another level and I wrote Mr Hickmott a massive email about what a team player I am and how I traveled the world as part of teams, and I'd be a really good asset... a couple of years later, Mr Micallef came down and asked me would I like to go. I first went in 2018. I still couldn't believe it, I was like they picked me I felt so special, I just try and learn everything about it and just soak up everything and get involved in everything.”

Mr Williams: “The one thing that really hit me and the thing that I've carried most, and ironically, it's not what I thought would, is Rubirizi school. Now when I look around the school here, I see so much more opportunity and even sometimes opportunity being wasted. People not realising the things that are available to them, people not realising the resources that they have at their disposal and not really appreciating it... I think it has made me kind of acknowledge how fortunate I am in my workplace and the things that I can do but trying to instill in people not to be taking advantage of the things that we have to really appreciate.”

Mr Quinn: “On a personal level, it was a way to connect with my youth. I was born in Africa and lived there for the first six years of my life. It offered me a way to give back. I was very fortunate and privileged in my upbringing in Africa and that is not the case for many people.”

Ms Moran: “I think it took me some time to really process some of the experiences from the trip. It was a challenge to manage my own feelings of sadness at times while keeping an eye out for our students who were trying to navigate and make sense of the same things.”

Ms de Courcey: “When I came here to St Andrew's and saw what was being done, I just knew immediately... Then the whole concept that Mr. Hickmott was linked closely and had lived there, that it was a really personal connection as well and going to a place where he has lived and people he had met and directly getting the funding there, that was massive for me as well.”

Ms Carey: “It was an honour to be able to experience a special place with an amazing group of people. The memories I've made will last a lifetime and the whole experience showed me the true value of teamwork and helping others.”





VIEW FROM OMUCHONDO

BY NAHABWE JULIUS

Omuchondo is the small village on the road between Kisiizi Hospital and Rubirizi school. Many people from Omuchondo work in the hospital doing a variety of jobs and many of us send our children to Rubirizi school. Matthew and Kim lived in Omuchondo and were good neighbours. Matthew was part of my wedding party when I got married in 2015. I have lived here all my life and I am the hospital plumber. I went to Rubirizi school and my wife works in Kisiizi Hospital, my children go to Kisiizi Hospital primary school. The St Andrew's team have been supporting my family and many other people in this community for many years. We have a local committee who distribute funds and gifts in the community kindly donated by St Andrew's. Omuchondo people are very thankful for St Andrew's. They see what is happening in Rubirizi SSS and how it is improving, this helps local families. We also enjoy showing the visiting students how Ugandan families grow local food and our ways of life.



“IT WAS FAR MORE IMPACTFUL THAN I HAD ANTICIPATED”

AN INTERVIEW WITH OLWYN GOULDING

There are specific moments when the trajectory of life changes. Inflection points, which may only be apparent on reflection. For Olwyn Goudling, who participated in the inaugural Uganda fundraisers and trip in 2005, the visit to Uganda was a catalyst for what would become an altruistic career in development.

If it was destined to be that way, Olwyn doesn't let on. Her motivation for participating in the first Uganda venture? “Curiosity.”

“I applied mainly out of curiosity,” she said over a Zoom interview from her new home in Australia. “Growing up, the images of Africa that you would see were mainly of starving children and I don't think that has changed drastically... I wanted to see what it really was like.” A sense of inquiry and a desire to break the routine of school led Olwyn to get involved in the initial fundraisers and ultimately participate on the trip. It was a life-affirming experience that defied expectations



As many of us who have been fortunate enough to visit Uganda can attest, the trip was both surprising and relatable for Olwyn. “I expected to see far less development than there was. Yes, it is run down, but there are buildings, there are cars. It is a relatively functioning society and I’ve been back to Kampala since and it’s worlds apart again.” The energy of Kampala with its sensory intensity can be overpowering, and at times it certainly was for teenage Olwyn. “I was very overwhelmed,” she admits. “I remember in Kampala there was a child living on the streets and he looked into my eyes.” Everyone who has visited Uganda can surely relate to the visceral power of this sentiment.

However, the effect of the trip was immense. “It was far more impactful for me than I had anticipated,” she said. The primary reason? The ability to connect with Ugandan youths and feel our shared humanity. Olwyn’s group were the first to discover what many St Andrew’s students have since come to realise: once you get beyond the superficial, teens in South Dublin have quite a bit in common with teens in southwest Uganda.

“I was struck by chatting to kids my own age,” Olwyn recalled. “That was very impactful and moving.” She added: “What struck me was having some sort of relatability to these children who were struggling.”

Upon arrival at Good Shepherd’s Fold, Olwyn and the 2005 group were met by a band of Ugandan children and adolescents singing and dancing. Their love, devotion, and sheer faith in God imbued their passionate performance. Olwyn explained how she felt overwhelmed at such a beautiful display of faith and felt moved by the experience. “In Ireland, we have had the luxury of not believing in God for quite some time,” she reflected with insight. To live in rural Uganda with its high levels of absolute poverty, lack of basic services, and prevalent public health challenges, is to live a life beset by many challenges that are now an afterthought in the West. Olwyn reminds us that to have control over our lives is a privilege. And yet we share so much in common with our friends in Uganda, especially our hopes for the future.



The first Uganda trip took place against the backdrop of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. GSF had become a place of refuge, including for HIV+ children. Some families faced no choice but to send their children there in hopes of securing food or education. Since that first Uganda trip, GSF itself has transformed and now acts as more of a community hub supporting education and outreach projects whilst housing a smaller number of children, many with additional needs. Olwyn credits her experience in the children's home and elsewhere in Uganda with shifting her entire perspective on life and helping her develop a sense of purpose which she has carried since.

After graduating St Andrew's, Olwyn studied politics and international relations, before returning to Uganda with Stuart Garrett, where she carried out an audit of the scholarship programme in Kisiizi. From there she completed a masters in humanitarian action at UCD before seeking work experience in the highly competitive humanitarian aid sector. An opportunity arrived with the Red Cross in Germany, which then led Olwyn back to Central Africa, but this time to South Sudan where she specialised in refugee camp management and coordination. After years of selfless, admirable work on humanitarian projects, Olwyn now lives in Australia where she remains in the development sector.

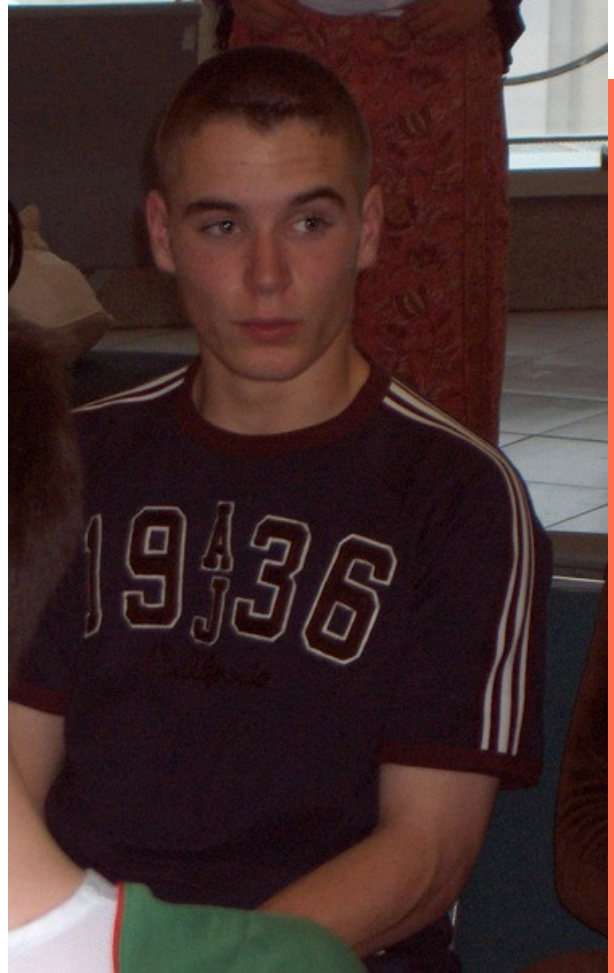
Olwyn gives the Uganda Project immense credit in helping to spark her remarkable journey. Twenty years after the project was born, Olwyn's story illustrates the power of combining curiosity with a desire to help and understand the shared humanity of people across the world. This is a powerful inspiration to the St Andrew's students of today.



A TALE OF TWO HOSPITALS

AN INTERVIEW WITH STUART GARRETT

It is 2:35pm in St James's Hospital, Dublin. The flow huddle in Ireland's busiest acute hospital is well underway. A group of medics and administrators form a semi-circle around the services manager who gives an overview of the hospital's position. There are rows of numbers on the screen behind. Numbers on the glass wall, on the white board. Everywhere: numbers of patients and beds. There are 15 patients in ICU. 10 awaiting a doctor. 36 patients are about to be discharged, but 28 more are coming to the hospital for a bed. The room itself is bright and high tech. In appearance it contrasts with the humid administrative quarters of Kisiizi Hospital. The arithmetic, however, is the same: numbers, patients, beds. That underlying similarity is not lost on Stuart Garrett, the man leading the flow huddle. In fact, Stuart credits his inclusion on the first ever St. Andrew's College Uganda trip in 2005 as an inflection point in his life.



Stuart Garrett is a prime example of the enduring effect of the Uganda Project on the lives of its participants: both the students and teachers in Ireland and the communities we support in Uganda. Stuart's 20 year journey from a Transition Year student on the first Uganda trip to the services manager at a major trauma centre has been an extraordinary one. During an afternoon meeting at St James's, he relayed it to us with his customary enthusiasm, kindness and dedication.

Stuart describes his school going self as a “troublemaker”. We all know the type: sprightly and chaotic, a bit of a messer, but always harmless. He was full of energy and, as his form teacher Mr Hickmott confirms, in and out of trouble. That energy was waiting to be harnessed and in the inaugural Uganda project it found focus.

Whether it was Mr Hickmott’s passion, as Stuart credits, or his innate drive, Stuart threw himself into the nascent initiative that Mr Hickmott and Mr Micallef proposed to his group of TYs. “Who would be interested in a trip to Uganda?” Mr Hickmott asked one day in lectures. A few hands went up. The fundraising, not to mention the details, would all follow.



Stuart seized the initiative and began working on the new fundraisers. He credits these activities with the development of vital interpersonal skills he employs in his job today. While the fundraising parts of the project are galvanising for the TYs, the selection process - which itself is a consequence of the logistics in Uganda only supporting a small number of travellers - is a challenge for students who have given so much to the project and found themselves disappointed. With his trademark optimism, Stuart reminds us that even this is a learning experience. “It is one of the first times in your school life that you experience not getting something you want which is the reality of life,” he says. “This teaches students an important lesson and helps prepare them for the real world.”

The trip itself inspired Stuart, fostering a newfound passion for outreach. One year later, as a fifth year, he went to Zambia for Habitats for Humanity with Ms Jenkinson and a group of classmates. The trip was mainly student run with Stuart being one of the student organisers. When asked about that first trip to Uganda, Stuart said the main take away for him was “how much people can achieve with the levels of poverty they deal with especially in the hospital and the children’s home.” These experiences then further inspired him to pursue a career in healthcare and physiotherapy, thereby giving him a new focus in school.

After a transformative two years, Stuart was offered a place in the physiotherapy programme in UCD, where he became heavily involved in UCD Volunteers Overseas, working on development projects in Haiti, Nicaragua and India. All in all, he participated in 11 development trips, before completing an elective physio placement in Uganda, cementing his connection with Kisiizi.



Graduating from college, Stuart found the employment opportunities to be sparse for physiotherapists in Ireland. Once again, Mr Hickmott caught him at the right time, suggesting that he work long term in Kisiizi hospital. Stuart took the opportunity and ran with it. He told us: “A running theme over my life has been whenever people give you opportunities, take them.” That is exactly what he did. Planning to spend a year working in the hospital, Stuart arrived with a positive attitude and mindset. However, come Christmas, to his disappointment, he discovered he just could not last as an individual. Feeling disappointed, he decided to try again but with an approach he knew would work and result in real change. Stuart brought over a team of students in 2012 which was a remarkable success. A longstanding UCDVO project in Kisizii emerged from this, while Stuart developed physiotherapy electives associated with this project.

Reflecting on these experiences, Stuart felt that he may have struggled with the individual volunteering, but he learned to harness the benefit of teamwork amongst healthcare professionals to support Kisiizi. With a friend, Mark McGowan, Stuart founded CHEEERS in 2015. ‘Community Healthcare Education Empowering Experiences Relationships and Support’ is an annual initiative that brings qualified healthcare professionals to Kisiizi for a two week period to assist and educate healthcare workers there. Since its founding in 2015, there have been 10 hugely successful CHEEERS trips. Each year the charity selects, through a rigorous process, healthcare professionals with the requisite skills needed by Kisiizi Hospital. These professionals include doctors, nurses, pharmacists, occupational therapists, biomedical engineers, psychiatric teams, and even accountants, who travel to Uganda and work alongside their counterparts. To better run the company, Stuart studied at the UCD Smurfit School graduating with a master's in business management. From there, his career took him into management, leading to that Wednesday afternoon flow huddle at St. James's.





Before the huddle began, we asked Stuart one final question: ‘How do you think your life would look if it wasn’t for the Uganda project?’ He laughed and said, “God knows where” he would have ended up. He reflected on how the Uganda project had inspired him to begin a career in physiotherapy, to found a charity, to become part of a community on the other side of the world, leading him to his current job in healthcare management. Along the way Stuart met his wife and now has two daughters. He has only recently stepped back from his role in the charity after nine years.

It is hard to say objectively how much the Uganda Project influenced the development of this kind, engaging, and proactive past pupil of St Andrew’s. All we know is that he credits the project with huge influence on his formative years. With his compassion, drive, and genial personality, Stuart is an inspiration to the students of St Andrew’s and a perfect example of what can be achieved with determination, hard work, and passion. If there is one timeless lesson here, it is the importance of embracing every opportunity, especially the ones that shatter your comfort zone and show you the world anew.

REFLECTIONS FROM PAST PUPILS

Since 2005, over 300 St Andrew's College Transition Years have visited Uganda as part of the Uganda Project. Here we present reflections from some alumni who were on more recent trips.

“The Uganda Project is a once in a lifetime opportunity that I am so grateful I got to experience. Spending time in the orphanage, Kisiizi Hospital, and school was incredibly powerful and emotional, seeing children living with so little made me reflect deeply on how much we often take for granted. Despite the challenges they face, their warmth, resilience and hope left a lasting impression on me. The Uganda Project has shown me that no matter how small of a role you play, whether it be bringing school supplies or new shoes, books or toys- you are creating a lasting impact far greater than it may first appear.”

Chrissie Byrne, 2018

“The importance of community to those that lived there, and how they supported it stood out to me. Everywhere we visited I saw how people really identified with their community, in a way I hadn't seen in Ireland. In addition to this, at least to my eyes, people would strive to support and add to their community. I particularly noticed this around Kisiizi, the hospital appeared to really be a central focus of the community.



I think within Western Society there is a view that the provision of basic needs will uplift and enable those less fortunate. From a young age at least in Ireland organisations portray that through sending food to impoverished areas the people will be able to develop.

However, having seen firsthand the reality of a developing nation, it is the infrastructure development as well as the education and training of the local population that will actually enable development. Seeing the “Belt and Road” project firsthand and how with continued expansion it would enable the delivery of medications, food and supplies deeper into Uganda was significant.”

Oscar Doyle, 2018



“The Uganda Project had a huge impact on me personally. I am not sure I would be working as a physiotherapist if I hadn’t been to Uganda. In October I will be moving into paediatric physiotherapy, which is something I have wanted to do since I spent time in the children’s outpatient department in Kisiizi Hospital.”

Amelia Johnson, 2018



“My biggest memory is standing on a balcony looking over the city of Kampala and being amazed at the amount of people there were and how much was going on. In my diary I wrote that the word I used most that day was insane and still to this day it’s the best word to describe it.

The thing that stood out to me most about Uganda was the sense of community. Everybody was so friendly and welcoming. A memory of this is when we were swimming in a lake in Kisiizi and some locals came and joined us. Although many people there have a tough life compared to ours they are always happy and smiling which is inspiring.”

Adam Horsfield, 2019



My fondest memory is carrying Matthew, who was in a wheelchair, down to the harbour so he was able to take part in the boat trip on Lake Victoria. The Uganda trip has had a long-lasting effect on me personally. As now I try to live by the statement of if you have the capability to help someone in need, it's your responsibility to help them to the best of your ability.

Stephen Nevin, 2019

"I really remember the community spirit and the local culture, all the music and dance we saw. The way everyone was able to dance together in Rubirizi school, students and teachers, was really cool. Visiting Uganda reminded me to be grateful for what I have, of course, but it also reminded me how there are more important things than material goods, like the value of community and of family. It emphasised to me how we have the power to shape our own attitude towards our life."

Patrick Fanning, 2023

The people I met In Uganda were some of the kindest I've ever encountered. Whether it was the 10-year-old, Marvin, who guided five lost Irish teenagers across a mountain, or the students in Rubirizi who let us join in on their classes, the patience and warmth we received everywhere we went meant we never felt out of place.

A core memory for me is the few hours I spent in the Children's ward in Kisiizi Hospital. As we arrived with our bubbles and balloons, I still remember the laughter and excitement that filled the ward, from things that we take for granted every day. Meeting the children and their mothers made me realise that it wasn't the beautiful setting or delicious food that made Uganda so special, but instead the people who over the two weeks, welcomed us into their lives.

Uganda really was a life-changing experience. Seeing the appreciation the people in Uganda had for things that I so often overlook really put into perspective just how lucky I am. The memories I made and the lessons I learned in Uganda will stay with me forever, and it's something I'm so proud to have been a part of."

Keelin O'Carroll, 2023



“Overall, the most incredible thing about getting the chance to go to Uganda was being able to witness, first-hand, just how far our fundraising and donations have gone. They have allowed us to help advance Rubirizi school, do amazing work in the Good Shepherd’s Fold Children’s Home and provide healthcare to the most vulnerable in Kisiizi Hospital. The incredible aid given to these communities is in no way just the work of the lucky few who get to visit Uganda, instead, it is the effort and support of the entire school that makes it all possible. For me, the most enlightening thing we saw in Uganda was their strength of community and how they did everything in their power to support each other and help their less fortunate members. This strong sense of community is also present in our school. There is no better cause to bring us together than the incredible work of the Uganda Project.”

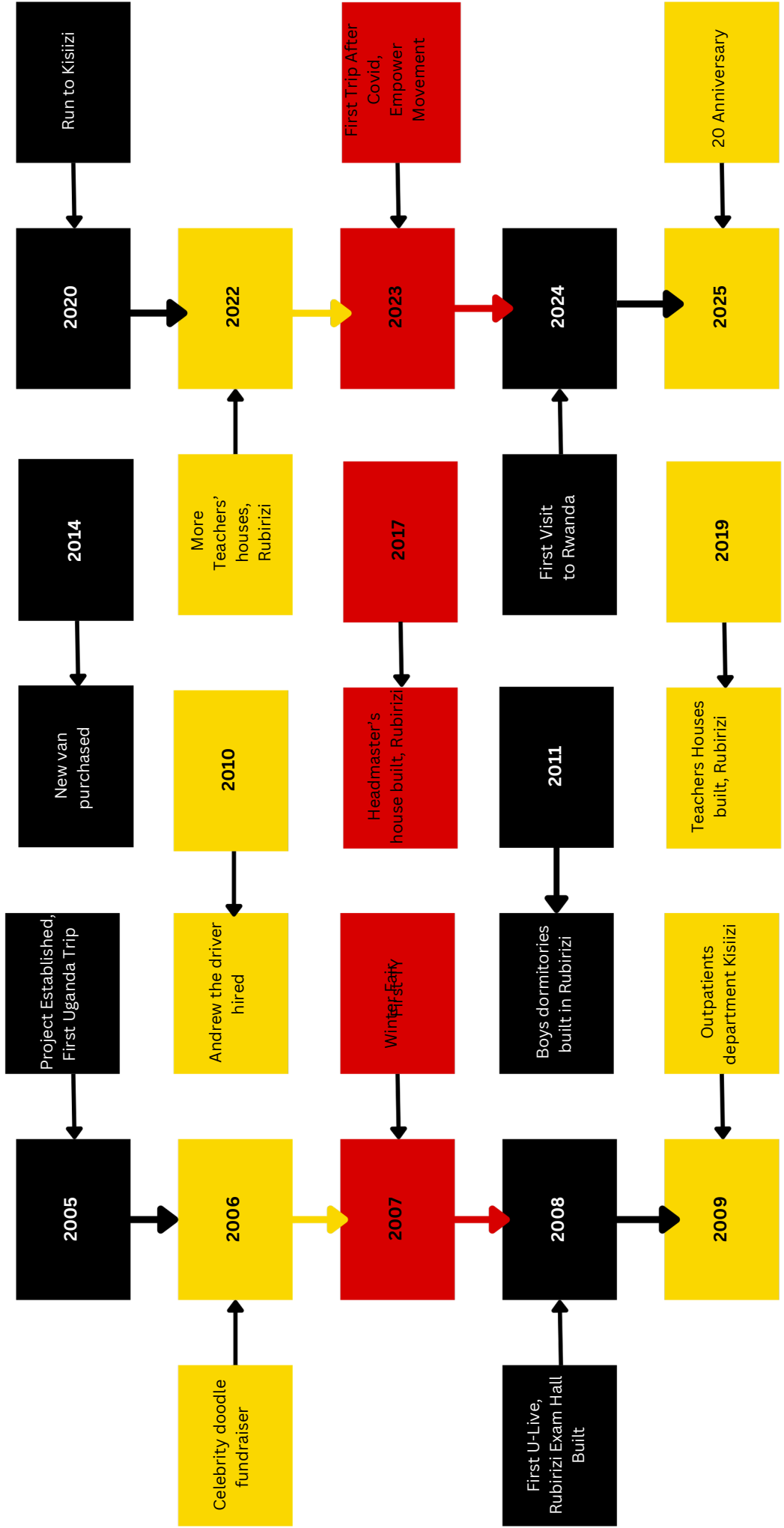
Ellie Walsh, 2023

“Something I found very interesting about Uganda and its people was that practically everywhere you went you could feel a sense of joy in the community. No matter their wealth or age, the people we met in Uganda were always happy and joyous. Their smiles were wide and genuine, and it made us as visitors feel so welcome and happy to be there. One of my best memories was going to a church service when we were in GSF. It took place in the church we helped reinforce and clean the day before. There were readings from passages of the bible, but what stood out to me the most was the music. There were loud drums, and everyone sang and danced loudly and freely. Not only that, but everyone was so good at singing, and it really felt like you could hear their faith coming through their voices. While I didn’t know the words to the songs they sang, I danced along happily, feeling very lucky to be there. I can confidently say I think about the trip every day and stay grateful for the bonds I made with my classmates and teachers. The children we met in GSF and Rubirizi have had a lasting impact on me and I miss their smiling faces. The kids we met have given me such an appreciation for childhood and innocence, and I wish I could go back and give them all a big hug!”

Elisa Terry, 2023



UGANDA TIMELINE



AFTERWORD

These pages have exclaimed the virtues of the TY Uganda Project, illustrating through a mix of interviews, reflections and anecdotes the many benefits the project has delivered to the two vastly different communities it connects. We are, as is clear, extremely proud of the project's achievements and longevity.

Alluded to throughout the magazine are some of the challenges we have also faced in managing and sustaining this endeavour. There have been strategic and operational challenges – how to get help to those who need it, for example, is a conceptual and physical question. Furthermore, we regret that we cannot bring to Uganda everyone who contributes to the project, due to the significant logistical difficulties of managing a trip in a developing country.

In 2020, the Uganda Project faced arguably its biggest challenge of all when the covid crisis shuttered not just the trip for that year, but all fundraising as we knew it in subsequent years. With gatherings curtailed and the school experience transformed, we had to get creative to continue supporting our partners in Uganda. We organised a 'Run to Kisiizi' with all the 2021 TYs and many staff running enough kilometres to get us to Uganda and home again. The diminished nature of international travel in that time and the serious challenge that entry/exit testing could pose to a school group far from home, meant that it wasn't until 2023 that we were in position to return to Uganda. Despite this, the enthusiasm of our TYs never dimmed and they found ways to raise money and keep the project alive even without any prospect of travelling at the end of it. The covid years were a time of tribulation in Uganda: schools were closed and buses and boda-bodas were taken off the road without many of the supports we relied on in Ireland. Sustaining the Uganda Project through the covid years was an immense challenge but it is proof of our community's commitment to ensuring that it endures. We are glad that it did. Our partners in Uganda needed us then more than ever – we are proud to have been there for them.

Uganda is a country marching towards the future. The infrastructure is developing. The population is growing rapidly. When we first returned in 2023, we found some of the changes more pronounced given the four-year absence. But it was still uniquely Uganda and there was comfort in that. The boda-bodas zip along dirt tracks and tarred roads. Vendors engage in street commerce, purveying all manner of goods. And the children, smart in their green or brown uniforms, run along the ditch calling out, "how are you? I'm fine!" Life is tough in Uganda, but people live it with palpable joy.

The Uganda Project has now thrived for 20 years. In that time, we have raised money, built buildings, provided financial support, and blown countless bubbles and balloons. We have also introduced 20 groups of TYs to a country that couldn't be more different to Ireland on paper. Ireland is one of the most developed countries in the world; Uganda is 157th on the human development index. Ireland has a median age of 38; in Uganda it is 16. Ireland, although not free of problems, has an advanced, highly developed economy; while Uganda is a tropical, agrarian country where one third of people still live subsistence-based lives, and one quarter of people live in extreme poverty. Yet, as you can see in these pages, that is not the sentiment our students who were lucky enough to visit Uganda emerged with. Instead, their reflections focused on the sense of community and love of life they encountered everywhere they went.

We hope that all our students who were involved in the project, whether they travelled to Uganda or not, emerged with an appreciation for the benefit of helping others and an understanding that Ugandan teens are just like Irish teens. They have hopes for the future, worries about schoolwork, and they love spending time with their friends.

What has the Uganda Project achieved? Beyond bricks and numbers, it has connected two disparate communities, shown us all the value of helping those in need, and proven that we as people have far more in common than our differences suggest. As this project proves, together we can make the world a better place for some of its inhabitants.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all your support over the past 20 years. Here's to 20 more.

Waybale Munonga.

*The Uganda Project Team, St Andrew's College, Dublin
September 2025*

Friends of the Uganda Project

We would like to thank all those who have provided assistance and guidance to the Uganda Project over the past two decades. In particular, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to our many friends in Uganda and in Ireland whose support has been invaluable in helping us reach this milestone:

Mr Arthur Godsil, Mrs Joan Kirby, Ms Monica Lynott, Ms Nicky King, and Ms Anne Corrigan of St Andrew's College

The Boards of Governors and Management, past and present, of St Andrew's College

The Chairs and committees, past and present, of the St Andrew's College PTA
Nahabwe Julius and Jackie Anatiwe of Omuchondo and Kisiizi

Moses Magume, Dr Ian and Hanna Spillman, Dr Henry Lukabwe, and Barak and Heather St John of Kisiizi Hospital

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Kim Ging, Claire Micallef and all the long-suffering Uganda Project spouses.

This list is not exhaustive. We are profoundly grateful to everyone who helped in any capacity. Thank you all very much.

The Uganda Project relies entirely on fundraising and donations from the St Andrew's community. Please consider donating here. All funds raised go directly to supporting our partner institutions. Thank you.





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