



St. Francis Family Helper Programme

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Dear Friends of St. Francis



Greetings once again from St Francis Family Helper Programme Uganda. We are in the New Year of 2022 already, and like others all over the world, 2021 has been an unusual year for all of us. Nonetheless, we feel, we should begin this letter by thanking everyone who made us smile this past year and who made us happy. You are one of these special people, so receive our sincere gratitude. We were not in time to wish you a Merry Christmas but we hope, if you celebrate this feast, that it was good for you. Very often Christmas is a time for family members to get together and we are aware, that because of Covid, many people could not travel, or join their loved ones, as they wished, so we hope and pray that you still managed to

communicate in other ways with your family and friends in different parts of the world.

This past year has been very disruptive for us as it may have been for you. We had numerous lockdowns, workers lost salaries and not being members of a welfare state, the government did not make compensation in anyway. After the lockdowns of 2020, we were all happy to resume our work from the 6th January 2021, so even though another lockdown was announced by the Government, in June, we were allowed to continue all our activities both here at our Centre and also in the field, where some staff spend most of their time. We are grateful that we remained safe and free from Covid. We would like to give you a short briefing from our various departments.

St Francis Vocational Training Institute.



It was a big joy on the 20th December 2021 when 24 Students of SFVTI graduated. Parents and Guardians were very happy to see their children's skills in fashion, design and construction. Empowered they were ready to go into the world and make a difference in their profession. Congratulations to our dear students, parents and teachers who brought them to this point.



Some of our Students (with German volunteer, Sabine)wearing their own designs

Because of the standard displayed by our students in end of Programme, Government Trade examinations, the department of education elevated our school to a Vocational Institute and encouraged us to begin planning for a 3-year Diploma Course, which though challenging and difficult would be a big achievement for our students. Having a Diploma would not only make them more marketable in the work place but they could also become teachers in various schools all over the country.

In order to set up a Diploma Programme we need more and better equipment and we need skilled staff who can write the Course Book for this Diploma in Fashion and Design. Thus far we have offered a two year training in Needlework, Dressmaking, Tailoring, Design, Pattern cutting and Construction.



Students are very happy to have new machines and other equipment.

With gratitude we can share that the “Little Smile Foundation” of the Netherlands gave us money to buy new Sewing Machines, equipment and

furniture for our 3rd year students. They are very happy to be using the new equipment. The “little smiles” are also around St Francis FHP. We are in the process of writing the Manual, having received guidelines from Kyambogo University which will be the accrediting and supervising institution. We are also hiring extra staff and as a real bonus we have a volunteer for one year who is an expert in industrial garment production. Sabine comes from Germany and has worked in various countries in her specialized field. Why would we not be smiling?



Child Sponsorship Department

The Child Sponsorship department was the most affected by the Corona Virus. All children lost time in school due to the lockdowns. In poor areas of Uganda, there was no possibility of online education, as children had no access to either computers or to the very costly internet. 20 children who were being funded by Cross Catholic Outreach of the USA lost their sponsors because of decrease in donations.



Sabine from Eirene visiting Abua's family. He is among the children who lost sponsorship from Cross Catholic Outreach.

This implies that those 20 children have no school fees and this has become our biggest challenge, as once we start sponsoring children we do not like to stop or to see them drop out of school because of a lack of school needs. At a time when education has become very expensive in Uganda, this was a huge disappointment and cause for anxiety. We are doing everything we can to find other means of making up this shortfall and to get the children back to school, with new sponsors.

We knew that our children were suffering at home during the total lock down. So, when the lockdown was partially lifted, the department organized to carry out some home visits while strictly observing the standard operating procedures (mask wearing, social distancing, frequent washing of hands). Due to restrictions we could not visit all homes so we selected the homes of children whom we deemed to be most vulnerable. These were children in the care of elderly grandparents, single mothers or other families severely affected by the lockdown and consequent food shortage. We found, what many countries reported, about having children at home for long periods of the school year, that many were subjected to physical or/and sexual abuse and harassment. The visiting staff took time to listen attentively and empathically. They helped them to be aware of the world wide problem of the pandemic and to know that they were not alone in this struggle. It was not easy but surely, they were helped. We keep hoping that these children will have some compassionate people who will help them to fulfill their future dream.

ST. FRANCIS COUNSELLOR TRAINING INSTITUTE (CTI)

The counsellor training Institute has been affected by Covid in many ways some good and some not so good especially when our students had to go without classes for almost one year, were not able to complete a course of studies and consequently some did not graduate from university. The students also reported having severe financial difficulties during lockdown and were therefore hindered in doing private reading and study. Uganda Martyrs University, our accrediting body, was able to do online teaching with their students, all of whom have laptops and the majority of whom are more financially secure. Lecturers worked from home so the administration of the university closed down. The university ceased to do work with affiliate institutions, like St. Francis CTI. This meant that examination monitoring, coursebook revision monitoring and other services ceased.

Francis Bainomugisha the new assistant director and Sr. Rosette Kyogabirwe (DMJ), the new academic coordinator and supervisor continued to work in the Institute.

As the Institute has plans to introduce a new Degree Programme in Education, Guidance and Counselling, the staff must carry out the very demanding work of writing the course book, following strict guidelines given by the Higher Council for Education.



Francis Bainomugisha

Furthermore, an infrastructure that is deemed appropriate by the accrediting body, must be created. This work has already been initiated by Francis and supported by Sr. Rosette.

During lockdown, in September 2021, Francis designed and held a stakeholder meeting to discuss all the aspects of running a Counsellor Training Institute, taking account of organizational best practice guidelines and student needs and requirements.



Sr. Rosette Kyogabirwe

In November 2021, the Institute was happy to once again get permission to begin classes with students coming to the Institute. New students were welcomed and those hoping to graduate in 2022 were given the special attention they deserve.

The Institute has two main foci. Students are trained on the campus for degrees in counselling psychology.

In addition to this academic work, staff of the Institute also go out to various communities, to give month long trainings in a variety of courses designed specifically to meet the needs of the participants.

For many years the staff trained development workers to become more self aware and to have greater self esteem. They also trained these development and social workers to work with rural families in a participatory, adult learning and empowering method.

For the last six years some staff have been training primary school teachers in student focused liberation education methods while also eliminating violence against and abuse of school children. Violence is still prevalent in many schools where teachers are viewed as holding all power with parents holding much less and children none at all. This used to be the system in Europe but with the help of legislation, methods have changed and this is what is beginning to happen in this country.

Primary Teachers Training in Personal and Group Transformation, Child Development and Liberation Education.

Since 2015, we have been training Primary School Teachers in the above disciplines with the aim of stopping violence against children in the schools. So far we have trained 1547 teachers in Southern Uganda and the training is ongoing. In the beginning, it was not easy to convince the teachers that they could teach without using a stick, but gradually, they have started to understand that it is not necessary to beat pupils each time they make a mistake. Teachers whom we have trained are now more skillful in handling pupils in the classroom. For readers in Europe, it might be important to say that in our Ugandan schools the teachers do not have many teaching aids supplied by the government. The pupils all sit in rows in classrooms and the number of pupils per class can range from 30-80. Thus discipline and management of children is quite challenging no matter how well trained the teachers may be.

COVID 19 Pandemic did not allow us to run this programme smoothly as before. We were able to train the teachers and parents in the different districts but we were not able to measure the impact



Primary School Teachers during Training in Lira

of the training on pupils because of the schools being closed during lockdown. In January schools reopened so we have continued training in Northern Uganda, with great emphasis on Standard Operating Procedures set by the ministry of health. During this teacher training, active participation and sharing of responsibilities were well-observed. During the course of the training, the Community Development Officer and the District Inspector of schools attended some afternoon sessions and later gave some encouraging remarks.

When training began a number of teachers had great difficulty to share their life experiences or to express their feelings but during the course of the training transformation occurred and they expressed their feelings and shared their personal stories with enthusiasm. One male Catholic teacher reported that he had beaten his child because her Protestant mother sent their child to a Protestant Pentecostal service. During the training he learned the importance of dialogue, of enquiry as well as the serious negative consequences of beating children. It was a very culturally transformative moment when he apologized to his child for having punished her. He saw how happy his daughter was when he spoke to her about the incident.

Another teacher who had been a school principal for 15 years expressed his happiness with the seating arrangement during the training. Every participant and facilitator sat in one circle, equalizing all those present. He said how he had acted as a dictator in both his home and school. He would not allow his children to have play time and he even dictated to his daughter who was at university, causing her quite some embarrassment. His presence in the home was not welcomed by his children and in school he was feared

by the pupils. He and other teachers reported having attended many workshops, but never before, had they attended a workshop where they had to take a hard look at themselves, their own behaviours, motivations, feelings, emotions, personal values and life goals. They had never before realized the impact of their behaviours on their spouses, children and pupils. They had not had the practice of deep listening, real dialogue, non-discrimination.



R to L. Gerlinde Vetter, Mary and Margaret Moran (cousin)

They had not known different parenting styles. The training opened their eyes and stretched their minds. They expressed sincere gratitude to St. Francis FHP. St. Francis FHP in turn offers sincere gratitude to the number of extraordinary teachers whom they have had—monks and nuns from Plum Village, Gerlinde Vetter, Vernice Solimar, Dr. Bobbie Hulberg and his wife Cissie among others.

PROMOTION OF NON-VIOLENCE IN RURAL FAMILIES IN NTUNGAMO DISTRICT

On carrying out an evaluation of our work with teachers on non-violence it became apparent that even if children were no longer being beaten in school they were still being beaten in their homes. In addition they were often exposed to witnessing violence between their parents. Thus at the end of 2020 a training course for parents was designed.

Part of the course involved training in mindfulness and in various styles of listening with everyone having an experience of deep empathic listening. These rural, sometimes illiterate couples learned for the first time to give full attention to their own bodies and bodily reactions as well as to their thoughts, feelings and actions and to see the impact



Parents/Spouses in local hall for training.

of these on others, especially within the family circle. They learned how to deal with strong emotions of anger, jealousy, hatred without blaming or abusing others. They learned how to really listen to one another and how to be responsible for creating their own happiness. They were very amazed that their trainers sat amongst them and not on some raised platform

The response to the training was actually quite overwhelming. One cannot over emphasize changes that are wrought in a family, team or community when each one learns to listen deeply with compassion without the need to respond, justify, excuse, defend etc. These same skills obviously improve conflict resolution which are so essential when working with groups.

Participants shared their suffering very openly and many shed tears when remembering unhappy experiences in their past. Both men and women shared how systems in their homes were changing owing to the learning taking place in the training sessions. Members spoke of some cultural beliefs which prevented them from sharing their feelings, and spoke of how good it felt to learn how to get in touch with their bodies, in touch with their inner core, in touch with their own thoughts and feelings.

They wanted to keep telling their stories to the trainers (who were all trained counsellors), and to grab every moment of their time before and after classes, during lunch break and in the evenings after the trainings. During training sessions participants realized that the inability to get in touch with their thoughts and feelings also hindered their sexual behaviours which in most cases negatively impacted their spousal relationships. The facilitators became inundated with the expressed needs of the groups. In discussing the impossibility of training all day



Spouses embracing one another and exchanging gifts (below)



This public demonstration of affection was/is a great cultural

every day for months and on top of that being used as counsellors it was suggested, that in future applications for funding, a greater number of counsellors would need to be available to groups of spouses or/and community leaders.

Whenever, wherever it is desirable to inculcate a community with a new culture (e.g. non-violence, conflict resolution, participatory dialogue), it is important to first align with community leaders—government appointed administrative officers, district commissioners, religious leaders of all religions, members of police and army, village leaders chosen by communities. In doing this community work is more assured. Where possible it is an ideal situation when community leaders actually participate in trainings. This is in fact what the trainers from St. Francis achieved in the districts and the success of the training was made apparent by the positive and convinced response. The leaders requested another longer training for themselves, and offered their full support to the project of non-violence in families. Trained community leaders reported having a greater passion for the work in communities (where formerly they were more self-focused, working for salaries). This change occurred as a result of deep looking into their personal values, which again is a unit of training.

As a result of deep listening, there was greater dialogue between the community members and their leaders as well as between the community leaders themselves. Community leaders spoke about the joy of learning conflict resolution through dialogue and listening rather than through violent methods as had been common amongst them.

The spouses were absolutely overjoyed to be awarded certificates after the training, as, for some, this was the first such public recognition they had ever received.



Participants receiving Certificates at end of Training

Training programme for catechists and their spouses in Personal and Group Transformation and Spiritual Development.

We continue to express our appreciation to Missio Munich for the constant support to improve the pastoral work of training catechists of Mbarara Archdiocese as well as of working with catechists to improve their delivery of services to communities. Covid 19 interfered with the training schedule but when possible we still went on to train some catechists. After the trainings they spoke of changes in their own personal lives as well as in their families.

Changes at personal level:

The catechists showed a positive attitude towards life. Their words portrayed hope and faith to continue the journey of transformation. Before the training, they believed that they were somehow destined to be poor and remain poor. This took away any motivation to work hard. After the training, their attitudes changed and they are ready to work hard to improve their lives.

-After the participatory training in gender they developed a positive attitude towards their spouses, which has encouraged dialogue, transparency in finances, and planning together and having projects for the family and not for self.

-We observed self-confidence and good self-esteem especially among those who did not have it before the trainings. Many proudly talked about what they benefited from the training, and the males talked about sharing in house chores, actions they had not previously performed.

-A catechist in Kishariro parish shared that he is being guided by the values which each one examined during the training. He chose Wisdom as his core value. He made a plaque for himself and hung it in his house to remind himself of his daily commitment. He is cooperative with his wife and plans together with her to improve their home. This is a cultural change in the context of rural Uganda, where traditionally, the man was the head of the household and the only one to make decisions.

Changes at family level:--

Some introduced planning together as a family, including children. One couple was advised by their son to divide their banana plantation and plant coffee on half of the plantation because coffee brings in more money compared to bananas which are mainly for home consumption. They took his advice and the coffee is already flowering in the garden.

-Many husbands are sharing the house chores like splitting firewood, cleaning the littered compound, and some even wash clothes which they had never done before.

-Some couples shared that formerly when they disagreed at home, they called in outsiders to help but that made things worse because those who came to help spread rumors in the villages. During the training, they learnt how to solve their own disagreements as a couple. This has helped to stop rumor-mongering and the couples can now manage their own conflicts.

-Many families have projects owned by the whole family and so their children are also obliged to care for them. Everybody is aware of what is happening in the project, how much they will get from the project and they are able to budget together for home needs as well as school fees. It is no longer the man's/fathers project as it was the case before. Common projects in homes observed were goats, pigs and chicken rearing. A few members reared rabbits for food and some also grew vegetables and sugar cane.

Changes at ministry level:

-90% of the catechists gained confidence to work together with their parish teams and not feel intimidated by Christians. Their self-esteem built during and after the training helped them to work well at their churches and all were happy, not asking for transfers to other churches, as it was before. They gave testimonies that working in a team with their church committees has reduced conflicts in their churches. This has developed cohesion and it is easy to plan and budget for church activities.

-Another catechist shared that the training helped her to improve her relationship between herself and the senior catechist in her parish. Before the training, she despised him because she is more educated than he is. In the training, she learnt that everyone should be respected, that discrimination is harmful wherever it happens, that "qualification" from school does not define a person. Each one has value, each one has something to offer, and each one of us is educated by life, often more than in a classroom.



Deusedit Head Catechist from Rushanje parish and his wife were very happy to have been invited to participate in the follow up evaluation exercises. Also happy to have benefited from trainings of catechists and their spouses, which made a big difference in spousal relationships

VOLUNTEERS TO AND FROM ST. FRANCIS

For many years, St. Francis has had a very fruitful relationship with a German sending organization, EIRENE, which sent volunteers to work in different departments every year. Then Eirene also introduced exchanges where volunteers from Uganda could go to work for Eirene outreach projects in Germany.

Thus at the moment we have Sabine working in the VTI and one of our Ugandan staff, George is doing volunteer work in Germany and may get the opportunity to study there at the end of his volunteer time. They will speak for themselves in the following pages.

Greetings from the new volunteer at St. Francis

My name is Sabine Nienhaus, I am 51 years old and my home is in North West Germany. For some years, I have been interested in working as a volunteer to support an African project during a sabbatical year. Due to the insolvency of my previous company during covid-19, I finally decided to fulfill my heart's desire and applied for the volunteer programme of EIRENE. I had started my career in 1989 as a trainee in dressmaking. After finishing my degree and diploma in Garment Construction I had the chance to work for several garment companies in Germany, Northern Ireland, China and Hong Kong. I always feel that it is a huge enrichment to work with people from different cultural backgrounds as I deeply believe that we can all learn from each other in order to upgrade ourselves and the society in which we are living. During my time

at St. Francis Family Helper Programme, I hope to be able to support all areas as much as possible. Since I have a certificate in tailoring for the last 30 years and a lot of experiences in the international textile and garment supply chain it would be an honour to pass on my knowledge to the students of the Tailoring School.



On 7th of September 2021, Sr. Christine and the whole team of St. Francis gave me a very warm welcome, which made me feel comfortable right away. For these past few months, I have had the chance to get to know my new home at Nyamitanga and the city of Mbarara. I visited Lake Mburo National Park with its great scenery and wildlife such as zebras, buffalos, waterbucks, Impalas and giraffes. Currently, I am learning Runyankore, the language of this area, with the help and support of teacher Innocent. At the beginning it was very difficult for me to get used to a totally new language as the sound and pronunciation of the words in Runyankore are very different from European languages. Now I have started my third week and I have even begun to speak the language as well as construct sentences. Another two weeks of Runyankore language class lies ahead of me. Last week I had a chance to join my colleague from the child sponsorship programme and we went together to two homes. Normally the sponsored children come to the office at St. Francis Family Helper Program to write letters to their sponsors. If a child does not turn up and the family does not give a clear reason for his/her absence the staff of the child sponsoring department will reach out to their homes to find out, if there might

be any difficulties within the families. Those two trips were very interesting for me as I could see some of the local villages, living conditions and the homes of the sponsored children. I had an opportunity to talk to the people. I even practiced the local language which seemed to delight the families.

I am very grateful to EIRENE for giving me the chance to fulfill my long-time heart's desire, here at St. Francis Family Helper Programme. I sincerely hope, that this will become one of the best years of my life with many enriching moments for all of us.

VOLUNTEER NDIBAREMA GEORGE WILLIAM FROM ST FRANCIS TO GERMANY.

Dear St. Francis Family Helper Programme, this is George writing! It has been exactly seven months since I came to Germany. I was assigned to work in a youth center in Bonn City. The youth center is open from 2:00pm to 9:00pm and the youths from the ages 6-20 years come to the youth center after school. I am having an incredible time here in Germany; Socially I have been able to find new friends; my host family Neuenhofer has played a very big role and I cannot fail to recognize their every support on this journey,



Familie Neuenhofer

creating a warm and conducive environment for me.

While here in Germany I got in touch with Janis (an ex volunteer to St. Francis in 2020), and we shared a very delicious meal together in his home where I was warmly welcomed by his Mum and Dad. Janis is now studying psychology in Germany, and he says his choice of profession was influenced by his stay in St. Francis where he worked in the counsellor training institute. Perhaps if he qualifies as a psychologist or

psychotherapist he will come back and help us once more for a few months.



George and Janis

I play volleyball every Sunday with very friendly colleagues; I also occasionally meet with fellow volunteers from Nicaragua, Bolivia and Bosnia to talk about our experiences from our different places of work.

At the youth center, we are a team of four members and my role is to support the staff. I do help in maintaining the cleanliness of the house, making sure the youths have a safe environment to play in, so that they don't harm themselves or others. I assist them with English homework, and we design games together. I have already introduced Omwesho, group-rope skipping, and magazine writing (to promote reading and writing skills).

This is one of my best moments for personal growth, learning from the youths and being patient with them. They are always interested in asking about life in Uganda for example wanting to know what we eat, what are our living standards, how youths spend their free time, how parents treat children, and what we study in school. This is not only helping them to get answers to their questions but also helping them to see the reality of life in other countries. Most of them cannot believe that a child can be caned as a form of punishment.

I am learning the German language, getting used to the transport system (trains, buses, trams, sometimes using a bicycle), to the type of food eaten, to the different climate and to being on time for every daily activity.

EIRENE offers us different seminars, e.g. on gender roles, political issues, conflict resolution and project planning. I must say they are always involved in our daily living, making sure all of us live in safe and comfortable environments. Of course it is very challenging to be far away from my family and my loved ones. However, we are all positive that my being in Germany is for the benefit of all of us. The weather is now cold, and we have short days of daylight; my mind and body are still adjusting to this and I am looking forward to seeing snow.

Best warm regards from our EIRENE Coordinator in Germany, Frau Tshiamo Petersen. Thank you all, I wish you a prosperous new year 2022

St Francis Vocational Training Institute Hostel.



Dear Friends of St Francis and all the readers of our Newsletter, this photo above of a building is actually a computer generated plan of a future hostel for our students. Until the pandemic occurred we had no boarding students. However with Covid and all its risks we could not afford to have students coming and going each day to and from villages and families. The risk of getting and of carrying the Covid virus was too strong. We therefore decided to turn a large classroom into a make shift dormitory and to build a makeshift set of washrooms from corrugated iron sheets. Obviously this has to be a temporary emergency set up. We must get more permanent structures and towards this end we have purchased a piece of land. No department of health or of education would pass our present arrangements.

This necessary construction of a hostel for students is a challenging proposal in even more challenging times. We are not in the habit of begging in our annual newsletter but this time we are requesting your assistance in any way possible, with building plans, bills of quantities, actual assistance in the construction and of course any donations towards the purchase of

materials and payment of workers. Any donation whatsoever will be more than welcome. Perhaps you are not in a position to do any of the above but know someone who might be able to offer some assistance. Please pray that this dream may become a reality and that we may meet someone or some group that would be interested.

You can always contact us with any ideas you may have for assistance. We were blessed in our last construction to have had the assistance of Brendan Beirne as a construction supervisor, a purchaser of materials and a Viatores Christi volunteer. Brendan met his wife, Louise Talbot (Lou) in St. Francis. We are happy to announce that they gave birth to their first son, Michael Samuel, on January 3rd 2022.

Before we come to the end of this newsletter we would like to offer a few words of gratitude.

We would like to appreciate the Irish society who helped our staff during the lockdown to keep their immunity system strong.



Gift of Food from Irish Society

Thank you ever so much for your donations to get food for our staff, during a time when they were not receiving any salaries.

We would like to offer thanks to our anonymous donor who gave the staff a small amount of money each month during a major part of the lockdown.

Our gratitude goes to Mrs. Hilda Timony and her Irish friends who helped us to buy the beds for our



students. Thank you so much for removing one of the stresses from our minds.

We also want to thank those many individuals, groups and organizations that fund our existing projects and keep them going. We are here because of you. As the proverb in our local Runyankole language says after the visit of a guest "We eat on you" / "we eat because of you".

We would like to remember in a special way, our friends and benefactors who have gone to the Lord, may they rest in eternal peace.

Much love from each of us here in St. Francis!

Sincerely,

Sr. Ch. Nibauyaga

Mary Hlavaw

Few Photos of our Newborns

Michael, Samuel son of Brendan and Lou Beirne



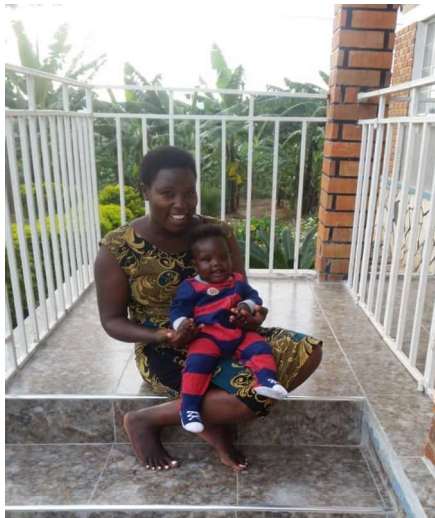
Ella, volunteer psychologist/teacher gave birth to her second daughter Fia.



John, Debbie and baby Lydia Myra Duffy



Barbarh, our accountant, with her first born son Daniel



Kevina, Social Worker in Child Sponsorship Department is happy with the birth of her second son Liam

