

The Source of Light Nursery and Primary School  
Mubende, Uganda.

## **Source of Light Nursery and Primary School, Uganda**

### **A story about Naomi Haigh told by Zena Bentley (Fund Coordinator).**

The remarkable story of the Source of Light School is really about the incredible compassion and belief of **Naomi Haigh** who died in September 2021. Naomi was a much loved outgoing, livewire, young musician from Stokesley. Here is the story of the school.

Naomi went to Birmingham University and studied Music and German. In 2013 she took part in a voluntary programme with NGO Soft Power Education, which took her to Uganda. She worked with a school in eastern Uganda.

Shortly before she left Uganda for England she met, completely by chance, a young Ugandan graduate, from the west of Uganda. He explained how his father had given him four parcels of land for his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and although he could sell the land or farm it, what he really wanted to do was build a school. As a child and teenager he had walked 12 kilometres a day to get his education. The government had promised the village a school but at the last minute changed their minds and built one in a different place.

His father had already started a school of sorts, sheltered under trees and with woven reeds for protection from the elements because a lot of the village children slipped into child labour. What John wanted to build a proper school for his village and for all the children to get an education and not be forced into work, with no prospect of escaping the poverty trap. He had no idea how or if he would get enough funds to build and run the school but he had started saving money from his job as a secondary school English teacher. He must have been very passionate and persuasive as Naomi promised to help him by raising money through a concert in England.

Naomi sought legal advice and set up a fund. In the first four years she raised and sent almost £10,000. She shaved her head, baked cakes, performed in concerts, organised other people to give concerts, cycled from Lands' End to John O'Groats. She had the reassurance of frequent updates and photographs of the progress made in Uganda from the man she met, John Kaahwa, who is now the proud proprietor of this school.

### **Uganda schools**

City and Government schools have more text books and the regimes and ethos are very different. Despite it being against the law, it has been very common for children to be beaten for any reason. Any child whose parents are not up to date with fees are sent away and stay away until there is money enough for them to pay for a term in full. A lot of children fall behind and some slip into child labour whilst others do not finish their courses. In Uganda there are end of year exams and if you do not pass you repeat the year so it can take a long time! If at the end of school there are outstanding fees then certificates are not given to the students as they must clear their debts.

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## **The School**

Naomi was persuaded to go and see the school for herself and as I had just retired and I volunteered to go with her. At this point I had no idea what I was letting myself in for.

It took us three days to get to the school and it is literally in the middle of nowhere. First there was the trip to London, then a long flight, a car journey and finally a Boda Boda (motorbike taxi) on a dirt track to the village. What a greeting we had! The pupils had prepared songs and dances of welcome. The whole school took part. We met parents, governors, friends of the school and local leaders. It was over whelming. The children were fabulous.

The children are very keen to learn and we witnessed no discipline problems. Everyone in Uganda pays school fees. The children know their parents have to make sacrifices for them to attend and they are strictly there to learn. John had told us he had built a library but was in fact a set of almost empty shelves. We filled them with things we had taken and bought - additional musical instruments, PE kits, pens, pencils, stationery, maths sets, red pens for teachers, text books, dominoes and jigsaws.

What we both liked best was the strong sense of community and caring. John's Mum is a very rare thing in Uganda - an old person and is revered by the students. The average life expectancy in 2017 was just 46. The children are well fed and drink rain water from the guttering and water tank which was our last big project before we left..

The school has grown gradually going up the years to their final year of Primary education P7. In 2017 the Source of Light had 165 pupils which had risen to 330 students before lockdown. The first cohort took and passed their End of Primary School examinations. They all attained good grades and most of them took the opportunity to continue to Secondary Education. The school looks after the children. Parents are often behind with school fees, especially if there are problems with the crops. John is patient. Parents know the Source of Light cares and it now has a reputation for excellent exam results too!

Most of the class were the first people in their families to get so far in their education. The effect is huge. Those students will be better placed to help their parents with filling in forms and understanding how to register to vote. They will be able to help their siblings and their siblings will know it is possible to succeed. In time they will have their own children and will be able support them to do even better.

John is now married and his wife gave birth in September 2019 to twin girls, Peace and Grace.

## **March 2020 - the impact of Covid**

Uganda locked down due to Covid and all schools were closed. Parents did struggle to pay rent and some children may well have slipped into child labour. John reported no pregnancies

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among the school girls and no forced early marriages which was not the case in Ugandan cities.

The school was re-inspected in February 2021 and the licence was renewed. We had managed to supply money to cover the cost of digital thermometers, washing stations, soap, sanitiser and masks. Unfortunately, shortly afterwards Uganda had a second lockdown and the school was closed. The one class which took their exams had to wait a long time for the results but the 12 students all passed with high grades.

Since our visit in 2017 until Naomi's death in 2021 we continued to raise money and fulfil the latest criteria from the government. Source of Light had already built three blocks of classrooms and a school hall. New requests include a perimeter fence, a permanent kitchen and because of its size it needs to provide accommodation for at least 4 members of staff. The aim is for the school to be self-sufficient including the teachers' salaries and materials and to help with money for the building.

Throughout the 21 months of lockdown in Uganda, Naomi and I sent donated money to pay staff. This ensured that staff were retained and stopped them from falling into debt.

### **Autumn 2021 update**

John Kaahwa was devastated to hear of Naomi's death and sent a very special tribute to her parents saying that he regards Naomi as an Angel who made all his dreams come true.

Despite the death of our beloved Naomi the work at Source of Light continues as it is her legacy to the world. On the day of Naomi's funeral, 24 September 2021, John had a further school inspection. This time for the school to become a centre to hold exams. John was sure this was Naomi's doing! The inspectors were very impressed and found everything that had been asked of the school done, or in hand. They had no hesitation in granting the licence to be a centre for examination.

### **February 2022 - Zena Bentley**

For now I have taken on the responsibility of keeping up connections with the school. I took a very small window of opportunity to visit Uganda with Liz Walton OBE, chair of 'All Our Children'. We were delighted to see that the school was flourishing. There had been very little Covid and we had lost no colleagues or children to the disease. The school remains one big family, working together with the whole community.

When I visit I pay my own way and usually take extra money and last minute donations to buy extras for the school including New Testament Bibles, a football and a netball for matches. I also took lots of collected items and red and white gingham dresses from the UK. These help keep girls in school.

Naomi was a force of nature with a character that lit up those around her and continues to do so.

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## **How does the money get to the school**

Contact with Liz Walton at 'All Our Children' said we should be included as part of their charity as we had the same aims and it would make administration a lot easier. We were also able to claim gift aid. This has been very successful as there are no administration fees on either side and the money donated goes directly into the school account. Naomi always promised people that all money given would go directly to the school and it has

**Zena Bentley**

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## **Donations**

Great Ayton Methodist Church have nominated the school as one of their preferred charities and will be fundraising through out 2023. You can donate through the Church as normal and in addition direct to 'allourchildren'.

The Source of Light School always needs money. There are frequent problems: crop failures, the rising price of living making paying school fees difficult. Almost everyone earns less than £1 a day. Uganda is one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. The school could use more equipment. It is always short of books.

Regular monthly donations are a lifeline to the school but one off payments are always welcome too.

Go to <https://www.allourchildren.co.uk>

You can read about how all our children works to promote education in Uganda, the trustees (which includes me) and Source of Light.

When you are ready click on donate which is one of the headings at the top of the page.

I recommend not donating through a card but through your bank account. When you use a card there is a fee but I leave that up to you. If you pay tax, please tick the gift aid box. The government gives us 25% on top of your donation.

## **Frequently asked questions**

**How will 'All Our Children' know the donation is for Source of Light?** They are quick to spot them and check them out especially if it is from Great Ayton, Stokesley, North Yorkshire or Teesside as it is assumed it is for Source of Light. When the opportunity arises she confirms this with me. This is easiest if you are a gift aid person

**How will I know if All Our Children have received my donation?** There is a tick box for keeping you informed. You can ask for a receipt. You will get a statement at the end of the financial year or you can drop me an email: [zenabentley26@gmail.com](mailto:zenabentley26@gmail.com)

**Your money can make a difference to children's lives**