

SEDCU

Supporting the Education of Disadvantaged Children in Uganda

January 2026

Supporting the Education of Disadvantaged Children in Uganda

Newsletter 24

Welcome to SEDCU Newsletter No.24 covering the period August 2025 – January 2026

The SEDCU trustees had a very fruitful trip to Uganda at the end of July, and we report in this issue what we found. We were made most welcome and were impressed with how much had been achieved in the two years since our last visit. It was particularly gratifying to meet a number of young people sponsored through SEDCU who are forging ahead with their school education, others who are now embarking on their college or university courses and some who are starting their careers. We have been able to refresh our ideas on what should now be the priorities for SEDCU funding during the next couple of years, and report here on how we see the future of the charity in order to best support our beneficiaries. As ever we must record our gratitude to our supporters whose generosity continues to transform young lives in a remote area of Uganda.

Visit Reconfirms SEDCU Impact

The SEDCU charity was founded in 2012 with the aim of supporting the education of disadvantaged children in Southwest Uganda. Thirteen years on, the three current trustees have just made the seventh SEDCU visit to Uganda (as ever at their own expense) to confirm that SEDCU's funds have been used as intended and to refresh future priorities. The visit posed physical and mental challenges, not least the travel – the journey from trustee homes to their lodgings in the far Southwest of Uganda took 56 hours each way! The trustees enjoyed seeing 500 children in six schools and had meetings with 20 sponsored children, their parents or family members, as well as their teachers.



Gifts from sponsors were delivered as well as donations of stationery and footballs for the schools.



We were honoured by welcome ceremonies at both schools – this one involved the KDS marching band for which SEDCU funded some instruments years ago.

A total of 37 children have been sponsored through SEDCU, and the charity also funds various projects to enhance school facilities, improve the quality of education provided and extend pupils' and teachers' horizons. On behalf of the children, the trustees are hugely grateful for donations made by numerous individual supporters and organisations who together are making this possible.

The visits to MCJS and KDS also gave the trustees the opportunity to assess the physical condition of the schools and new building projects. KDS has been able to continue extending buildings to cater for evolution in the school needs, thanks mainly to funding from another charity. At MCJS the trustees were updated on plans for the widening and major repairs to the road from Kisoro Town to the Mgahinga National Park and potential impact on existing school buildings. They were shown new school buildings under construction and discussed the need for existing buildings to undergo renovation.

SEDCU is only a small charity, but our trip again demonstrated it is making a difference to many young lives, thanks to sponsors and those who support us financially. While such (personally funded) trips are costly, we found out things we had not known about from the two years of email correspondence since our last visit, and we were able to talk in depth with some older sponsored children struggling with decisions about their futures. Priorities are being re-set as a result of this visit, and we give an update in this newsletter. However, the fundamental objectives will remain unchanged as SEDCU continues to work tirelessly to ensure that seriously disadvantaged children are able to realise their potential.

Wheelchairs are Delivered!

When the SEDCU Trustees visited the KDS Disabled Unit during their latest visit at the end of July, they were very sad to discover that there were too few wheelchairs for the growing number of physically disabled children that needed them. Children were having to be carried around the school by their older peers. The wheelchairs they did have were in desperate need of maintenance. They determined that this situation should be resolved immediately. Several individuals and organisations had kindly given SEDCU donations earlier in 2025 which we had been holding until an appropriate need was identified. This money has enabled the charity to send sufficient funds to the school to pay for four new wheelchairs and spare parts to repair six others.



The new wheelchairs are in differing sizes. Others are being repaired.



Some of the disabled children being assessed for the correct size of wheelchair. Sadly, one young girl has no legs...

Hats from Hexham

Many ladies in the Hexham area spent months knitting Beany Hats for the children in the Mgahinga District of Uganda. Not only at the school but all over the area, children, teenagers, mothers with babies begged for a hat. To have something new, individual and not passed down is very special. Although on the equator it can be surprisingly cold on the slopes of the volcano at Mgahinga. Despite some difficulties we were able to fly with 400 hats! They were quickly distributed to the school, community and street children as the word spread. Even as they were being given out at the school, children gathered round the school perimeter – by agreement, the Head Teacher invited them all in! They formed an orderly queue! On many occasions, as we attempted to drive back to Kisoro, we were flagged down by children standing in the road tapping their heads. A huge thank you to all the knitters and to those who donated all the wool.



Children gain new experiences on KDS Educational Study Trip

A total of 55 children participated in the latest Study Trip in December 2025, of which eight were special needs and the others were children without disabilities. The trip started with an 11-hour overnight drive by coach from the school to Entebbe, arriving in time for breakfast, which must have been very exciting!

The first stop was the Ugandan Wildlife Education Centre, which incorporates a wildlife museum with skeletons of many wild animals and then a zoo with many wild animals that the children would never have seen before, even though the majority were endemic to Uganda – elephants, lions, crocodiles, giraffes, zebras, snakes, impalas and hyenas.



Next the children visited the shore of Lake Victoria – and the teachers enjoyed a shade made of recycled bottles! At the Zoo, they watched crested cranes, which are Uganda's national bird. The children also saw planes at Entebbe Airport which will have been amazing for them!



On the following day the group visited Lake Bunyonyi, the second deepest lake in Africa. Among other things they saw a boat under construction. They went on to see Echuya Forest with its bamboo trees.



On the way home they stopped at a viewpoint to appreciate the beautiful scenery of Kisoro District and to learn about potato crops.

The following are quotes from the trip report:

Learners saw traffic lights and to learn what the different colours mean....

Pupils saw buildings with 5 – 15 floors for the first time....

They were excited by the traffic jams in Kampala and the way the cars were following each other!

They were excited to see how materials are recycled, and bottles used for floors and shades ...

The trip was largely funded by SEDCU but for the first time each child's parents also made a small contribution. The five teachers accompanying the children also benefitted from what they saw and expressed their gratitude to SEDCU for the experience.

Reviewing SEDCU's Priorities for the Future

As SEDCU celebrates its 14th birthday, the Trustees have been reflecting on what has been achieved and whether there should be any change in its priorities.

The charity was created almost by accident in 2012 following a visit to Uganda by Ben and Jan in 2011 under the auspices of a conservation charity seeking to protect the habitat of the rare mountain gorillas in the extreme Southwest of Uganda. This visit provided a unique insight into life in this area of the country and led to Ben and Jan taking a personal decision to sponsor four children to obtain an education which would otherwise have been denied to them. As they enthused to friends, family and work colleagues about what they had seen and done, they started to receive offers of financial support, and this led to their decision to found the charity and to register it with the Charity Commission and HMRC. There was no thought then about how long the charity would need to exist if sponsored children went on to secondary and tertiary education – but we now know that some of the earliest children did not graduate until 2021 - 24 and some of the more recent sponsorships could last until 2036!!

From the beginning, some people said they wanted to sponsor a child, while others did not wish to make long term funding commitments and wanted to make financial contributions to the schools being attended by the growing numbers of sponsored children. In the early days, most of SEDCU's donated income was for school fees, but as time passed an increasing percentage was employed to enhance school facilities and to provide opportunities to improve the quality of education and to broaden the children's horizons. This trend has continued and last year about 30% was spent on sponsorship and 70% on school facilities and enhanced breadth and quality of education. The sponsorship percentage will naturally continue to decline with the passage of time.

Looking to the future, the trustees have decided to maintain their policy of enabling every child currently sponsored through SEDCU to realise their full potential, which in many cases may mean funding vocational college courses and university degrees over the next 10 years. Moreover, since we believe sponsored children were, in some cases, starting to be seen by other pupils as the objects of favouritism (despite their valid reasons for being sponsored) we were already inclined to move towards projects which benefit as many pupils as possible.

After a period of reflection and discussions with school staff and community members the trustees have therefore concluded that we should continue to focus an increased proportion of SEDCU funding on raising educational standards and giving children experiences. This would include funding currently employed teachers to study for diplomas or degrees, and seven teachers are currently now participating in this programme. We hope to continue to encourage all school staff to stay in post by funding part salaries in the holidays when they would otherwise receive nothing. Where funds are available, we will also plan to continue funding school trips for the older primary school children and scouting and athletics competitions for disabled children, regardless of whether or not they are sponsored.

Needless to say, our ambitions will need to be matched by the continued generosity of donors, and it would be right to end this article by thanking so many donors who have between them donated a total of over £260,000 during the last decade, equivalent to 1.2 billion Ugandan Shillings!! You have made a huge difference to many young lives!

An Expression of Frustration

Gad was the first blind pupil sponsored from 2012 by SEDCU. He proved to be not only highly intelligent but also determined and ambitious. He graduated with a degree in English from Makerere University. In tandem he has also been demonstrating his sporting prowess and has ambitions to represent Uganda in the Paralympic Games. He has shared this poem with us.

MAY I STAND by Tumusime Gad Reuben

I was born into storms.
A mother fighting.
A world cold.
Left behind, hands that hurt.
Years of trials shaping my soul.

At four, darkness came.
By six, the world vanished from my eyes.
But inside, a fire –
A blaze no shadow could hide.

School became my wings.
Braille under my fingers.
Every dot, a world to explore.
Knowledge my sword. My fight.
Every grade, every test,
A victory carved from night.

I ran hills.
I faced valleys.
Muscles screaming. Hunger biting.
Step by step, I rose.
Every pain, a seed of power.

I travelled far.
Turkey, Morocco, Netherlands, Dubai,
England, UK.
Dubai Grand Prix – Paris 2024, my
Chance.

Disqualified. Hopes blocked.
But my vision stays.
Los Angeles, America 2028.
Paralympics calling.

A dream alive. I train. I climb. I push. I fight.
For my country. My family. Myself.
I will stand on that stage. I will shine.

Doors slam
Employers doubt I can work alone.
They see cost, assistance,
adaptation.
They fear a burden.
But they cannot see –
The storm I have tamed.
The strength I feed.

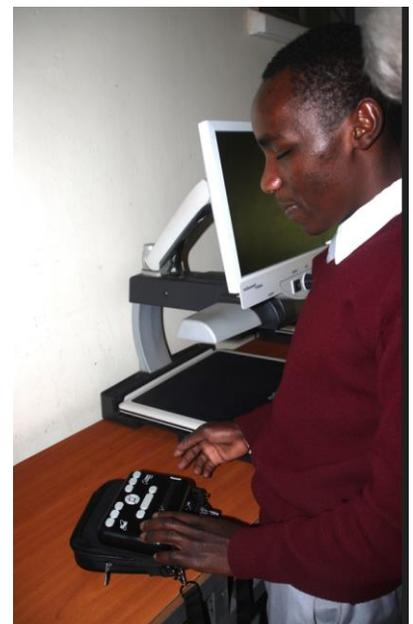
I remember those who lifted me –
Jan, Ben, Gerald.
Their faith, their guidance.
The hands that shaped my journey.

I stand.
Unbroken, Unbound. Unstoppable.
One day – they will know.

(Received from Gad on 24th September
2025)

Digital Braille Technology Donated to Hornby High School

When the SEDCU trustees visited KDS and Hornby High School (HHS) in July, they saw blind pupils using the latest technology device (Orbit 20) for braille data entry and reading. The device has 3 – in – 1 functionality in that it serves as a self-contained book reader, a note taker, and a braille display by connecting to a computer or smart phone via USB or Bluetooth. The strip along the bottom of the device is equivalent to the Perkins style 8 key braille keyboard. The photograph was taken at HHS where W, a blind boy sponsored through SEDCU, is demonstrating the uses of the device. It is lightweight and fully portable. It is also expensive! Staff at HHS asked us if SEDCU could fund some more of the Orbit 20's, and thanks to the generosity of one of our donors, five devices have been ordered from a distributor in Kenya.



Scouts are victorious – again!!

KDS has developed a thriving scout troupe and on our visits, we have witnessed the pride of the children in wearing the uniform – also when participating in school events. For the last ten years, SEDCU has funded KDS to send a team to participate in the annual National Scouting Jamboree where they have been able to meet and compete with special needs children from other schools across the whole of Uganda. We believe that this demonstrates both to the children at KDS and to the wider community that children with disabilities can participate in such events, so living the school motto “Disability is not Inability”.

This year the event was held at Kaazi, near Kampala, in August, which involved an overnight journey by hired coach each way. KDS sent two teams: one consisting of eight hearing impaired girls, and the other seven visually impaired boys.

We have received a detailed illustrated report which shows that the KDS teams passed the initial inspection with flying colours, being correctly equipped with the right food, clothes and necessary camping equipment, all clean and in good order. The report shows that the children’s activities included;

- Leadership and pioneering training, rope knots, construction of an energy saving stove to reduce the need to cut down trees;
- A project to use material to be found in the environment to construct a shelter for a child who had become homeless after dropping out from school;
- An excursion to nearby Lake Victoria with the opportunity to swim and paddle boats in an open-air pool.

The four teachers who accompanied the KDS team were trained to make their own shoes from available materials!



Girls enjoying boat riding.



Elephant patrol doing pioneering in front of tent.



Children with their teachers at the lake shores where the silver fish is caught.

The scouts participated in the opening and closing ceremonies, with awards presented to the highest performing scout teams based on the observations and scoring by independent judges.



Celebrations of the trophies

Despite a few challenges, both KDS patrols won first place out of twelve in their respective categories – hearing impaired and visually impaired. The author of the report records: *“Children were extremely happy and danced, sang and laughed in celebration of the victory. They wished to continue attending such camps for the competition and other benefits.”*

Updates from Kisoro Demonstration School

The Head Teacher at KDS sends SEDCU a report at the end of each term. Some points will have been covered in previous articles, and others are mentioned elsewhere in this issue. The following are some additional items of interest.

The number of Special Needs pupils attending KDS has grown to 149 out of a total school enrolment of 653, and we were given the breakdown during the trustee visit in July:

Hearing impaired	37	Physical handicap	29	Dyslexia	12
Visually impaired	32	Autistic	11	Other health problems	6
Intellectual impairment	8	Downs syndrome	9	Multiple disabilities	5

At KDS, vulnerable special needs children are exposed to additional skills and activities including additional sports and games, athletics, music, dance, drama, gardening and scouting. They are also taught agricultural skills.

Children at KDS are taught agricultural skills like growing vegetables from nursery bed preparation to planting seedlings, then vegetable management up to harvest. Harvested crops are served as a food supplement.

Vocational skills training such as computer skills, tailoring and knitting, art and technology are provided to special needs children which may help them to live independently in future within their communities.



J is deaf and a former pupil of KDS who went to Vocational College and then returned to KDS where she now makes school uniforms, instructs in crafts and is here teaching deaf pupils to use the knitting machines.



Some of the special needs children spend the holidays at school, either because they have no home to go to, or because they are vulnerable and school is safer, or because they are happier at school because they can converse with other pupils and teachers in sign language and can use equipment adapted for blind pupils not available at home. Even some young people with special needs who are now studying at universities or colleges are welcomed back to KDS during the holidays and even after they graduate – a testament to the exceptionally dedicated staff.

Thank You!

Our ability to map out the direction for SEDCU in the coming years is entirely due to the sustained generosity of individual sponsors and donors, as well as corporate entities who have awarded grants to us in recent months. We are particularly grateful to the Leo Lion Foundation which has just awarded us a third substantial grant, and for a very generous grant awarded by another organisation. We also recognise the collective impact made by numerous individuals who have continued to make significant personal donations. It is hard to find the words to describe the differences you are all making to so many young lives.

Thank you to our sponsors, donors, supporters and all who take an interest in SEDCU. Together we can continue to make our stated mission a reality. If you wish to donate you can do so through the website or by cheque made out to SEDCU and mailed to Lowstead, Highford Lane, Hexham NE46 2DP. Or you can pay online into the SEDCU account, sort code 20-74-81, account number 83561356.

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