

OKASFund Donates Textbooks to OKSSS

In April 2017 some members of our charity, Old Kampala Alumni Scholarship Fund (OKASFund), visited our old school, Old Kampala Senior Secondary School (OKSSS) in Kampala, Uganda.

The charity was established in 2014 to assist students of our old school.

This pictorial report chronicles our visit, and highlights some of the activities we carried out over three days.



The raw shipment of Mathematics textbooks, one of several boxes...

The main purpose of our visit was to deliver these textbooks... more on that later. But there were other important items on the agenda as well.

OKASFund has an ongoing scholarship program for promising students who cannot afford to study without financial help. To these needy students, we provide not only the school fees but also modest living allowances. Currently we sponsor 21 students but there are another 40 such students who could do with our support.



Patricia Mulumba, English Teacher, welcomes us upon our arrival



Some of the girls in our scholarship program

The visit was a good time to catch up on this scholarship program and to monitor the students' progress. We wanted to know, is there room for improvement? How can we do more? So we met with the scholarship students and their parents.

For the meeting, most parents had to take time off from their busy work schedules. All of them expressed their gratitude for our assistance.



Some of the boys in the scholarship program, with Arun Patel, BCAh, Dr. Saif Najefi and Dinesh Dattani

As the old saying goes, feed a man a fish and you feed him for a day - show him how to fish and you feed him for the rest of his life. We believe our scholarship program is showing the needy students how to fish for themselves.

(Please note, some members of our charity could not join us for this visit, but they too played an important role in our success: Mayoor Patel BCAo, Jit Davda and Suresh Desai)



Current scholarship students with their parents



Scholarship students with their parents at the meeting with OKASFund trustees



Cathy Bisereko, standing, conducts the meeting. She is secretary of locally-based Old Kampala Old Students Association



A scholarship student tells us how the program has benefited his studies



Another scholarship student speaks



Cathy consoles a scholarship student who suddenly breaks down while recounting her story. Such poignant scenes strengthen our resolve to continue and extend our scholarship program



At the end of the meeting, we awarded five of the scholarship students, certificates of merit for exemplary academic performance.



In the last two pictures, did you notice the empty shelves in the background? Remember, we were in the school library - good reading material is badly needed!

This brings us to the next aspect of our visit to the school, namely the donation of several dozen motivational books for the library. On a prior visit, we had noticed the empty shelves seen in the above pictures, and the little that was there was either obsolete or poor quality.

As Arun noted, "currently, at the school there is no culture of reading extra-curricular books, partly because of a lack of available material. We need to change that."

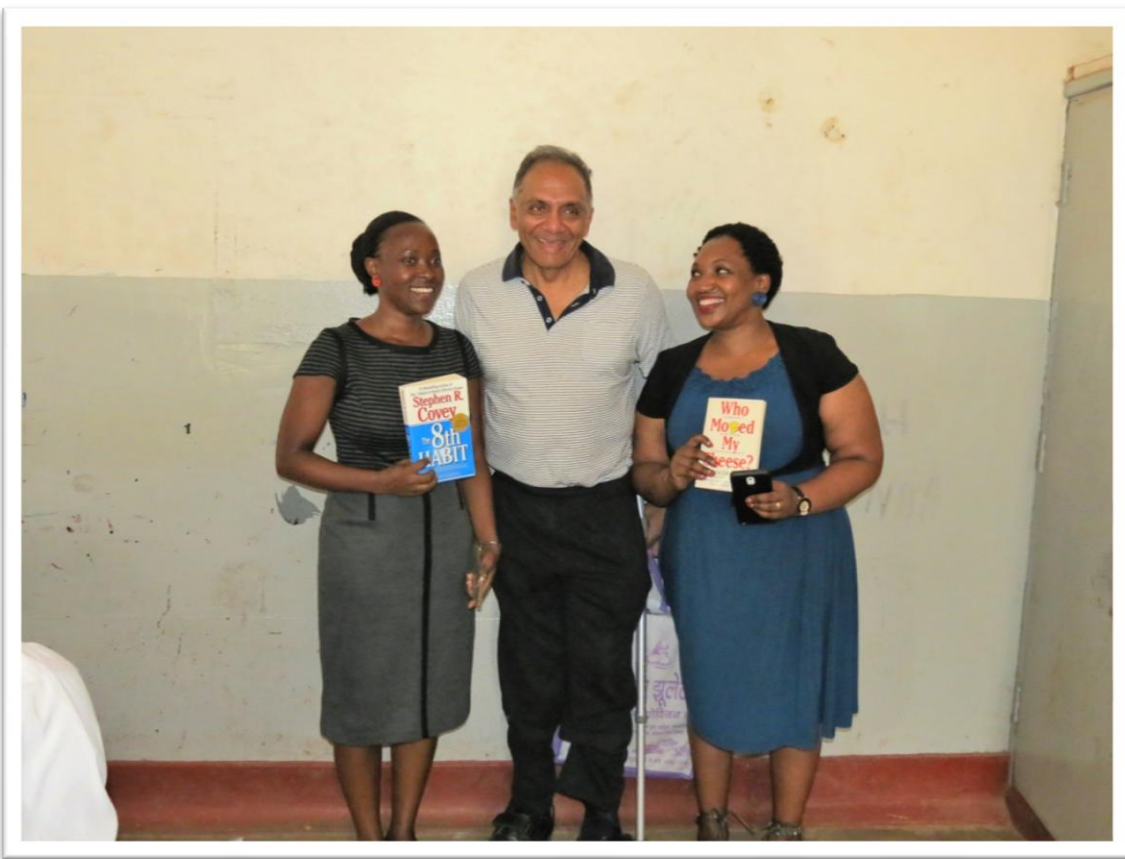
We have future plans to address the issue of empty library shelves, but for starters, we brought with us as many motivational books as our luggage allowance would permit. Alas, we could only bring a few dozen with us. These we catalogued and labelled, before handing them over.

Many teachers were extremely elated to see these books...hopefully it will help them to motivate students as well as themselves.





Dr. Shirish Patel supervises the labeling of library books, assisted by school teachers

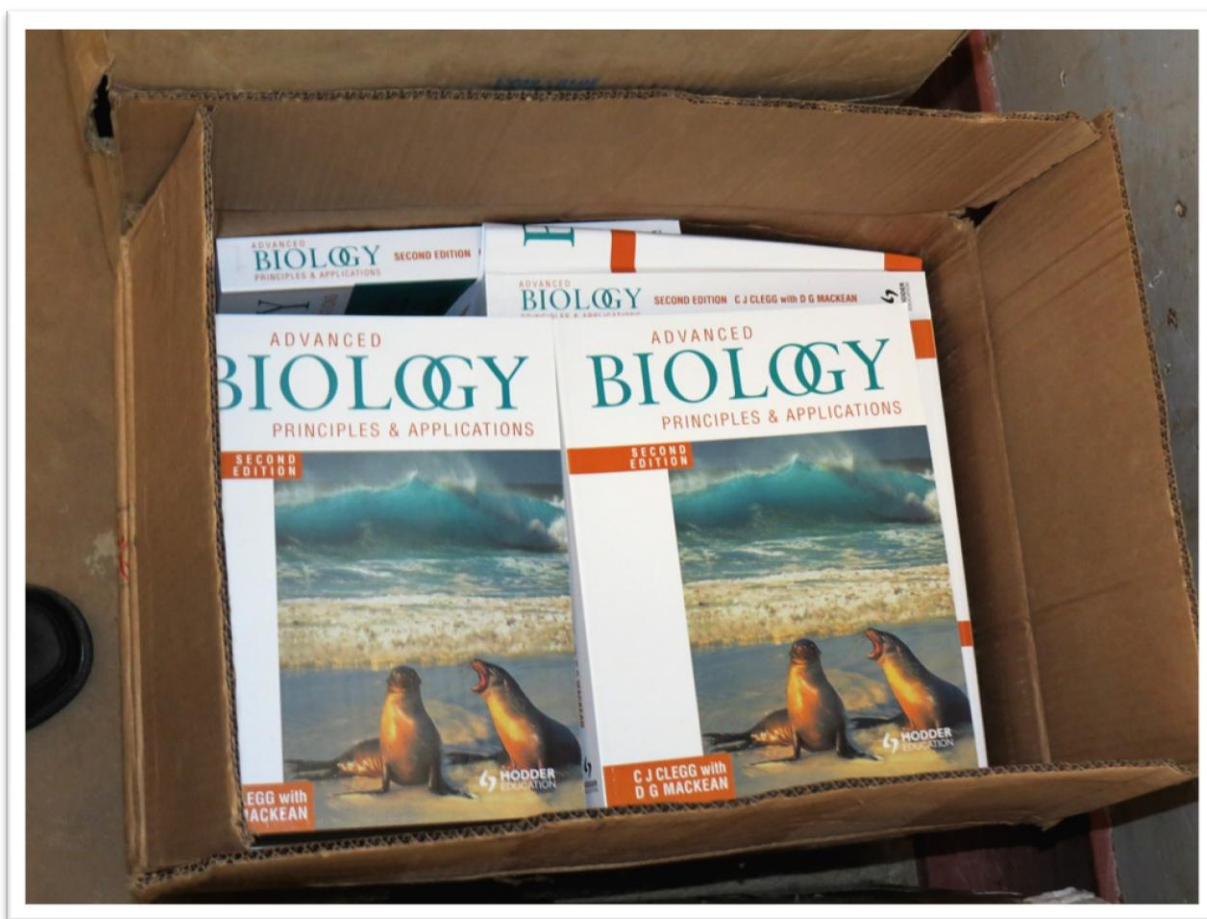


Books for the school library - Arun Patel, BCAh, with Sandra Mlay (left) and Patricia Mulumba (right)

We now come to the main purpose of our visit, that is, the handing over of textbooks. Our funds were limited; we could not afford to deliver all the books.

So we had to scale down our ambitions. In this first phase of the project we decided to supply books in Mathematics and Biology to ensure that ALL the students have access to a textbook in these two subjects.

For logistical and other reasons, we chose a local supplier for the purchase of books. Amar Thakrar, our trustee residing in Kampala, did all the purchasing.



One of several boxes, this one containing Biology textbooks



To deal with the task of labelling, cataloging and numbering, we were assisted by head students from each class.





Dr. Shirish Patel and his niece Prina Patel (beaming with joy!) organize the Mathematics textbooks



Aron Desai and Dr. Saif Najefi seen here labelling the textbooks to ensure safe-keeping

We took a stroll along the school grounds. Some of us were visiting the school after a 'long' time, measured in decades!



Our emotions ran high. These could only be described as nostalgia and fond memories mixed with a feeling of having left something behind in these school grounds.

This is where it had all started; this is the school that gave us a solid foundation, academic and otherwise. This is where we shaped our personality and character, and this is where some of us forged life-long friendships.

What better way to show our appreciation than to give back to this school as much as we could?





Peeking inside the arts and crafts room, a surprise awaited us. Here we saw works of art that could easily be mistaken for items in some arts museum. Who knows, among the students there might be a Picasso lurking somewhere...



Inside the school library, we saw something unique - just a picture for most, but a treasure for the visiting alumni....



This frame, depicting the school insignia and Uganda's national emblem, was found on a shelf in the school library.

It seems the item, which was there even in the days when we were studying, has not moved an inch from its original perch on the top shelf - but that could just be an imagining...

For us visitors it was a pleasant sight to behold.



The school grounds have remained remarkably untouched by the vagaries of time and events. We saw the same buildings, even the same trees and shrubs! And most likely it was also the same air that we breathed so long ago!





The Head Teacher, Mrs. Aziida Nsubuga updates two of our trustees, Dr. Shirish Patel (left) and Amar Thakrar (middle) as Prina Patel looks on



You get to see such lush greenery throughout the year, Kampala being near the equator.



Motivational signs such as these are peppered all over the school grounds. These were not there in our days. Wonder who put them there?

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Now back to the main point, namely the textbook project.

After all the labelling, cataloging and numbering, it was time to officially hand over the textbooks.

To mark this occasion, the school had organized quite an extravaganza. This was a total surprise to us unsuspecting visitors, and went well beyond our wildest expectations.



The banner heralds our arrival. All the textbooks just before they were handed over



The entire student population, some two thousand strong, was here to observe the proceedings



There was a festive atmosphere, complete with African and Indian dances





What good is such an event without gifts and speeches, eh? Arun Patel, BCAh shows off the plaque of thanks given by the School Board of Governors, which he acknowledges in his speech.





Two trees were planted in our honor. Arun Patel, BCAh plants the first - the man in the suit is Robinson Nsumba-Lyazi, a senior Director in the Ministry of Education and Sports



Amar Thakrar gets to plant the second tree. Amar was instrumental in arranging the purchase of textbooks locally. On the extreme right, the Head Teacher, Mrs. Aziida Nsubuga looks on.



The whole event was covered by multiple news media outlets, including local television and newspapers. The following day, in this article published in a local newspaper, we were amused to see ourselves referred to as 'Indian Alumni'!

In summary, we believe that giving back to the school and the country that gave us so much is of paramount importance, almost obligatory.

Our charity could do with more monetary support: we hope to roll out phases two and three of our Textbook Project. This will require some £25,000 (\$32,200). Also, there are more than 40 students waiting for financial assistance for school fees.

If you would like to donate, please visit us at WWW.OKASFund.org. This charity has zero administration costs, as all the work is done on a volunteer basis. Therefore, 100% of your donations will go towards helping the needy students of OKSSS.

There is another way you can help. If you know of anyone who studied at the school, or who lived in Uganda, but might not have received this blog, please forward it to them. If you are not on our mailing list, and would like to receive future communications, please visit our website and subscribe.

"Drop by drop, a lake is formed; pebble by pebble, a dam is built" - Indian proverb

Compiled by Dinesh D. Dattani, a trustee of OKASFund - Dinesh lives in Toronto, Canada

