



Beatrice's HOPE

THE NEWSLETTER OF HOPE MULTIPURPOSE, INC., FOUNDED BY BEATRICE GARUBANDA

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WHAT A YEAR AT BLUE HOUSE!

2020 is not yet over but it's been such a roller coaster year in which people all over the world have experienced the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in one way or another. The Blue House, located in the small town of Kazo in a rural part of Western Uganda, has not been spared the upheavals that came and continue to roll out with the pandemic, including shut-down.

The guardians and the girls

Remember that in 2005 the Blue House started out as a small orphanage serving desperate girls in the community of Kazo. It has since opened its doors to provide a safe and secure living environment to the most vulnerable young girls. They may not necessarily all be orphans but they are eligible to live at the Blue House based on a vulnerability scale as assessed by a social worker, considering danger of physical and sexual abuse, hazardous and exploitative work, child marriage or early pregnancy.

Each girl has a responsible guardian, usually a relative, who lives in the area. The girls visit them during holidays and the guardians attend an annual meeting at the Blue House. Those students who live at Blue House enroll in local schools, and generous donors like you fund their expenses and education.

In addition, there are some select students in the Kazo community who live safely with parent/s or guardians who are unable to pay for the children's schooling because of poverty. These girls' and boys' education is also funded by the generous support of Blue House donations.

In March, when the Ugandan government ordered the closing of schools and community living (like the Blue House) because of COVID-19, the girls returned to stay with their guardians, an additional burden on families as well as the students. Besides limited food and living resources, alternative education via radio, TV, and computer were inaccessible. It is a fair assessment to say that Blue House students' formal education has largely remained on hold since March.

Food Distribution and Keeping Connected

Since home visits were no longer possible due to Uganda's COVID-19 management guidelines, Director Merab planned a food distribution drive to support families of children who would otherwise be living at the Blue House. It also doubled as an opportunity to find out how well the students were doing after the closure of Blue House. The board sent Director Merab \$1,000 for the purchase of food and other necessary items like health and hygiene supplies.



The guardians who live close-by were instructed to go to the Blue House with their Blue House students to receive food items in support of their families during the COVID-19 crisis.



For guardians and students who live further away from Blue House, former Director Aine's home near Obuzinga village was used as a central distribution point for their families to collect food and other necessities. Students who live much further away would receive food delivered by boda boda (motorcycle taxi).

**In 2020 please support the
UN-BOUTIQUE!**

We can't gather and shop, but the Blue House still needs your donations. See more on page 3 and Blue-House.org/2020-Un-Boutique

GOOD NEWS: Girls Return to Blue House

In early September Director Merab reached out to the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) for approval of the return of students to the Blue House. Her initial request was for return of girls living in the most at-risk conditions. In mid-October, approval was granted for all students living at the Blue House to return.

In preparation for return of the students the Blue House needed to obtain certification attesting to compliance with guidelines set for the re-opening of education institutions and implementation of COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures in Uganda. Some of the requirements include observing adequate physical distancing of 2 meters spacing in dorm rooms, and ensuring that an adequate number of COVID-19 signs and posters are displayed in and around Blue House. In addition, hand sanitizers and adequate hand washing stations must be available for students, and a temperature gun purchased.

The guidelines also state that living communities should have a health worker on site to appropriately triage any students suspected of contracting COVID-19. To fulfill this requirement Director Merab has identified and hired a part-time health worker who lives off-site. Eventually Blue House will need to provide on-site accommodation for the health worker, a sick bay for sick students that includes a quarantine room for students who test positive for COVID-19 or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms.

Director Merab and her staff worked tirelessly to ensure that the grounds and living spaces at the Blue House were ready for students' return and the RDC inspection for signage, hygiene conditions and health equipment.

To date the RDC operating office has been busy performing inspection of schools in the Kazo community, but the Blue House has not yet been inspected and certification of compliance has not yet been obtained. Nevertheless, students have returned and are very happy to be back.

After the students are settled at the Blue House, they will need to undergo health screens, and counseling will be made available to those who need it.



Group photo of girls after their return to the Blue House – happy to be home.

Current Situation – Ever Changing

In a televised address on September 20, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni made an announcement that students in candidate classes for schools, colleges, and universities will reopen on October 15.

Candidate classes/finalist classes are those grades at the end of which a student sits for a National Exam. A student's score from these exams greatly determines their subsequent education trajectory, for example the tier of schooling or college the student can apply to next. Students sit national exams at the end of 7th grade (primary 7), Senior 4 (second year of High School) and Senior 6 (last year of High School).

The government stated that primary and secondary schools will not be allowed to operate both day and boarding sections at the same time when they reopen for candidate classes, until the government feels it safe to run both sections concurrently.

This announcement impacts four Blue House students in candidate classes: one in Senior 6 and three in Senior 4. These students attended a nearby secondary school as day scholars before the COVID-19 school closures, but they will now be required to join boarding school, which brings up additional new expenses for tuition and board.



Director Merab and older students teaching younger students how to wear masks and use hand sanitizers.

Education Plans for the Rest of the Students

A plan for school reopening for non-finalist learners is not yet confirmed but will be decided by January 2021. So, what are the non-finalist Blue House students to do?

Director Merab plans to have Secondary students engaged in computer lessons. She envisions Primary students from P4 to P7, ages 9 to 13, to learn tailoring skills, while Primary 4 students and younger learn basket/mat weaving.

Director Merab is working with the Ugandan Education Board to formalize a plan to keep all students actively engaged in learning. This may necessitate the hiring of one or two teachers to come to the Blue House to deliver or create work packets for each student. At this point in time, teachers have not yet been identified and this action item is still pending.

In addition, Director Merab has plans to purchase entertaining books from a local bookstore in the hopes of encouraging reading. These books will be age-appropriate and selected after receiving input from the girls and their social worker.

For the long-term, Director Merab is considering exploring ways to upgrade Blue House's Internet bandwidth for students to have more consistent access to the Internet.

Facing Costs in the Pandemic

In 2019, income was almost \$60,000, of which the Boutique generated almost 40%. End of year donations made up another 15%. In other words, 55% of support came in the last two months, last year. In 2020, through September, donations totaled about \$16,400 (thank you!). However, expenses were \$30,700, in the same time period, including:

Expenses Jan. – Sept. 2020

- 2 months of school, Jan. - March
- Staff salaries 2020
- Care of livestock and crops
- Building and land maintenance
- Food purchase and delivery to the children
- Newsletter printing and mailing

Anticipated expenses from now through first half of 2021

Although the girls are coming back to the Blue House, expenses will be very different from 2019 and previous years. Only some of the girls will be able to go to school, and they will be in boarding school, not day classes. We will need to hire new staff like teachers and health care workers, and add new infrastructure to address Covid-19 and home schooling at the Blue House. Here are just the expenses we know about:

- Six lap-tops
- COVID-19 guidelines compliance for certification
- Part-time health worker
- Eventual on-site accommodation for the health worker, and a sick bay and quarantine room for students who test positive for COVID-19 or show symptoms
- School fees (tuition and board) for the candidate students in boarding school: for one student in Senior 6, and 3 students in Senior 4.
- Computer classes
- Tailoring classes, which may necessitate hiring a teacher from Margaret Krohn Tailoring school
- Hiring of one or two teachers to come to the Blue House to deliver or create work packets for each student.
- Upgrade Blue House's Internet bandwidth for students to have more consistent access to the Internet.
- Books for the Blue House library
- School fees (tuition and board) for Olivia at Bishop Stuart University in Mbarara for a diploma in social work
- Support for Lillian in medical school (beyond scholarship) including laptop, books, and possibly room and board.
- Standard expenses of food, clothing, house and farm costs.



Ampumuza arrives back at the Blue House. She is one of the candidates expected to resume studies at a boarding school in October.

THE 2020 UN-BOUTIQUE



Because it is not safe to gather and shop together during the pandemic, we invite you to join us at the online Un-Boutique, the Blue House's only fundraiser of the year, and maybe even next year. We hope you will be as generous as you possibly can for the children of the Blue House.

Our Un-Boutique fundraising goal is \$60,000, to support the Blue House for the next year. Read more about the Un-Boutique and donate online, or send a check in the enclosed envelope. Please consider giving what you usually spend at the Boutique, if you can.

Better yet, become a Sustaining Supporter and your donation will be matched up to \$100! Set up automatic, regular giving directly from your bank using electronic funds transfer (EFT). Simply download the authorization form on the Blue House Un-Boutique web page:

**[www.blue-house.org/
2020-un-boutique](http://www.blue-house.org/2020-un-boutique)**



**BLUE
HOUSE
UGANDA**

Blue House Uganda is a 501(c)(3) charity, sponsored by Hope Multipurpose, Inc., based in St. Paul MN, for orphans and vulnerable children in Kazo, Uganda.

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Contact us: E-mail: info@Blue-House.org
Telephone: 612-470-8316. Web: www.Blue-House.org
Mail: Blue House Uganda, c/o St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
2136 Carter Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55108



Hope Multipurpose, Inc.
 c/o St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
 2136 Carter Avenue
 St. Paul, MN 55108

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Sylvia, Mercy and Immaculate checking each other's temperatures upon arrival at the Blue House. In Minnesota, we're also taking COVID-19 precautions; See page 3 about the 2020 Un-Boutique

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