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*Circle of Peace International (COPI) is a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to ensuring the success of a small, family-run school in Uganda that is a sanctuary for children who would otherwise be denied an education.*

*COPI supports the school financially, establishes links with schools in the U.S., provides opportunities for Americans to volunteer at the school, and helps the school set up profitmaking businesses in order to become self-sufficient. COPI is run completely by volunteers.*

#### What's your preference?

Hard copy or digital? If you haven't already let COPI know your preference for how you'd like to receive our newsletter and other announcements, please email circleofpeaceintl@gmail.com to let us know: hard copies delivered through the mail, or digital copies delivered via email, or both. Thank you!



Circle of Peace School would very much like to have some Macintosh laptops for their teachers and students. Laptops are preferred since they conserve electricity, and Macs are preferred since they are less susceptible to viruses. Please let COPI know if your family, your office, or your school can donate laptops – new or used. They will be sent to the school along with volunteers who are traveling to Uganda this summer.



#### Help COPI and SAVE when you drink, eat and shop in Richmond!

Do you have an RVA Card? An RVA Card saves families and individuals money throughout the course of the year when they visit participating businesses in Richmond, VA. COPI and other charities are using the RVA Card to raise money for their causes. You can help COPI and be rewarded with savings every time you use your RVA Card at a participating business.

And the RVA Card makes a great gift for those that live in Richmond or are coming to visit.

There are hundreds of participating locations. Click on <http://www.rvacard.com> to identify the participating businesses and the loyalty discount you receive at many locations in the Richmond area.



#### COPI's current volunteer needs include:

- International Pen Pal Program Manager
- Overseas Service Learning Program Manager
- Student Sponsor Program Manager
- Videographer
- Newsletter Editor
- Finance Committee member
- Nominating and Leadership Development Committee member
- Fundraising Committee member

For job descriptions please log on to the COPI website:  
[circleofpeaceintl.org/#!/volunteer/c3b6](http://circleofpeaceintl.org/#!/volunteer/c3b6).

# Circle Of Peace International

## NEWSLETTER

Spring 2016 Volume 6, Issue 1

### A Terrifying Start Leads to Gifts of Peace and Grace at the Circle of Peace School, Kampala, Uganda

By Connor Fitzpatrick Charlton



Connor and Abdul Bbaale enjoy a chat while sorting beans. Bean sorting, reports Connor, seems to be a never-ending task at COPS!

After Turkish Airlines mistakenly unloaded my bags in Rwanda, I found myself stranded at Entebbe Airport in the middle of the night with no wallet, no phone, no laptop, and no clothes. Even worse, an immigration officer seized my passport because I couldn't pay the visa fee. I felt lost and frightened, having no idea what this would mean or what would happen to me. All I had to my name were the clothes on my back and my guitar.

I finally was able to make a deal with the authorities to let me out of the airport with a makeshift visa. Outside I was met by three Circle of Peace School (COPS) staff and Bbaale family members Farook, Abdul and Abraham. I told them everything that had happened and asked them what to do. Farook, the Busar at COPS, rubbed his chin and said, "That is crazy, man. You need to sleep. Let's get out of here."

My first dreamlike visions of Uganda were from the open windows of the COPS van as we drove to Kampala: fruit stands, banana trees, huge stork-like birds in the trees, salvaged motorbikes (boda-bodas) crowding the streets where no stoplights directed traffic.

That morning I met the community that is COPS. When I relayed my unfortunate tale, there was nothing but complete welcome, acceptance and concern on their faces. COPI board member Liz Jordan was there, finalizing the adoption of her child. She told me, "It's a week for miracles. Just pray and believe." I prayed extensively beneath my mosquito net, and then I slept for I don't know how long.... A long time.

I awoke to Headmistress MaryLove knocking at the door. It was the airport on the phone. My bags had arrived.

Before they drove me the hour's journey back to the airport, the school loaned me 360,000 shillings to get my passport back. Three hours later, I returned to COPS with my bags, passport, all my money, and peace of mind. It was as though the previous twenty-four hours had

I cannot think of a finer place to support and cherish than COPS. It is so much more than a school, it's truly a way of life. They are instructors of goodness, in addition to the more obvious scholastic instruction they provide their students.

hit a reset button on my Americanism, and had allowed Africa to get into me first.

Although there is always something to be done at COPS, no one has to tell anyone to do anything. Because my own culture has such a "what-do-I-get-out-of-this" attitude, it was strange for me to see the school community functioning so efficiently. Things got done because they needed to be done, and community members did them ... happily.

Also, I immediately noticed the openness. I could spend time with anyone, talk to anyone, and there was never a sense of unwelcome, or a "too-busy-for-you" attitude. This behavior was not naïve or born of idle hours – very much the contrary. Folks in the community always had tasks to do, they just made time to be with one another. They know full well the hard realities of person-to-person interaction in this world. They are simply some of the best people I've ever known.

I spent time getting to know the pillars of COPS: Grandmother Amina; her daughter MaryLove; her sons Charles, Abraham, and Solomon; my spiritual brother Farook; and the incredibly special relatives and boarders who were there during my visit: Sliman and Elijah, Irene and Isaac (little and big Isaacs), Abdul, Moses, Masaba, Teacher Eddie, Hassan, and all of the others.

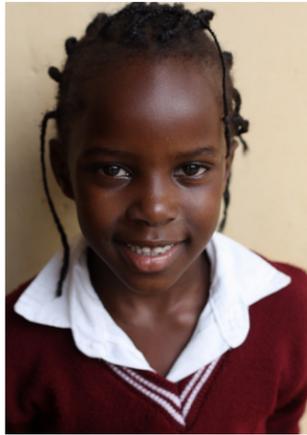
I compiled data and wrote reports on the state of the chicken farm, the construction projects, the Annual Report, the financial report. I travelled to "the village" to see where the crops are grown and to breathe in the spirit of Uganda.

The guys took me around, quizzing me on the types of trees, telling me stories. Farook and I rode *boda-bodas* around the city. We set up and decorated the Christmas tree, and I had the blessing of spending Christmas with such people. We attended a rowdy New Year's party. We sat around the fire and discussed life, the future for our burgeoning global generation, how we wanted things to be in this world.

Ultimately, through a kind of spiritual osmosis, I received the gifts of peace and grace simply by being around the special souls that make up COPS — people who, with very little, possess so much in their hearts. I cannot thank them enough.

And from the bottom of my heart I thank Joanita Senoga for her work, determination and vision to make COPS a living reality. I thank the rest of the COPI board for doing all that they do to support and give of themselves to such a special place. I'm very happy to have made the journey. ●

## STUDENT PROFILE



Name: Tahiya  
Class: Primary 5  
Mother: Shop Attendant  
Father: Absent

My name is Tahiya, and I am 10 years old. I have a younger brother, Tahid, who is also at the Circle of Peace School. I like sweet potatoes and playing soccer.

When my father left us, I was a year old and my brother was two weeks old. My mother didn't have a job at the time. She was not able to pay the rent, so we could no longer live in our house. The landlord asked us to leave.

Thanks to nice neighbors, my mother, brother, grandmother and I are allowed to sleep in their garage. Mother helps to clean their house, wash their clothes and cook. Then she works in their shop. I love my grandmother. I help her cook, clean and wash the clothes.

I am the top student in my class because I study very hard. I want to be a doctor. Circle of Peace School has been so good to my family and that is why I love it here. We have wonderful teachers. All the students are nice and we play together. I feel like I have a second family.

I tell everyone never to give up because if you study hard you get everything you dream about and want. I know my dreams will come true some day. Long live Circle of Peace School! ●

*Tahiya is one of about 70 students at COPS who needs a sponsor. A gift of \$400 per year covers the costs of tuition, uniforms, lunches, books and school supplies. Please contact COPI if you, your church, or community would like to sponsor a child like Tahiya.*

## Updates from Circle of Peace School

By Mary Love Bbaale, Headmistress



Greetings from Circle of Peace School (COPS) teachers, students and the Bbaale family! Let me take this opportunity to thank COPI board of directors and our friends in the United States for promoting COPS in so many ways. There has been much progress at the school. Without your assistance we wouldn't have been able to accomplish all these things.

Our school year was delayed due to the national presidential elections which took place early in February. Both teachers and students are now working twice as hard to make up for time lost.

Right after school began two boarding students fell ill and were admitted to the hospital. It has been difficult and challenging to see to their care and launch the school year. I am grateful for your prayers. The students were discharged after a week and both are now doing well.

The Ugandan Ministry of Tourism has organized a competition for grade schools. I am pleased to announce that out of 400 schools Circle of Peace School was one of 20 selected to participate. The goal is to promote tourism in Uganda. The winner will be given a trip to Murchison Falls National Park. This is where the Nile shoots through a narrow gorge and cascades down to become a placid river whose banks are thronged with hippos and crocodiles, waterbucks and buffaloes. Wildlife also includes lions, leopards, elephants, giraffes, hartebeests, oribis, Uganda kobs, chimpanzees, and many bird species.

Our students have written a poem and are busy rehearsing it for the competition that will take place the first week in April. Additionally, we have been selected to participate in a mega competition that Dark Media Entertainment has organized for schools. The prize is a week-long trip to Kenya. This is taking place in June.

COPS has recently been blessed with visitors from the United States. For over two months we had the opportunity to work with COPI board member **Liz Jordan**. She experienced the day-to-day operations of the school. It was an honor having Liz live with us and we enjoyed her stay.

In December 2015, COPI sent **Connor Charlton** to celebrate Christmas with us. We had a lot of fun with him and thank him for giving up time with his family to be with us. He is a person with a special and big heart.

In January, **Dr. Barbara Dennis** from Indiana University visited the school with a team of colleagues doing research on peace around the world. We are fortunate that COPS has been included in this project.

Lastly, I thank the teachers and school administration for their hard work. Because of them tremendous progress has been made by our students! ●

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT



There's no day that goes by that I don't talk about Circle of Peace School (COPS) and Circle of Peace International (COPI) to people I encounter. Whether it is meeting with family members about a gift to honor a recently-deceased loved one, or speaking with an education student about teaching for a term at COPS, or simply telling co-workers about the school I founded in Uganda, my days are filled with opportunities to advance our goal of changing the world through the power of education.

For children living in developing countries, education is the key to a better life, and its effects span generations. A sister organization, *Room to Read*, reports that if all children in low-income countries left school with only basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty.

My days are also increasingly filled with meetings with COPI's growing number of volunteer leaders. This

year we are pleased to welcome Mr. **Tejdev Sandhu**, Mr. **Nick Peterman** and Ms. **Kate Hooper** as new COPI board members replacing **Liz Jordan**, **Nakita Rowell-Stevens** and **Seth Johnson** who we send off with our deep appreciation for their service.

We also welcome **Dianna Leyton** (*Social Media Manager*), **Agnes Morris** (*Fundraising Event Planner*) and **Joyce Nelson** (*Photo Archivist*). Among other positions we are working to fill is a new Student Sponsor Manager to replace **Susan Higgins**, and a new Grant Writer to replace **Matthew Luger**. We wish **Susan** and **Matthew** the best of luck in their new endeavors.

Besides administering our **Service Learning Program** at Circle of Peace School and our **Student Sponsor Program**, COPI facilitates the partnering of schools in the United States with COPS in Uganda. Recently, **Children's Aid College Prep Charter School** in Bronx, NY, has become the 11th school to develop a pen pal program with COPS.

As you have read in COPS' Annual Report distributed last month, the

"Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life. It is essential to development and health, and opens the way for democratic participation and active citizenship."

-Kofi Annan  
Former United Nations  
Secretary-General

school is in desperate need of **new classrooms**. In order to accommodate a Primary 7 class this year, a temporary classroom is being erected. By the end of the year, COPI hopes to assist COPS in building two permanent classrooms, a library and a new boys dormitory. The cost is \$38,000. To raise the funds, COPI is promoting **home dinners** where I can share the story of Circle of Peace School and our vision of a world in which all children can pursue a quality education, reach their full potential and contribute to their community and the world.

World change starts with educated children. Through your support of COPI, you are changing the world. Every penny and every shilling counts. Thank you for your support, which is

## Understanding Children's Concept of Peace

By Barbara Dennis, Indiana University

Since 2014 a team of researchers from Kyambogo University and two US universities have been engaged with students from Circle of Peace School (COPS) to study how Ugandan children think about peace. Children were selected from P1-P6 classes to participate in focus groups and draw images of peace and "non-peace".

The research was quite successful. Ugandan children's notions of peace contrast with those of children raised in Europe and the United States. Most COPS students spoke of peace as having the community's basic needs for food, health, shelter and safety met. They also talked about the absence of violence as an indicator of peace. They described forms of violence as antithetical to promoting peace – including witnessing violence between adults. COPS students used popular culture and media to give examples of peace and violence, including politics.

The research team was particularly impressed with the way young Ugandan children were able to talk about their experiences and ideas of peace. Children at the school think of themselves as agents of peace. They described ways in which they have helped to resolve conflicts with peers and family members. They drew on ideals of for-



givenness as ways of dealing with people who mistreat them – so that peace can be restored with friends and family members. One child talked about preparing a meal to bring his parents back together after a fight. Children also identified adults in their community they could trust to promote peace – teachers and police officers.

The children at COPS were very cooperative and the team was honored to have the opportunity to speak with them. The staff and teachers were also very accommodating.

The results were presented at two international conferences and the team is preparing a children's book that will utilize both stories and drawings by the children. Believing that the world has something to learn from these youngsters the research team is also working on journal publications. ●