



June 2008

Grandmothers visit

Outreach

Children of ROTOM by Sue Cousineau

It took two days by plane as we zigzagged from Canada across Europe to Africa, followed by ten long hours of driving in a van over roads that were more like obstacle courses than highways and then finished with a one-hour drive up a winding, bumpy, dirt road, to finally arrive in little Switzerland of Africa. Our destination was a tiny hamlet near Kabale in the south-western region of Uganda called Kahama.

Even though it took an inordinate amount of time to arrive in this secluded, isolated corner on top of Uganda, I and three other Canadian grandmothers, felt very privileged to visit ROTOM Grandmothers Support Project, a project of Reach One Touch One Ministries (ROTOM) funded by the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF), that is supporting a group of 100 grandmothers and their orphaned grandchildren. We were eager and excited to meet Kenneth Mugayehwenkyi, the Director, and his team of professional staff and volunteers, and of course the grandmothers and their children.

Reach One Touch One Ministries



Some of the 150 grandchildren supported by SLF under ROTOM Grandmothers Support Project

(ROTOM), operating in different regions of Uganda, has grown to become a very effective community based organization whose mission is to “enable older persons and their dependents acquire a bearable form of existence spiritually, socially, mentally, economically, and physically and to equip them with coping life skills which enable them to live dignified and independent lives”.

Through ROTOM the grandmothers re-

ceive food supplements and other nutritional and hygienic product such as soap, soy, rice beans, flour, and sugar all resulting in the improvement of the grannies health as well as the health of their grandchildren. While most grandmothers and their extended families live in clay huts with earth floors and thatched or corrugated tin roofs and have little income on which to survive, all sponsored households now have a kerosene lamp and with

Some 13 million children in sub-Saharan Africa have lost one or both parents to AIDS. After their parents die, it is usually their grandmothers who raise them. In response to this growing crisis, the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) launched the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign on International Women's Day in 2006 as a way to raise awareness, build solidarity and mobilize support in Canada for Africa's grandmothers. Today, 5,000 Canadian grandmothers are supporting the Campaign and over \$3 million has been raised, which the Foundation has distributed to projects that assist grandmothers and AIDS orphans in 15 sub-Saharan African countries.

In March 2008 a group of twelve Canadian grandmothers from seven provinces traveled to Uganda, South Africa and Swaziland as part of a special educational and solidarity-building trip to visit some of these initiatives funded by the Foundation.

For more information, visit www.stephenlewisfoundation.org

ROTOM: Reaching older persons and children under their care in Jesus name!

Evelyn; one of the grandchildren supported to study tailoring. The sewing machine was also provided by the project. She is now able to make dresses, shirts etc for the local school children for an income.



the funding from the SLF every granny and child under their care have a mattress to sleep on. We were touched by the work of ROTOM as we learned first-hand how well the grannies and their children were cared for. The grannies welcomed us openly and graciously and shared with us some of their incredible heart-wrenching stories of having to bury their children and then return to re-parenting their orphaned grandchildren, mostly due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Under such burdens, conditions of poverty and without access to electricity, water or roads, one would think life would be unbearable. But in our short visit we realized that this was not the case with the ROTOM community. These elderly women and their children could be described as lucky, healthy, fortunate

and cared for. One hundred children of school age are now attending school, a luxury few grannies could afford before joining ROTOM. Not only did the orphaned chil-

dren receive school uniforms, workbooks and school supplies, all school fees are covered by the project. Thirty orphaned teenagers are going to vocational school while

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70 younger children attend primary school. Some of the classrooms especially at the lower levels are very large but to be in school means a hopeful future. They are the lucky ones.

The children's days were full. Often the older youth had to walk several miles to and from school, then fetch water in their jerry cans for their granny, which was often

way down in the valley, again many miles away, and then they complete their day by working in the fields and small gardens. Living on the equator the days are short and by 6:00 pm the night comes abruptly. With little light to work by, where and when do they find time to do their homework, if any? It seems that the children work hard and play little.

We had a wonderful visit to their school. It began with a boisterous welcome by the children as they sang and clapped their hands upon our arrival. In a sea of purple uniforms and short, cropped hair, hundreds of little eyes were staring at us as we walked up the pathway to their school. Tentative at first, their curiosity got the better of them as they marveled at seeing their own faces on our digital cameras.

The children cared for under ROTOM Grannies Program are all protected as well. Just recently it was found out that a young child was being abused in her neighborhood. The child was taken out of the house for a couple of days while the pepe-



Evelyn with Linda during Canadian grandmothers visit to Uganda

Prepared by Sue Cousineau, March 2008.

I am proud to be one of 5,000 Canadian grandmothers who are supporting the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign and equally proud to be chosen by the Foundation as one of the 12 Canadian grandmothers who traveled to Africa as part of the special educational and solidarity-building trip.

trator was found and the police notified. Once the individual was charged the child was returned to her granny. The word soon got out that no one abuses a ROTOM child or there will be definite consequences. Not many children living in such poverty can be assured of this protection

It is safe to say that the program has changed the lives of all involved. We know that behind every orphaned ROTOM child there is a story of loss, grief, fear and sadness. No wonder sometimes their faces are tentative and distant. Our memory of the children of Uganda, of their inquisitive,

happy, reflective little faces is indelible. They touched our heart. The disturbing fact is that there were many more children that need to be under ROTOM care as the entire region is a very impoverished area of Uganda.

As we left ROTOM we were excited to learn that the program received additional funding from the Foundation to include another 50 grannies in their program.

That meant another group of young orphaned children will be protected, cared for and fed - a small consolation in the huge HIV/AIDS pandemic.

We witnessed first-hand a community pulling together to raise a lost generation

of orphans. We heard stories of individuals overcoming extreme poverty, isolation, fear and lack of resources. As Canadian grannies we intend to share the stories of the many resilient and determined ROTOM grandmothers and their orphans, to give some insight into the realities of their lives and to demonstrate how the SLF projects are making a difference.

We were observers, we were listeners and now we are storytellers hopefully to inspire others to support the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign so that SLF can continue to help organizations like ROTOM.

A place to put one's Head by Kenneth M-ROTOM

Every one needs a decent shelter to protect them from the adverse effects of nature. Unfortunately that is not the case for many in Uganda but more so for poor older persons.

As part of our mandate, ROTOM strives to provide safe and secure housing for seniors under its programs.

In the last four years, ROTOM has provided safe and secure housing to 13 older persons and children under their care. (10 homes built and 3 rented)

The 1st senior to have a house built for her was Elizabeth back in 2002. Elizabeth had lost most of her family and was left helpless and hopeless, moreover with the responsibility of looking after two grandchildren. They lived in a house near collapse. In a country where the only insurance to old age and disability is family, she was at a dead end. In December 2002, we built a house for Elizabeth and her grandchildren with funds from friends of the ministry in the US. Since then 12 other needy seniors have received safe and secure housing with the support of ROTOM.

Another senior for whom a house was built is Regina Kalyenzo. Regina had a poorly built room in which she lived with her granddaughter. Two years ago it collapsed and they were forced to join her sister Maria and brother in law Eriya in their two room house. This was in addition to other dependants under the care of Maria and Eriya. They were all crowded into a small two room house.



Regina and her grandchild (right) her sister Maria and brother in law Eriya in front of the house built for her with support from Galloway United Methodist Church, Franklin PA

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Visit our new website:

www.reachone-touchone.org

We are still need support to complete the Administration block at ROTOM Center. We need funds for:

Plumbing and fittings.

- Internal wall finishes
- Internal Doors and window panes.
- Exterior finishes and landscaping
- Furniture and office partitioning.
- Floor finishes

The Engineer has estimated the above works to cost US\$ 39,768

To have her own strong and safe two roomed house did not only help her and her grandchild but the entire family because they now have more space. On my visit after the house was built, she was full of smiles. It was not the same Regina. For the first time she was praising God for what had happened in her life. It was life touching and life changing.

Another senior for whom a house was built by ROTOM is Augustine. In his 80s he lost all his children and grandchildren. He and his wife were left alone with the exception of one grandson. They had neither savings nor any other form of support. Their only hope had been their children and grandchildren and now all were gone. Life was hard! It was at this time that ROTOM came into their life. Augustine was enrolled into the ROTOM senior sponsorship program in 2005 and started getting regular medical help, food, weekly visits from ROTOM staff and a chance to participate in weekly Christian fellowship with other seniors. Augustine's ears had infection and after treatment and he can now hear. During this time we discovered Augustine was among the seniors without a latrine or bathroom and he was not able to build one himself. With support from the Solidarity fund of Unie KBO in Netherlands we built him as well as 10 others latrines with a bathroom. As soon as we completed the latrines, heavy rains came and a part of his old house collapsed. We knew the remaining part would collapse as soon as more rains came. The community came to his rescue and started to build a new house for him but because of lack of funds they could not complete it. It was at this time that we received a donation from Galloway United Methodist Church USA.

With this gift a new three roomed house with a store was completed.

The new house built for Augustine



Now Augustine, his wife and grand child are happy, and sheltered from the hazards.

At times the ROTOM staff have had to improvise where we have not received sufficient support for projects. One such case is George Kajubi whose house had collapsed which meant that he had no place to live, so the ROTOM Uganda staff provided all the needed labour and materials. He only had a \$100 gift available from his sponsor Pauline Kelling which was only sufficient to buy 10 sheets of tin roof. For two days the staff cut the trees for poles, cleared the ground, dug the foundation, put up the poles and the roof. We later returned for another day to fill the walls with mud. A safe and secure house was ready for him. And it was joy for us!

ROTOM Staff building a new house for Kajubi



Kajubi's old house