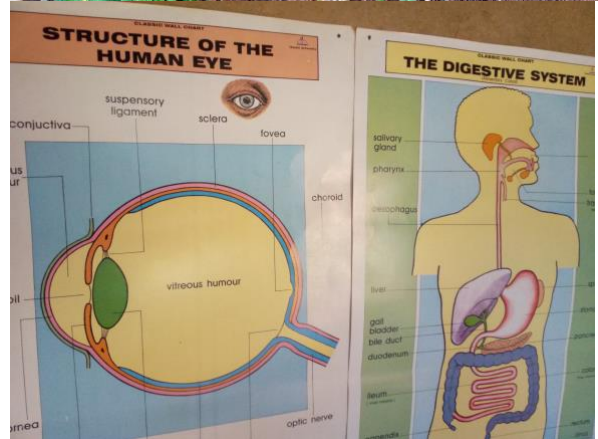




Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Kanungu Humanist Primary School Progress in the face of Covid, July 2021 by Robert Magara, School Director



Covid has robbed us of our children and staff

Kanungu Humanist Primary School opened in May this year as a not-for-profit humanist school situated in southwest Uganda in Kanungu District. Thanks to financial support from Uganda Humanist Schools Trust we have completed a fine new school and are ready to serve the children and families of our community that was so wounded by the cult church massacre of almost 800 adults and children. Unfortunately, the current Covid-induced closure of Ugandan Schools is frustrating our efforts.

For one term, during the months of May and June, we began the education of 27 boys and girls in primary four and primary five classes and things were going well. Sadly, a serious spike in the delta variant of Covid -19 brought a further national school shutdown for 42 days, which continues into August.

Recently employed staff, many recruited from Districts a long distance from Kanungu, had to return home to their families. I talk to teachers and other staff each day by phone. I remind them to take care of themselves and their families health by washing their hands with soap and, if they leave home, to avoid crowds. Emergency funds from Uganda Humanist Schools Trust have provided a lifeline, enabling us to relieve the worst hardship experienced by staff.

The lockdown followed weeks of non-adherence to Covid-19 measures by the general public and rising cases of community infections, hospitalisation, and death in the second wave of the pandemic. Covid-19 is both a painful and a solitary torment. It stigmatises infected people, who are seen as being a danger to others! The lockdown has greatly affected the livelihoods and social wellbeing of our children, teachers and parents.

In school we have washed hands, worn facemasks, and maintained safe distances. As a result, we have had no Covid cases among staff or students. However, Covid in the wider community has closed schools and workplaces and left families with no option but to stay home and keep safe. Our district Covid Task Force communicates to people in their neighbourhoods about new outbreaks, how to avoid them, signs and symptoms to look out for and what to do if they fall ill or see people with symptoms. People who come into contact with sick people are quarantined in special centres. As a result of these community measures, the incidence of Covid is falling.

Preparing for reopening

Kanungu Humanist Primary School is built on scientific foundations and embraces humanist values. During the closure, we are working hard to prepare the school for reopening. We are making the school a green and pleasant place for children and staff by planting trees and maintaining lawns and flower beds. We are making paths to prevent dirt from being walked into the classrooms. My builders have constructed a perimeter wall to prevent animals from entering the school compound to destroy fruit, medicinal and other trees we planted in 2020, in the first lockdown. In the classrooms we have made shelves where children can keep their books and bags and we are putting up educational wall charts.

What next?

We sincerely hope that children will be allowed to return to lessons once the current 42-day closure ends. A further extension of the closure would do serious damage to our children's education, to the livelihoods of staff and to the survival of our new school.

If the school closure is extended, then we shall need financial support if we are to survive:

- To make subsistence payments to teachers so they can escape serious financial hardship.
- To meet our contractual obligations to pay for rented accommodation for teachers.
- To provide home-study materials, so that children do not lose the habit of study.
- To pay for askari guards and for solar security lighting around the school to deter intruders.
- To prepare for the return of our children by ensuring there are adequate stocks of soap for hand washing and re-useable sanitary pads for our older girls.
- We also need to equip our clinic with dressings and medicines and provide an isolation room, so that we can take care of health needs.

Terri Julians in the UK, who runs the Kanungu School Facebook page, is doing her best to raise funds for the clinic as well as for educational toys and games for the younger children.

I should like to thank all supporters of Uganda Humanist Schools Trust and of Terri Julian's fundraising initiatives. Together you have transformed the quality of our infrastructure and stocks of books and learning materials. We are in a strong position to serve the children of Kanungu Community just as soon as the Covid closure ends.

Prepared by



MAGARA ROBERT
DIRECTOR

If you think you would like to help us to ensure that Kanungu Humanist Primary School survives through the pandemic then please contact stevehurd@uhst.org (01782 750338).

Donation forms can be found at: <https://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/>