

Possibilities Chairman's Report 2017

Period covered 20th May 2016 – 18th May 2017

Introductory Statement

This past year has been quite a contrasting year for Possibilities. It has been a mixed bag in terms of positives and negatives. It often feels like one step forward and two back. In truth we have accomplished many things in the past and look forward to being more successful and increasingly more strategic in the future.

The year began with hope and anticipation and drifted into despair quite quickly as yet another long period developed where it seemed not much was being achieved and the constant frustrations, often caused by being so remote – 4000 miles away, had us asking many questions.

Why do we bother? Is it worth it? What are we really achieving? and Whether we should seek another path or not?

These are very valid questions and should always be check-points for us. But when that is all that you are asking it can become a little depressing. Fortunately we end the year on a high point and approach the coming year with more enthusiasm than we had for most of it.

Website

The Possibilities website is largely unchanged. It still speaks of what we are and offers information about what we have achieved and emphasises our vision. It is time for the site to take a refresh and it is something that I will attempt this coming period.

Visits

None of the Trustees visited Uganda this past year. It was really a time of consolidation and with not a great deal of progression in any projects it was felt that we would be spending much needed resources on travel when we could be putting it to good use in Africa. This coming period Peter Gunter (Treasurer) and Marilyn Potter will visit in June and Denise and Rob Pattison (Chairman) will make a visit in October. As my eye operations are now behind me and my vision has now settled, it is a good time to resume travel as in previous years.

Groups that sponsor Possibilities

Needham Market junior choir - The Skylarks - has supported us for a few years now. The Skylarks have continued to hold raffles when they sing. They once again donated some fundraising from their Christmas concert to Possibilities.

Links and Partners

SPAU We continue to work closely with Paul Lwanga and the team at Spau (Single Parents Association of Uganda)

Fundraising

Major Specific Events

2016

June - Raft Race

July - Fun Summer Drive (Cancelled due to bad weather).

October - Charity Quiz

November – Bead Workshop

December – Bead Workshop

SkyLarks Children's Choir Christmas concert

Christmas Market – Needham Market
2017

March 10 Green Bottles Wine Tasting

Craft / Possibilities with Beads

Denise organised and made some Christmas decorations sourced with African beads. These were popular and were sold at various events and individually to friends and acquaintances. We still have a stock of crafts that we'd like to sell. This past year we have refrained yet again from attending too many craft fairs and places where we could set up a stall and raise funds from craft sales. The sheer time commitment for not a great financial return has convinced us to rest from this kind of activity at the moment.

SPAU

Spau are managing the Ensigno Y'O mucungwa / Malangata project for us. Paul Lwanga has been project manager at Malangata. He has been very unwell this year and he is undergoing investigation by the hospital. This has hampered what he has been able to achieve for us.

Possibilities for Children

This has been a particularly harrowing year for our activities with Children. Two children that we have cared for over many years have had difficulties that we have been unable to deal with at such a distance. It was with great sadness that we learned of the tragic death of Pauline in a road accident. It was a tragic occurrence and hit us hard. Joan has left the school and not been seen again. This is a common occurrence in Uganda and as there are limited child services in the country, children can easily disappear for a length of time or altogether. For young girls in their teens in this culture it is not uncommon for them to fall pregnant or to be taken as a wife. That means their education ceases and they sever ties with their birth family. Because of the breakup of family life as we recognise it, the family ties are often not that strong. Children are not therefore, that integrated well into a family unit. With the children that we have served, it is often the case that they have no strong roots and therefore can easily be enticed or taken from their established setting.

To be hit with these two episodes in the one year has been a difficult blow to take.

We currently pay for 10 Children's education. Benedicta's heart for children always pushes the boundaries of what we can afford. There have been some tough conversations, as we both have had to disappoint children. We cannot keep paying for all the children that she finds. Benedicta's organisation has managed to find other sponsors for 5 other children. That makes her responsible for 14 and in association with many others.

It is a constant battle with our consciences for these children. We are not in favour of boarding schools but in this culture it is the norm and in many situations it is arguably a better prospect for the children. The parents are driven to extremely long hours of work or children are surrogate parents to younger siblings, or they suffer abuse at the hands of family members or family friends. So boarding school can be seen as a very poor but more favourable option. Boarding schools can of course also be a problem as this kind of environment is proven to be an abusive environment the world over. It is with a heavy heart that we have to sometimes accept that boarding school is a safer place for the children.

We pay for their schooling as well as for breakfast and lunch at the school. We are responsible for Margret, Angel, Jacqui, Florence, Kenneth, Justine, Victoria, Sissy Lydia and Juliet.

Our responsibility will cease for the children at age 18 or at the end of their mainstream education. As the children grow older their education increases in cost, university will stretch our resources too far.

We currently have several individual sponsors (always more needed) the rest is made up from general funds.

Possibilities with Goats

It has been decided that the goat project should be closed and the goats sold to fund the purchase of a herd of pigs. This is considered a better prospect for giving a start to many and will hopefully be better at returning a profit to re-invest in the Malangata project.

Malangata

TfSR

The building is to be used by SPAU. They will be running 2 courses funded by TfSR (Tools for Self-Reliance). They will be funding two training courses, one for building, and one for tailoring. Funding arrived in April 2017 and the courses began immediately.

Spau have employed a man named Ezekiel who is to manage the project at Malangata. We contribute to Spau's funds to allow them to employ him. He comes with good references. Our initial contact through Spau has been good. He seems to be aware of what we need and expect from the project. He has a university degree in agriculture and appears to understand how to get the best from the plot.

Spau still employ Charles as a caretaker at Malangata.

Footnote

The fraudsters that stole money from Possibilities via Benedicta last year have been caught and brought to justice. They are paying back what they had stolen over time. This will release a little pressure on school fees and other responsibilities that we have in Uganda

Rob Pattison

18 May 2017