

From a Flashlight to a Fellowship

Written by Earle Newton for the Rotary Clubs of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

This inspiring story begins in rural Uganda in 1994. Joy Kagira, a midwife, asked her daughter, Maureen, to hold the flashlight, without looking, during a birth. Maureen did as she was told and helping children became the focus of her life as a teenager, a mother and a business owner in Uganda. After moving to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada in 2004 she was desperate to raise funds for what had become Joy's Centre back in the village. During this time she met some members of the Rotary Club of Saskatoon who offered her support even before she joined the Club. I met her in a shopping mall handing out brochures. Having done world community service in several countries I became her assistant. We spent two summers in the village but finding good water and looking after the children was too much until one day we said, "Why don't we apply for a Global Grant?" We did and just this month we were informed by the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International that the final report had been accepted and the project was considered closed! In recognition of her leadership and commitment, her Rotary Club awarded Maureen Torr a Paul Harris Fellowship.



Filling Station



Maureen Torr

In what follows the special features of the Global Grant, the terms under which the government of Canada provided support, and the outstanding work of Rotarians at all levels are shared. In conclusion you are told how you can get a glimpse of a village revitalized.

It all started with us doing workshops in Buremba, the village where Maureen was raised, in the summers of 2016 and 2017. The focus was on how school staff and villagers can work together to make life better. This was vocational service for both as Maureen was President of Joy's Centre and in my career as an educator I had co-authored a book called "Voices, Vision and Vitality". We learned that the first priority of the people was to have good drinking water. We also realized that water projects were a top priority of Rotarians in Uganda. During the second trip we had a visit with James Nkooka, an engineer who chaired the committee

responsible for all Rotary grant money coming into the district.

Our first challenge was to visit each of the 5 Rotary clubs in the city to raise the \$10,000 US to qualify for a grant application. We had some good fortune because 2019 was the celebration of 100 years of Rotary in Saskatoon and Rotarians wanted to do something special. We had a power point and our story. To the credit of all, by Christmas we had the support we needed. The Rotary Club of Saskatoon



took the lead. President, Mark Gryba, became International Contact. District 5550 provided \$15,000 and their expertise especially in transferring funds. We also realized that the government of Canada would support some Rotary projects related to the environment, gender issues and good governance. At first there was concern that digging a well would damage the environment but Dr. Emmanuel Kasimbazi, whom we had met in Uganda, prepared a very scholarly, 24 page, report on environmental regulations at every level from local to international. With that support Rotary Canada leaders decided to give it a try and see what could be learned. There was another challenge as Rotarians had usually been advised that a grant should have one area of focus – we had water/ sanitation and the three priorities of the Canadian Government! We were grateful, however, to have another \$25,000. We also had excellent support and advice from The Rotary International Regional Grants Officer for Uganda and our application was approved with a total of \$82,500 US.

The host Rotary Club of Mbarara got this project off to an exciting start by donating 1,100 seedling trees to be planted by all of the partners including students from Joy's Centre. Local horticulturalists had made plans and holes were dug. The day went very well and ended with a BBQ. It was fully realized that day, though, that the 3 hour drive for the host Rotarians was long!

Early in the project we had a major challenge, however, as the well drilling produced only a dry hole. This turned out to be very serious with questions of liability, hydrological surveys and delay. Incoming Rotary presidents wondered what would happen next! Months later a second well was dug at a different location with a good supply of water at 150 meters! The second big challenge was COVID. Joy's Centre schooling had to be shut down. Maureen, who spent over a year on site, got COVID and was on a respirator! In all of this Rotarians at every level in Uganda were amazing. For example, Allan Asingwire, President of the RC of Mbarara when we started later became Host Contact. Ambrose Owoesigire submitted progress reports and the final report to Rotary

International. All others contributed beyond measure to meet challenges as they occurred. Rotarians at all levels worked together with commitment and strong leadership.



The Water Holding Tank



Students after menstrual hygiene awareness seminar

Readers may be wondering which of Rotary's Areas of Focus have been addressed by this Global Grant. We started with the two summer workshops on school improvement at Joy's Centre. In rural areas particularly, schools and community are dependent on each other so we were into basic education, literacy and community development right from the start. The greatest need was found to be water and sanitation. As mentioned earlier, we had to have a major report done about how to dig a well and keep any damage to environmental health



to a minimum. At this stage it was again realized that the project offered ideal opportunities for student learning so the Head Master and teachers made a commitment to integrate activities with the school curriculum. An example is “Days for Girls” as apart of sanitation and health. Attention to organizational health was required to manage the grant and to provide sustainability. With all of these considerations we decided that the tittle for this project should be “Joy’s Holistic Health”. It can be seen that projects such as this address several areas of focus and are therefore more difficult to manage. The integrated outcomes make a major impact, however, with promise for years to come.

This development was inspired was by Joy Kagira. The children at Joy’s Centre inspire us day by day with what we see on Facebook at “Joys Centre Corporation”. We realize now more than ever what new Canadians have to offer to Rotary and to the global community by remembering what has been done by Maureen Alice Torr as she moved from holding a flashlight to PHF.

Learn more about Joy’s Center here: <https://joyscenter.org/our-history/>