

Peace House creates possibilities in Tanzania

A Minnesota entrepreneur uses his economic success to change lives half a world away by offering high-quality education to dirt-poor students in the East African nation.

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ARUSHA, TANZANIA — Francisca is beaming. She has just solved a troubling geometry question, with a bit of guidance in Swahili and English from her teacher at Peace House Secondary School. The 16-year-old breaks into a smile so big, both rows of her teeth show.

“She’s good in class, a fast learner,” says headmistress Theopista Seuya.

Two months earlier, Francisca Anania Kimario’s future held little of this brightness. It most certainly didn’t include going to school.

Abandoned at birth by her father, Francisca lost her mother to AIDS when she was 2. As so often happens to Africa’s orphans, Francisca was passed around to relatives who barely had enough money to feed their own children, much less someone else’s. Francisca suffered beatings and threats, and made it through primary school only after nuns at a nearby Catholic church offered to pay for it.

Now Francisca is one of 210 AIDS orphans and vulnerable children attending the Peace House Secondary School, a co-ed boarding school in north-eastern Tanzania built by an Eden Prairie nonprofit, Peace House Africa.

By offering a free, world-class education to the kids least likely to get one, the organization is on a single-minded pursuit to turn Tanzania’s outcasts into future inventors and business owners.

“Most of these kids would have been on the streets,” says Seuya, who is quick with a hug but expects good manners and good grades above all else. “Now they are getting such beautiful things, using very high-quality materials, and getting a high quality education. This is given to kids who had no hope, who had nowhere to go.”

Peace House Africa grew out of an informal group of parishioners at Peace Lutheran Church in Bloomington who, in the late-1990s, wanted to respond to the AIDS pandemic roaring through sub-Saharan Africa. Their idea to educate AIDS orphans quickly grew beyond the church’s borders. By 2001, it had evolved into an independent, non-evangelical, non-profit foundation.

The organization began funding scholarships in 2001, but last September it threw open the doors to its own facility, the Peace House Secondary School. Located in the shadow of Mount Meru in Arusha, the school sits on 100 acres donated by the government to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania.

With a library, science lab, acreage used to grow food and eventually raise cattle, the \$4 million, 22-building campus rivals some of the best schools in the country, including universities. The environmentally friendly construction is something of a classroom itself. Rainwater is captured in nearly three dozen 50,000-liter drums. Solar



Jackie Crosby, Star Tribune

Students at the Peace House Secondary School in Arusha, Tanzania, headed back to the dorms after class. Built and operated by an Eden Prairie-based foundation, the school for AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children aims to train the students to become future business leaders. It opened in September 2007.



panels heat the water and provide power. About 30 percent of the cooking will be powered with biogas from sewer and other means, and some water will get recycled for irrigation.

When students first arrived on campus, some stuffed food in their pockets, not trusting that it — or they — would be there the next day. Others asked how many people would be sharing their bunk beds. Instead of sitting in classrooms jammed with 70 to 100 students who scrimped for paper, pencils and books, the well-stocked and freshly painted classrooms seated 40 kids, and the teacher actually stayed in the classroom with them.

The secondary school is the pearl of the operation. But efforts are underway to raise money for the next phase, a \$6 million postsecondary institute that will also draw engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs from around the world to do technology research and develop businesses appropriate for Africa’s economy.

“Only 2 to 3 percent of Tanzanian kids graduate from secondary school,” said Scott Augustine, a Minnesota medical products entrepreneur whose own foundation funded most of the construction of the school and will be a major contributor for the institute. “And even at that, many can’t find a job that uses their secondary education. It’s a subsistence agricultural economy with a little bit of tourism and that’s about all.”

“We started saying, ‘We’ve got to teach them how to create jobs,’” he said. “Let’s put a curriculum together focusing on entrepreneurial business with a special emphasis on science, technology and manufacturing.”



Jackie Crosby, Star Tribune

Teacher Raymond Mtazama reviews math assignments with students at Peace House Secondary School.

Augustine spent seven years of his youth living in the bush of central Tanzania, where his father, a Lutheran missionary, taught math and science at a training school for teachers. Augustine returned to the states for high school and medical school. He and his wife, Sue, returned to Tanzania briefly in 1979 after he wrapped up a six-month stint working at a jungle hospital in Liberia.

Augustine worked for years as an anesthesiologist but found greater financial success as an inventor, including developing a warming blanket that became the world standard in operating rooms. He sold that company to Citigroup Venture Capital Equity Partners for an undisclosed sum in 2004.

Walk into the business he now runs with two of his three sons, Augustine Biomedical + Design, and it's not hard to see why he places such a premium on creative thinking for the students in Tanzania. A two-story wall is covered with a portion of the more than 150 patents he has to his name.

"If Africa's problems are going to get solved, it's going to be brain power that does it," he said. "If we can get American business people, American scientists, graduate and undergraduate students to go over there and dive into these problems, and help them make sustainable businesses and create jobs, then we can accomplish something real."

Room for 1 in 10

Tanzania, slightly larger than California, is home to about 40 million people. It has had a relatively stable government since independence from Britain in 1961, but some 40 percent of its national budget is funded through outside aid. More than a third of the population lives below the poverty line and 1 in 25 has HIV, significantly less than some African nations but far higher than in industrialized countries.

In 2005, 12 percent of the country's children under 18 had lost a mother or father or both to AIDS — about 2 million children. That number is expected to double by 2010.

Orphans and vulnerable children are easily exploited. It's not unusual for a young girl to be sold into marriage for the price of a cow. The children often are forced into child labor or prostitution, and risk drug and alcohol abuse, as well as HIV infection. Few have the means or opportunity to go to school or get vocational skills to help them support themselves. But while the government mandates that all students attend primary school, a British-based education system that's the rough U.S. equivalent of first through sixth grades, half of kids still don't finish.

The country's secondary schools, which charge tuition, only have room for 10 percent of the kids, Augustine said. The foundation's initial aid efforts, which continue today, focused on giving

scholarships to street kids, and the prime seats weren't going to orphans.

"Then we said, 'If we build it, we can also run it,' so that hopefully the kids that graduate will have skills that can actually sustain them," he said.

Teachers at Peace House Secondary are trying to move beyond the traditional Tanzanian style of teaching, which is heavy on memorization and light on critical thinking. As required by law, students must take 11 subjects, and go to class from 7:40 a.m. to 3:50 p.m. They learn for the first time in English, after having spoken the national language of Swahili throughout primary school.

Nearly every activity is turned into a teaching opportunity. Kids work on bikes and cars and learn how to make yogurt so that they might one day sell to safari companies or tourist hotels. An REI manager from Minnesota came to the school recently to lead students on a camping trip up Mount Longito. Besides the adventure, it exposed them to future jobs as mountain guides.

Physical and emotional problems

Tanzanians and Minnesotans agree that achieving the school's goals will take time. Many of the students have significant physical and emotional problems that even food, shelter and caring adults can't ease.

Francisca is of them. Since arriving at the school in June, she has had several seizure-like episodes. She refused to eat and was caught running in the night. Francisca's primary caregiver, an ailing grandmother, was so worried that she showed up unannounced at the school one day. It likely took days for her to make the journey from her wood-and-cardboard shed deep in the Tanzanian countryside, about a half hour's car ride outside of Arusha.

Peace House is working to expand its list of major donors beyond the Augustine Family Foundation, whose goal always has been to invest heavily at the front end, and back off once the projects get up and running.

Macy's made Peace House the beneficiary of its flower show in 2007 and contributed \$10,000, enough to sponsor 10 students for a year. One family contributed \$300,000 for the library. Peace House recently received a half-million-dollar grant from USAID for the next phase of construction at the secondary school and has applied for a science foundation grant with Michigan Tech for the postsecondary institute.

The foundation, which holds a benefit Saturday, has raised \$400,000 in pledges this year, and its volunteer base of 2,500 households is growing, said Peace House Africa's executive director, Doug Nethercut.

A fundraising climb up Mount Kilimanjaro is being planned for February.



Provided by Scott Augustine

Sue and Scott Augustine

are full, Peace House Secondary, which will cost \$640,000 to run this year, will have about 700 students, with room to grow if needed.

Come June, another group of about 120 hopeful students will arrive at the school. The older students will offer assurances that the food and shelter will be there, day after day. Francisca and her classmates will move on to higher grades.

When all six levels