

A Visit from Minnesota

Tim Krohn is an HMI friend and supporter from Cloquet MN. After running a marathon in South Africa, he made a side-trip to Uganda to visit the Blue House in Kazo. He and his daughter, Dr. Kristina Krohn, had visited in 2009 when she was doing a medical school project in Uganda.



Tim kept a journal of his visit from June 28 to July 4, 2011. This time he was travelling with a Ugandan friend named Santa, and was escorted by Aine, the Blue House Director. Following are excerpts of some of Tim's observations. A shorter version appeared in the Summer 2011 *Beatrice's Hope* newsletter.

Arrival

The distance from Entebbe to Kazo was 205 miles the short way, or 250 miles the long way, and 125 miles as the crow flies. It is a long day's drive without any stops, and much longer with stops.

Along the way from Entebbe to Kazo we stopped at an open-air roadside vegetable market and bought watermelon, bananas, mangos, and another fruit.

We arrived in Kazo late on Tuesday, which was market day, so we drove through the market. I had always wondered where the rural people bought things since the shops had a very limited selection of goods. There were people everywhere in the road and among the vendors. One vendor sold cooking utensils and fancy dishes spread out on blankets on the ground, like all other goods at the market.

At the Blue House we went to Aine's office and talked for a while about the girls' future, mostly about what kind of continuing education they should receive. The three oldest girls have finished secondary school and could benefit from some vocational training to become independent adults.

A Tour of the Blue House

I met Kabarungi Penlope, the new housemother. We began by touring the new dormitory, which has two wings for sleeping and one central area for eating, gathering, and studying. The dorm rooms each had two bunk beds and housed 4 girls. One older girl was assigned to each dorm room to look after three younger girls.

The beds were plainly, solidly and well built, with storage bins under each bunk. Two 2-story cabinets and a countertop desk completed the room furnishings. Twenty-four girls were living in the Blue House at the time. The plan is have 44 girls.

We then toured the shower, toilet, kitchen, and generator buildings. Some of the unused bricks were being used to make a "paved" pathway from the dorm to the showers. The showers consisted of 8 3- by 5-foot stalls with a 6-foot wide central area. To take a shower one must heat water on the fire in the kitchen and carry it in an 18-inch diameter washbasin to the showers. Water was not piped to the showers. The shower consisted of splashing water on yourself.

The toilet building had 8 3-foot by 5-foot stalls with a 9-by 8-inch hole near the center of each stall. Toilet paper was located on a piece of plastic outside of every other stall. A washbasin with jug of water for hand washing was provided just outside the building.

There were two "kitchens." The first had 3 rooms: the general preparation room, storeroom, and generator room. The storeroom had gunnysacks full of peanuts, millet, and beans that Aine bought during the harvest season when prices were typically at their lowest.

The second kitchen was built after the other construction was completed. A fire was built in one corner of the room with 6 rocks, 3 per pot, to hold the cooking pots above the fire. Water for dishes was boiled over the fire and taken outside to the wash area next to an outdoor wooden dish drying and storage rack.

Water collection from the roof, underground water storage, and a water tap from the underground water storage were all working well.

I did a tour of the gardens with Penlope. They grew mainly corn, sweet potatoes, peanuts, and cassava. I learned that sweet potatoes were propagated with cuttings from the green stem after the tuber is harvested. They were mostly self sufficient in these crops.

Aine hired a man, Ivan, from Kampala to build shelves for the Blue House library (which will also be a sewing room when we buy sewing machines for the girls). Aine bought the boards, which were delivered to the Blue House via boda-boda, a motorbike taxi.

Ivan used a cross cut bow saw to make the boards the right size, and made the joints with a hammer and chisel. He assembled them with nails and glue. Then the unit was carried to the library and mounted on the wall, where Ivan hand sanded the boards without even a sanding block. He smoothed the boards relatively nicely and then varnished them.

After the tour we walked the perimeter of the property. I used my GPS to determine the area of the property, which was just over 9 acres. They have nice black rich soil and a spring on one side of the property.

Life in the Blue House

We bought some watermelon, pineapple, and papaya for the girls for dinner. I had some fruit and millet porridge for my supper.

Meals were filling, but of limited variety. At the Blue House the girls got cooked plantains, millet, rice, and beans on a very consistent basis. Lunch was a plate of rice and beans. Supper was rice, beans, plantains, and sweet potatoes. Meat and fruit such as watermelon, bananas and mangos were served on weekends. They did not have liquids with the two meals I saw. I was told they get liquids (water) elsewhere.

After dinner we distributed the clothes I brought the girls from Minnesota. Santa also gave a bag full of clothes. The girls were thrilled to receive this shipment. They giggled most for the clothes that really appealed to them. However, we should not send large and extra large sizes since the girls are small. Aine and Penlope both gave a moving speech for the girls.

Aine works many long hours. He does his computer work (in his Blue House office) at night to conserve fuel and make use of the generator when it's running for lights.

Schools

We visited the primary school the younger girls go to, which has 850 students. A desk unit was a 4- to 5-foot long bench seat with an 18" wide and same length desk top attached to the bench. Usually 4 students shared a desk and sometimes 5 if they were young and small.

The lowest grades had dirt floors and many of the children were bare foot. The first 3 grades were taught in the local language with English as a subject. The upper grades were taught in English with a very heavy Ugandan accent.

Some of the subject matter I saw being taught were slavery, math, English, geography, HIV, and drugs (the good kind). This is from what was written on the blackboard and wall posters.

We met with the headmaster, the head of academics, the Blue House girls' teachers, and the girls. The adults all gave a short talk about how good the girls were, how good the Blue House was taking care of them, and how they need to apply themselves.

The headmaster told Aine that the girls could borrow books from the school to use to study at night, and return them at the end of the term. He also shared with us the results of the national exam of the 7th grade class, which is the highest level of the school. There were a hand full of 1's and about two-thirds with 2's. In Uganda scores are grouped into divisions numbered one through four, with one being the highest. Santa was pleased to see the high number of 2's and above.

We visited the Mazorid Vocational School for girls, which may be an option for the older Blue House girls who cannot go to college. It is run by a Catholic order of nuns with some government support. Sewing, computer use/typing, and secretary skills were taught for a 2-year certificate. The sewing machines, the old fashion treadle-type, don't need electricity.

It costs \$200/term (3 terms each year), including room and board. A high dropout rate was due to students not able to afford the costs.

We also visited Kazo Modern School, a private school owned by a Ugandan man. We talked with him about landscaping. He sounded quite knowledgeable on the subject. For example, he choose a fan palm to be near the administration building because its roots would not spread and damage the building, it would not require daily maintenance sweeping up leaves, and it provided a see-through screen. Other trees would provide a place for students to sit and talk in their shade.

A Board Meeting

We met with 4 of the Ugandan board members to discuss projects, including:

- 2 cows to provide milk for the girls -- The land owned by the Blue House could support 2 cows (1.5 acres/cow/year).
- Fixing the fence -- Repairs were needed with double strand wire to keep cows on the property.
- Landscaping the compound – Plantings will make the place look nice and will stop and prevent erosion.
- An exit policy for the grown-up girls – The girls should know what to expect when they become young adults; they will need training or education beyond secondary school, and skills that fit their abilities to support themselves.
- Sewing machines -- Foot pedal powered machines at \$120 each would provide the girls with a life skill and possibly employment as adults.
- Assistants for the housemother and cook who are on the job 24/7/365, which means job burn out can easily happen.

Some other projects and needs that they were discussing:

- Solar panels may replace the gas/diesel generator, which was noisy and fuel was expensive, but currently the only way to provide electricity a few hours at night.

There were examples of solar power use in Kazo and Uganda, so it was an accepted technology.

- Inflation was very high in Uganda. The price of food had more than doubled in a very short time and wages had not kept up. The exchange rate from dollars to shillings had gone from 2000 sh to 2700 sh per dollar.

Home Visits

We visited two homes, one of a new girl at the orphanage and the other of a girl who will be coming next month. The first home was maybe 10 to 20 miles away from Kazo. The guardian was a single woman living in a mud hut 9 feet in diameter with a poorly thatched roof with holes in it. A mud brick wall divided it into a living space and a bedroom. Four children were staying with her. She had a subsistence farm on two small parcels of land, growing plantains, corn, and beans. When food from her crops ran out she would work in other people's gardens.

The second home we visited was of a girl who will go to the Blue House next month. It was nearby Kazo. We walked the last half mile along a footpath to the home. The mother was mentally ill and we found her sitting on the dirt floor of her home talking but not making too much sense. Six children ranged in age from 4 or 5 to early 20's. The twenty-something came to the Blue House asking for help for her younger siblings. Their father died in 2007; he had been a hard worker. They appeared to be subsistence farmers. The main house had 3 rooms - a living room and 2 bedrooms.

The Kazo Community

We drove over to the dam that held water for Kazo's water supply for bathing, cooking, laundry, and drinking, depending one's income level. Poor people used this water for everything. Those better off, or organizations such as the Blue House or the Catholic school, also used water from a roof drainage-storage tank system for drinking and cooking.

Kazo is building a municipal water system that stopped about a quarter mile from the Blue House. The pipe extension will need to be paid for by those who want it, at some undetermined rate.

We also visited the Kazo health clinic where one of the Blue House board members worked. We met with the head of the lab who showed us around. The lab manager was quite proud of the microscope given to them by the parents of the Peace Corps Volunteer who also worked in the lab. They had a decent program of managing HIV.

Outdoors a sign asked if you used a malaria net. A shelf with a door contained free condoms. Scattered throughout the compound were painted signs promoting various

health issues. One sign stated, "avoid queer touches" with a picture of a man grabbing the crotch of a teen boy. Another said "friendship doesn't mean sex," while a third stated "Malaria kills more people than HIV."

Leaving

Santa and I said our goodbyes to the Blue House girls and with Aine, began the trip back to Entebbe. Aine's mother, a Blue House board member, her 6-year old daughter, and Ivan who made the library shelves, also came with us. That meant that 5 people were in the back seat meant for 2 comfortably or 3 with a minor squeeze.

The road from Kazo to Ibanda was being upgraded from unpaved to paved. Ibanda to Mbarara had a nicely paved road, while the road from Mbarara was also being worked on.

We stopped for lunch in Mbarara for some local food in a restaurant on the main street. It cost sh 25000 (\$10) for 5. At a fancy restaurant where there were a good number Ugandans in suits, the entrée cost sh 15000 (\$6) for one.

See more about the Blue House and photos by Tim and Aine at www.HopeMultipurpose.org.