

BOOK REVIEW - THE PRICE OF STONES: BUILDING A SCHOOL FOR MY VILLAGE

By Twesigye Jackson Kaguri, with Susan Urbanek Linville (Viking Adult, 2010)

Reviewed by Dianne Rush Woods, Ph.D., California State University, East Bay

The Price of Stones: Building a School for My Village answers the question, "Can one individual make a difference?" Authored by Twesigye Jackson Kaguri, the director of development at Michigan State University, and a son of Uganda, this autobiography chronicles his passionate and creative response to the catastrophic effect of HIV/AIDS on AIDS orphans.

Kaguri, born in poverty, moves out of poverty through education and does what many cannot do. He takes minimal resources and leverages them bit by bit, stone by stone, into education, social service and community-building programs for the region surrounding his home village of Nyakagezezi. This is the account of the founding of the Nyaka AIDS Orphan School in the Harlem Zone of Uganda, by Kaguri and his wife, Beronda.

Following the loss of his brother and sister to AIDS (an illness nicknamed "slim" in Uganda), Kaguri vows to do something for AIDS orphans in the region. This task is all the more compelling because there is no extensive social welfare system for children in Uganda. In Ugandan culture, the family takes care of the children of deceased family members. This basic social welfare system was compromised when whole families died and left children to the care of their grandparents or, worse yet, to the streets. Kaguri started a day school for AIDS orphans in Nyakagezezi with \$5,000 of his own money. However, starting the school was complicated because there were so many unmet needs.

Students needed clean water, so Kaguri developed a gravity-fed water system, which not only helped the school, but also the village and the surrounding region. Because children were hungry and falling asleep in class, the school began a nutrition program and a community garden. Nurses, hired to support

student health, soon moved into the community to work with families. They also helped pregnant mothers with childbirth. Children who needed a place to live were provided foster care. Scholarships were provided to those students who moved on to secondary school and the University. An increasingly literate community required and eventually received a library. The unmet and unanticipated needs of the children and their community were assessed and met when possible.

This is the story of an individual who, like pioneering social worker Jane Addams, stood at the nexus of change and was brave enough to start putting the pieces together, stone by stone. In 1911, Addams used her resourceful nature to open Hull House to recently arrived European immigrants. In January 2003, Kaguri used his resourcefulness to start a school that has grown into a life-supporting institution for 200 AIDS orphans.

Like Addams, Kaguri made speeches about the needs of the children, the village, and the region; raised money; convinced foundations and government agencies to help; convinced young people to volunteer at the school as interns; addressed public health issues plaguing the community; listened to concerns of troubled community members; and helped the grannies who had buried their children and were now raising their grandchildren.

Can one person make a difference? Yes, he can!

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