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## STARS OVER AFRICA: A VOLUNTEER'S JOURNEY

*As a middle school student in New Jersey, Cate Connor founded a school talent show that raised thousands of dollars for Awegys School in Uganda, helping to provide Awegys with a library, a well for water, equipment for the school clinic, and much more. Recently, as a college student, Cate traveled to Uganda to see the programs she has spent years supporting. This is her story.*

I first learned about the outreach Mtaala Foundation had in Uganda when I was in middle school. At the time, I was missing many school days due to a chronic illness, so I had a good deal of time on my hands.

I created a fundraiser for students as part of a school project to raise money for our peers in Africa. I was inspired by my teacher Gretchen [Seibert, Mtaala board member] when she showed me pictures of her travels in Uganda with family and local students. At that moment, I knew my dream, Stars Over Africa, would benefit the students of Awegys. Gretchen and I worked together for a year planning the talent show: organizing auditions, then selecting student performers, and crew. Nine years ago, the first show was a huge success! Now, Stars Over Africa is an annual event at Rosa International Middle School and I am humbled that it continues without my help.

As Gretchen and others involved with this amazing school can attest, a heartfelt symbiotic relationship evolved over the years. In high school, I organized writing Christmas cards to the students with my church youth group and we read the online student profiles. Like students here, they desired to become nurses, social workers, and teachers. I continued to support Stars Over Africa during high school even though my health had worsened. I dreamed of someday traveling to meet these amazing students. I felt a certain camaraderie as we both were struggling, albeit in very different ways, to achieve an education.

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## FINDING HOPE IN EDUCATION

*Written by Okello Deogratus who, with Mtaala's support, currently attends Mtaala's partner school, Awegys Comprehensive Secondary School in Kigo, Uganda.*



I am Okello Deogratus, a 17-year-old boy in form five. I joined Awegys three years ago, after a chance for sponsorship came my way.

After losing my parents, paying my tuition was an uphill task. My guardian labored hard to allow me to study and become someone in the future. She tried to keep me in school but she simply couldn't give anymore when I joined high school. I lost hope of every studying anymore in life.

I prayed to God and he saw my ambition and the hard work of my guardian. I got a chance to join Awegys School on a sponsorship from the Mtaala Foundation. Thanks to the Mtaala Foundation, I have reached Senior Five in school. I now have the hope of completing my secondary education, which I thought could not happen in my life. The school has helped me to acquire life skills like computer literacy, carpentry, and tailoring. Through all these, I can earn a living and support my family.

I am so grateful to my sponsor who tirelessly gives all her efforts for my welfare at school. I am indebted to every effort dispensed by the Mtaala Foundation for the welfare of every student at Awegys School.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Okello Deogratus

## SPOTLIGHT ON A STUDENT

**NAME:** Daniel O.

**AGE:** 19

**GRADE:** S-I



**ABOUT:** Daniel lives with his mother and five siblings. His father passed away from HIV/AIDS when Daniel was three years old. His mother, too, is ill with HIV/AIDS. Because his family could not afford tuition, only two of his siblings completed secondary school. His mother grows crops to provide for the family, but her illness has made it difficult for her to do so. In his free time, Daniel loves playing soccer and reading novels.

**FAVORITE SUBJECT:** English

**DREAMS OF:** Becoming a journalist so he can speak out on behalf of Uganda's orphans

To become a sponsor, visit us online at [www.mtaala.org](http://www.mtaala.org).

## UPDATE ON THE CLINIC

In 2014, Mtaala constructed the Thomas Fest Community Clinic at Awegys School; it serves as the only health clinic in the surrounding village of Kigo. Mtaala board member Bob Fest, who spearheaded fundraising for the clinic, recently visited Uganda. During his trip, he had the opportunity to see the clinic in action as health care workers administered approximately 100 tetanus vaccinations, 250 HPV vaccinations, and 200 deworming treatments to students and local children. The clinic is also currently working towards certification as a maternity ward and continues to provide regular care to both local residents and Awegys students.

After seeing the work of the clinic and being welcomed at Awegys School, Fest says, "It was a humbling experience to be shown so much love and appreciation. I feel like I'm not doing enough."



Above: The Thomas Fest Community Clinic in Kigo, Uganda.  
Right: Medications are prepared at the clinic. Photos by Bob Fest

## UGANDA GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

This fall, Uganda went to Hollywood with the release of Disney feature film *Queen of Katwe*. Set in the slums of Katwe on the outskirts of Kampala, Uganda, the film tells the true story of 10-year-old Phiona Mutesi (played by Madina Nalwanga) as she struggles to make a life with her mother, Harriet Nakku (Lupita Nyong'o). Phiona soon meets Robert Katende (David Oyelowo), who teaches children to play chess at a local missionary program. Under Katende's guidance, Phiona not only learns the game, but soon becomes a top player, finding success in international competitions and competing at the World Chess Olympiads.

The film is based on the book *The Queen of Katwe: A Story of Life, Chess, and One Extraordinary Girl's Dream of Becoming a Grandmaster* by Tim Crothers. And while Phiona's achievements are extraordinary, her struggle to reach them is all too common. Nearly 40% of the country earns less than \$1.25 per day, and even those living above the poverty line often face tremendous challenges (UN). Girls in particular are at risk of dropping out of school. With the support of the Mtaala Foundation, Awegys Secondary School works to reach students affected by these very statistics, recognizing the power in education.



## STARS OVER AFRICA *continued from pg. 1*

After high school, I decided to take a break from school so I could travel around the world. I worked several jobs for a year, saving for my journey. I had a few places in mind that I wanted to visit, but Awegys School was top on my list. I arrived in Uganda the day after my 21st birthday, eleven months into my trip. Conceptually, I knew what to expect based on my many discussions with Gretchen; it promised to be different and exciting. I witnessed motor bikes weaving through traffic in what looked like dangerous patterns, and armed guards outside every shopping center. The cultural immersion was incredible. Well-dressed men preached the bible in the streets; children begged for food, water, and money; women balanced baskets topped with fruit on their heads.

The next day, we visited Awegys school. My anticipation and excitement were palpable as we drove down the dirt road. For years, I had seen pictures of Awegys, but in person I felt overwhelmed with the beauty and serenity of the compound. I was awestruck with the beautiful, shy faces that were looking at me. As I walked around the classrooms, lab, library, dorms, water well, and clinic, I was so overtaken with gratitude. Gratitude for the illness that led me to create *Stars Over Africa*, and for the series of circumstances that landed my feet on the ground of that incredible country.

During one of my visits, the students performed traditional songs and dances. Another time, they held a handball match, some races, and a soccer game. Their fellowship and team spirit was infectious. One time some of the girls demonstrated how to peel matooke (plantains) and make traditional Ugandan dishes. We laughed together as I easily took twice as much time to peel one fruit as they did. I also met with the Arts teacher, who showed me the collages, sculptures, and textiles the students had created for class.

What impressed me the most? Awegys interdisciplinary educational style. I found it ingenious and think many American schools could take a lesson from them. The students are not only equipped with lessons in English, mathematics, and science, but they are also taught entrepreneurial skills to help pay for their books and uniforms during school holidays. This gives them the freedom to take charge of their education.

Above all, I enjoyed talking with the students. We are the same in so many ways even though our cultures differ greatly. We discussed our goals and appreciation for the opportunities that would help us attain them. I feel blessed to have had the privilege of sharing in their lives and will cherish these memories always.

— Cate Connor



*Cate Connor, Mtaala volunteer, sits with Awegys students and Awegys school founder Alice Wegoye on her recent trip to the school in Uganda. Photo by Cate Connor*



*Mtaala Country Director Agnes Nabulo stands in front of the library (under construction), which was built with funds raised by Stars Over Africa. Photo by Cate Connor*



*Students at Awegys study at the classroom desks provided by Stars Over Africa. Photo by Bob Fest*

# THIS YEAR **AND** BEYOND

As an ambitious and ever-growing small organization, we love it when our supporters lend a helping hand towards Mtaala projects. The following are a few of our goals for this year...and beyond!

## ONGOING PROJECTS INCLUDE...

**SECURING STUDENT SPONSORS** Mtaala's greatest need is sponsors for students. For a small monthly fee, sponsors provide tuition and room and board for our students. Our sponsors are the heart of our program.

**THE THOMAS FEST COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC:** Mtaala's Community Health Clinic needs ongoing support to fund the staff and acquire necessary supplies. It is currently the only health clinic in the village and provides vaccinations, malaria treatment, and regular primary care for local residents.

**RAISE FUNDS TO BUILD A STORIED BUILDING:** Awegys Secondary School was created in the humble two-room home of school founder Alice Wegoye. With the help of generous donors, Mtaala is in the process of constructing a building several stories high that will house classrooms, dormitories, school administrative offices, and a computer lab. We are nearing the completion of the first floor of the building, and we welcome support as we continue to help Awegys School grow.



*Top Photo:  
Students at Awegys School*

*Middle & Bottom Photos:  
Construction continues on the  
new storied building at  
Awegys School*

**HELP MAKE IT HAPPEN: TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THESE PROJECTS  
MAKE A CONTRIBUTION, OR BECOME AN EDUCATIONAL PARTNER WITH THE MTAALA FOUNDATION, VISIT [WWW.MTAALA.ORG](http://WWW.MTAALA.ORG).**

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## OUR MISSION

The Mtaala Foundation creates and supports education communities for vulnerable children and at-risk youth, including those affected by poverty, war, and HIV/AIDS. Empowering youth through learning and giving back to their community is a central tenet of our work.

The foundation partners with individuals and villages to create secondary schools where none exist and connects the schools' students with international sponsors to fund their educations.

LEARN MORE AT  
**[WWW.MTAALA.ORG](http://WWW.MTAALA.ORG)** 6

