



HEAL International responds to local priorities in Uganda through the support of education, health initiatives, and leadership development.

2020 was an unusual year for HEAL International (as it was for all of us around the world). We entered the year with the hope of ramping up our activities in Uganda. The Ugandan school year began in a typical fashion in February, and though there were early signs that a novel coronavirus was circulating, none of us imagined the tremendous impact this virus would have on the population.

By March, schools in Uganda had closed and lockdown restrictions were being put into place. Our partners in Uganda were sharing stories of local hardships and challenges brought about by the pandemic. The issues on the ground ranged from economic hardships to physical safety. Though we were not sure how long it would take for things to return to normal, we knew we had to find a way to ensure the well-being of the children and youth in our programs. Our response was to temporarily pivot from access to education to access to food and safer environments. Below is a summary of what we did in with the support you provided.

Food Security

Vulnerable children, such as the orphaned children we support, were at risk of not even having one meal a day. Through our partner YES Uganda, we provided approximately \$10,000 for the delivery of food to over 250 children and approximately 1,000 others in their households. Our donation was also used to provide agricultural training, seeds and supplies for households with land.

Quality of Education and Global Citizenship

Each year, our *Learning Beyond Borders* clubs at the University of Alberta and University of Calgary fundraise for essential teaching supplies for three rural primary schools in Uganda. In the beginning of the year, we used their donations for practice exams and homework packages which provided students with at-home activities during the early parts of school shutdowns. Towards the end of 2020, our funds supported the safe resumption of Primary 7 classes at these schools.

Access to Education

HEAL funded 25 school children and 4 post-secondary youth to attend their first term of school. In October, schools re-opened for 3 of 13 school grades (Primary 7, Senior 4 and Senior 6) as well as for post-secondary students in their final year. Our funding enabled these students to return to school.

Health Education

Peer Education Kabarole is our youth health education initiative. With schools closed, our school-based trainings and activities stopped. Students back in their villages began sharing stories of substance use by youth, the risk of early pregnancies and marriages for girls, and the anxiety felt by youth during the lockdown. We decided it would be important to continue this program “virtually” through WhatsApp, SMS and voice calls (the only communication mediums available in the region) to our 200 peer educators to discuss these issues with them and come up with key messages and information. In Canada, we are in the process of developing a mental health curriculum and used this resource to prepare some key messages around positive mental health, which we then shared with peer educators through social media. The peer educators then mobilized youth in their villages to share this information. Our Ugandan staff were also available daily by phone to help youth and their parents access more detailed health information.

At the beginning of 2021, the Government of Uganda announced that schools would reopen for all grades in a phased manner. With vaccines much further on the horizon in Uganda than they are in high-income countries, we expect that issues brought about by the pandemic will continue through 2021. Economic hardships are expected to continue in communities where the average daily income is less than \$2 per day. Therefore, our activities in 2021 will focus on both returning children to their schools, but also on addressing ongoing food and security issues for children and youth in our programs. We thank you for your support in 2020 and hope that you will continue to support us in these endeavors.

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