

## The slum

**Child of Hope is based in Namatala, Mbale (Eastern Uganda) – an area which qualifies as a slum by all United Nations' indicators. There are no up-to-date figures regarding the slum but it is estimated that there are between 30,000 to 40,000 people living in the area. Although development is coming, it is still the biggest slum in one of the poorer regions in one of the poorest countries on earth. Uganda is rated 166 of 191 countries in the UN's Human Development Index.**



Around half of the population are of school age but only around half of that number actually attend school. Housing is characterised by shacks with iron sheet roofs. These properties are rented at a rate of around £7–£16 per month. Typically families of five or more share a room.

Sanitation takes the form of pit latrines (many installed by Child of Hope) as mains sewerage is not available to the majority. Mains water is available in the form of standpipes owned and managed by the landowners. So, many residents choose the river as a source of free water for domestic and animal needs – approx ½ km from the edge of the slum. At times, this gives rise to epidemics of typhoid and cholera.

Typically the families are headed by the mothers, as fathers are either physically or emotionally absent due to death, sickness, polygamy, alcohol abuse, etc. Many of these mothers struggle to find an income – relying on finding daily, poorly-paid casual work.

Financially they live a hand-to-mouth existence, with no means of saving for medical needs, school fees or rent.

## And then it began...

Child of Hope was started by Moses Okotel, having grown up as an IDP himself. He started by assisting a handful of children with school fees. After marrying Bex, a British National, in 2007, he had a dream to start a nursery school in the heart of the slum.

The Child of Hope nursery was started in February 2008 for around 40 children in a borrowed church building. It became apparent that these children were malnourished and a feeding programme was added to the project.

A lack of affordable or available healthcare and social welfare assistance had to be overcome. Medicines and healthcare were needed for children falling sick. Advice, advocacy, training and intervention were required for those families in abusive or risky home situations – and a strategy for helping families out of financial crisis. So, a holistic approach was developed. CoH now has over 100 staff organised into departments of health & nutrition, welfare, nursery education, primary education, secondary education, income-generation and administration. Construction of our first purpose-built school commenced in 2010 and was completed in 2015.

## The picture today

Now Child of Hope's four schools have 660 pupils (from nursery up to secondary) and over 300 of their parents are in an income generation scheme. The team works closely with the community, including local councillors, elders and church leaders, to ensure full ownership by community members, and that only the poorest of the local families access the programmes.

Our current premises provide education from 3 1/2 year-olds ('baby class) up to 14 year-olds in Primary 7 level (the final primary class), and around 100 attend our secondary school ( up to O-level) or local vocational schools. This enables all our children to access entirely free schooling alongside healthcare, welfare assistance, counselling and guidance for their future. In addition, thousands of family members are also benefitting from the benefits – better parenting skills, higher understanding of healthcare within the home and sustainable finances for those within our income generation scheme.

Our fostering service now allows for up to 30 orphaned or vulnerable children to live in families.

## What's the latest?

During 2022 we opened a new nursery school a little further north in the desperately poor region of Karamoja.



Pupils at our new nursery in Karamoja

This is an area from which many of our Namatala pupils' parents originated, and we have long wanted to do something to help children and families there. We have started a new nursery in a borrowed building with 60 children. A teacher we trained is now teaching them with two classroom assistants. All these children receive porridge before lessons, and the families are benefitting from our wrap-around welfare services.