

Changing the World One Child at a Time

The Story of Sonshine



Susan Kabugo, with the support of her husband, Daniel, and their family, officially started the Sonshine School in 2017 to serve the needs of women and families working at [Kiwoko Hospital](#) in the Nakaseke District of Uganda.

Susan's calling to start Sonshine arose from her own personal struggle to get an education when often educating girls was not a priority. But there was one event that compelled her to start this school. The moment occurred when her son Raffa was absconded from the family compound when he was just a year old. Susan was working at the hospital and left Raffa in the care of a housekeeper. Someone came and took him and during this horrific incident he was severely injured. He was brought back to the compound and was left there. Returning home from work, Susan found him, frightened, and hurt. After that incident and the fact that she was unable to find a quality primary school for her oldest daughter Ruth, Susan said she wanted to leave the hospital and take care of the hospital staff's children so that others would not be abused or injured and so they had access to quality education. While initially resistant as the family needed her income from the laboratory job she had, Dan and the family cheered her on and the hospital was excited, knowing that their staff's children could be well cared for at a site easily accessible from the hospital. There were some naysayers as neither Dan or Susan were teachers or knew much about running a school, but the call was there, and the community quickly embraced the idea.

Dan and Susan owned a small piece of property abutting the hospital where they had built a small 3-room home in 2013. This is where things got started. In 2016, after quitting her job at the hospital, Susan took in 4 children for daycare services in their home and cared for them along with Dan and Susan's son Raffa. The word quickly got out and it was clear they needed more room if the nursery school was going to serve the demand from Kiwoko staff and the local community. An elderly man who owned a small abutting piece of property came forward and was willing to sell it to the Kabugos at a very low price. Then a personal friend of the Kabugos, a missionary named Jim who was doing some work in Kampala at an orphanage, made a one-time gift to build the first few classrooms. Sonshine School was born, the first fully-licensed school in the area!

Since its founding, the Sonshine School has grown and thrived. Susan felt that she was answering the needed call and was thrilled! Pre-covid, there were 180 students enrolled. The school was closed for 2 years (2020 and 2021) along with all other schools in Uganda, creating challenges for many students and families. During lockdown teachers came to the school to prepare lessons for the students. As most did not have access to computers, these lessons were hand-delivered to the children's homes and the students were encouraged to keep up with their learning. Susan along with the dedicated teachers did all that they could to stay connected to their students in this rather challenging time. In 2022 Sonshine was able to re-open with a very crowded campus of over 200 students.

With the Sonshine campus overflowing with students and demand increasing, something had to change. A parent, who had 4 children in the school and was also a member of the School Committee, came to Susan and offered to sell the school additional land so that the school could expand. The property was a 5-minute walk from the current campus and seemed to be an opportunity that could not be passed up. With the financial help of many people from around the world, 2 acres of property were purchased on February 5th, 2021, with the dream of building Sonshine School Campus 2, something that Susan never imagined back in 2017 and even in 2019! A few weeks later, Sonshine also was able to purchase a house for teachers serving Campus 1.

One of the key donors for the land purchase asked about how water was going to be sourced for this new campus. Discussions were held and, with his support, surveys were completed, a well dug and clean water found. A huge hurdle was cleared, and all involved with Sonshine cheered!

Since finding water and creating a special partnership with this key donor, Campus 2's development progressed rapidly. By opening day on February 6th, 2023, a classroom block, 2 dormitories, a kitchen and dining area, staff housing, administrative offices, storerooms, and a house for the security guard had all arisen from the Ugandan soil. This day was such a joy-filled day. Please watch and enjoy [this short video](#) of opening day.

Today as Sonshine enters the second year of Campus 2 over 400 children are receiving quality education from qualified teachers. Campus 1 educates 192 children ages 0 – 6 and Campus 2 educates 255 children ages 7 – 11. 60 children are boarding on Campus 2. The school is run by a community-based management committee of 15. Each member of the management team has a specific role and expertise to offer. They are all volunteers and work together to ensure that the children are safe and well cared for. A staff of just under 40 people works hard on both campuses, teaching, feeding, managing accounts, managing curricula, sports, religious studies and so much more. Several management committee members and staff have children at Sonshine, an added incentive to ensure the quality of the education offered.

Children arrive at the school on foot, bicycles, boda bodas (Uganda's motorcycle taxis), 2 vans and a bus. The day starts at 7am (that means the buses leave base around 4am to start their pick-ups) on both campuses. Campus one's day ends at 2pm (a few stay for an after-school program until 4pm) and Campus 2 ends at 4pm. The children at Campus 1 get tea, breakfast porridge and lunch. The children at Campus 2 get tea, breakfast porridge, lunch and an afternoon snack. The boarders also get dinner.

Hope abounds in this corner of Uganda and there is more to come. The longer-term dream is to have 500 students on Campus 2. Sonshine will then be providing quality education for over 700 children! We have a way to go until then; more land to buy, more buildings to build and equip and some scholarships to secure. We hope that you will join us on this journey.

Sonshine Nursery and Primary School's Vision: To be a model (perhaps the number 1) school that provides quality, affordable education to children in Uganda and perhaps beyond.

Sonshine Nursery and Primary School's Mission: Being a model school, training all children to be self-reliant so they can reach their full potential in life for God's glory!

Please reach out to pambaritnolan@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like to get involved.

Sonshine's Vision and Mission:

Every child has access to affordable and quality education no matter their background.

And their mission to achieve this vision is to be a model school of excellence in the region.

What is the current infrastructure of the school?

The school has 5 classrooms in use along with an office and a special projects room. There is a courtyard in the centre of the school where the students can enjoy some time outside during breaks. There are currently 180 students. The school employs fully certified teachers. The teachers work in classrooms with 20 - 40 students.

The students, if they can, pay \$250 per year to attend the school. These fees cover all scholastic materials, uniforms, food for breakfast and lunch and study tours as needed. These fees are significantly lower than daycare and school fees for good schools in Kampala. Sonshine does this to ensure that the staff at Kiwoko are supported and their children safe and getting a good education. 5 children are currently attending on scholarships.



Campus 1: classrooms and the school gate

What feedback has there been from the community?

Staff retention at Kiwoko hospital has increased. Morale is higher as parents can work, knowing that their children are being cared for and educated at a reputable and safe school. Daycare services are helping those that work the evening shifts, and the children can be collected easily as it is a 5-minute walk from the hospital. The hospital has seen increased performance since the school started. The District Education office has highlighted Sonshine School as a district model school, high praise given the school is only in their 4th year of operations. Children moving on from the Sonshine School have been accepted into highly ranked Kampala Boarding schools given their strong performance. The school has been a win-win in many ways.

Sonshine's dreams:

As mentioned, Sonshine currently offers classes up to P4 (up to the ages of 9 or 10). Parents are hoping that the school can expand so that their children can continue their education with Sonshine up to the age of 14. This expansion requires the purchase of additional land and the creation of Campus 2.

The dream of purchasing land became a reality, thanks to our community of supporters, in March of 2021. We are now on a journey to raise the funds needed to build and outfit the needed infrastructure. Thanks to an amazing donor, Sonshine has drilled a well and now has access to potable water.

The school has a dream of being self-sustaining and will need funds to install solar power, and a farm so that the school can produce food for both the children and the surrounding area.

As these children are older, the dream is to have a computer lab, a library and perhaps a science lab, along with recreational facilities for the children when they are not in classes.

If Sonshine cannot make this dream a reality, many of the children currently attending may not further their education as their families will not be able to afford boarding school. Please help us ensure these children continue to thrive and change the world!

Thank you for reading this story and for your interest. I hope you will join us in making Sonshine's dream come true!



Susan, her husband Dan and their children