

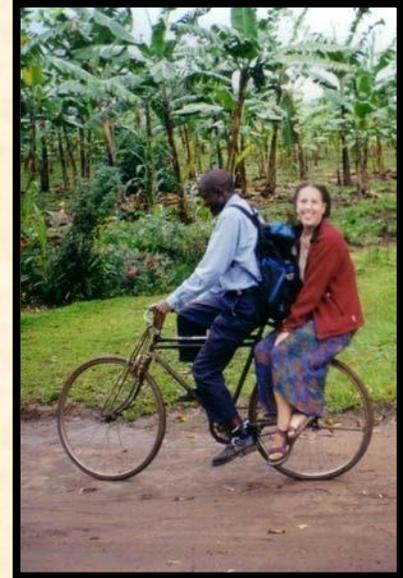
Interview with Ben and St. Stephen Children's Centre



1. **What is your full name?** Ben Jerevazio Ssemwogerere
2. **What do your friends and family call you?** Friends call me Ben and family call me by my surname Ssemwogerere.
3. **How did you get the nickname Ben?** After a long collaboration and strong friendship with Julie, I asked her to give me a traditional French name. She gave me the name “Benoit” and since then, I use the name Ben.
4. **When and where were you born?** I was born at Kabwami village, Kisansala parish Kingo Sub County in Lwengo /Masaka district.
5. **Where did you grow up?** Mayira village
6. **Who raised you and who was your family?** My Aunt raised me after the passing away of my Mother.
7. **Were you able to go to school when you were growing up?** It was a difficult situation since my aunt was a peasant farmer. I started schooling late and I spent many years in primary school because I missed some years without going to school due to financial constraints. After ordinary secondary level, I tried advanced secondary education but couldn't complete it due to limited funds and resources. So I worked at a farm school as a herdsman and later I completed a certificate in tropical agriculture [crop and animal production].

8. **You met Julie when she was volunteering in Uganda. How did you both become friends?** We became friends after meeting in 2000 at the farm where I was working. Julie was volunteering there and we became friends.

9. **You were referred to as "the doctor" while working on the farm. How come?** I was called a Doctor simply because I was carrying animal health care activities like treating ill health animals at the farm and I was aspiring to become a veterinary doctor after college studies. But I had to work in order to raise funds to pay for the tuition fees for college-level diploma studies.



10. **Julie mentioned that she was able to sponsor you to pursue your studies after you met. Is this correct?**

Yes it's correct. She sponsored me for three years and I undertook a Diploma course in animal production and management at Centenary Community College.

11. **Julie mentioned that you started an animal medicine and farm supply shop in your village as well during that time. Is that correct?** Yes, she funded me to start the shop and it is still in existence. It is used for community livestock treatment and training farmers on improved livestock husbandry practices. I used the funds from this shop to pursue studies and start up St. Stephen Children's Centre.

12. **Do you still run this shop now?** Yes, it grew and in 2005 I also started a medicine shop for people in the area which will hopefully become a medical clinic in the future.

13. **You learned to use computers and the internet using some of the sponsorship money as well. Is that correct?** Yes, in addition to funds generated from the animal medicine and farm supply shop, I was able to complete a certificate course in computer applications at the Institute of Computer Science at Makerere University in Kampala.

14. You learned of an internship in the Netherlands for students from developing countries and that you applied to and was accepted into this program. Is that correct? Yes, I completed the



Netherlands fellowship program www.nuffic.nl. I had heard about this program from a friend who studied computer applications with me at Makerere University. We studied poultry, piggery, food safety, and agricultural extension. I also had 24 hour access to the internet, which helped me to learn other issues in relation to animal production,

agriculture, gender, and community development.

15. What was the experience like for you to go on your own to a new country and do this program? I didn't have any experience traveling and had never left Uganda. I did not know anyone in the Netherlands. The international office helped and even directed me to the Royal Netherlands embassy office in Kampala which I didn't know about. Being in a new country was very interesting and very different. I was the first person in my clan and family to have an opportunity like this.



16. How was it for you to return home after being in another country? It was so good to see my family and friends again, but on the other hand I missed a lot of the Dutch people because they were so welcoming and friendly where ever we traveled. I also missed the 24 hour free internet services at the college and so many other things. I was able to pass along the skills I learned and gained to the farmers in my village. It has impacted a lot on their income and livelihood, as well as mine. I also saved funds from the monthly allowances from the fellowship and used these to begin construction of the school for St. Stephen Children's Centre, in addition to funds donated by Julie.

17. **What did you do when you returned home?** I acquired a piece of land for growing a few crops and raising poultry and began implementing a plan for starting a non-governmental organization (NGO) in my community. I began by helping the farmers in my village with proper livestock husbandry practices, like feeding and disease control.

18. **What made you decide to start a non-governmental organization (NGO) in your village?** I was an orphan and was greatly affected by poverty and lack of resources for education, care, and basic needs. There were so many orphaned children and vulnerable members in my village. So with other community members, we decided to start an organization to address challenges among the vulnerable people of the village with education, training, and support, by using the resources within our reach.

19. **What did you do to start your NGO?** We started by researching what the major challenges faced by vulnerable people in the area were and then developed a strategy to address the identified challenges. We then began by building a school and centre of learning.



25. **What does your NGO do?** St. Stephen Children's Centre is a centre of learning. At the centre there is a school for children aged 4 years -14 years, including classes for nursery pupils and classes for primary pupils. The centre also provides a meeting place



for community members and training and education programs including training farmers in better agricultural and animal husbandry practices, training women in work and parenting strategies, and home supports for women, children, youth, and the elderly.



26. **Who do you help?** Vulnerable members of the community, including orphaned/needly children, women, elderly people and youth.

27. **How do you fund your NGO?** We have small businesses and sponsorship and volunteer programs that help to fund our operating costs.

28. **What are some of the projects that you hope to run and fund in the future?** Our first priority is to complete the construction of the

school building so that school and other learning activities can be conducted here. In addition, we hope to achieve the following goals:

a Desks for students (as of now pupils sit on the ground).

b Water harvesting tanks for school use.

c Computers/internet for teaching pupils.

d Construction of staff quarters/houses for teaching and non teaching staffs (as of now we are still renting).

e Other priorities include an orphanage home for children, a community health clinic, and water & sanitation projects.



29. **What would money raised through Julie's project go towards?** The funds will be used to meet the goals listed above.

30. **How will you and your NGO participate in Julie's Halloween fundraising project in Uganda?** The pupils at our school will learn about pirates and Halloween traditions, a holiday that we do not have in Uganda. We will host a community event and celebration in October with exhibitions of different things created by the students, including crafts, speeches, music, dance, poems, and stories about pirates and Halloween.



31. **Do you have other jobs as well as running this NGO?** Yes, including the farm supply shop, human and animal medicine shop, growing crops/rearing cows but most of my time is spent on NGO activities.

32. **Are there other people who help you to run this NGO?** Yes, we have a directors committee, beneficiary/school management committee, and day-to-day administration staff.

33. **How has Julie helped in contributing to this NGO?** I don't know where I would be without having met Julie. What I have achieved and what the NGO has achieved is greatly based on Julie's contributions in terms of financial support, material support [school supplies, clothes and other], advisory support, academic and sponsorship support, recommending us to other volunteers to work with us and many other things.

34. Julie mentioned that your children correspond now too.

What has that been like for you and your children? It brings me so much joy and happiness and I am proud that our children are growing up knowing each other. When our children receive letters from Julie's family, it becomes songs, laughter, and happiness for days and months. I hope we shall be able to continue this together.

35. Do you think that you will be able to see each other again one day? We shall meet again soon I hope. It's been many years, hopefully in the future we shall meet again and meet our families.

