

# JIFUNDISHE HABARI

Special Edition

## Editor's Note.....

Every once in awhile we share an experience with you in an effort to describe what our programs are all about and how they impact both participants and volunteers. We are so fortunate to have the **Unlimited Possibilities (UP)** team come each year to help us with our Independent Studies program. Joyce Cuff, a wonderful writer and good friend, says it all so well. Here is an excerpt from her last post. Enjoy this UPlifting story!

**Deb Kelly**



.....The next two weeks I spent at Jifundishe Free Library with my brother, Bill, and friends, Phyllis and Joe Cronin, on another UP service project. This is the fourth time UP volunteers have worked with the Independent Study students and the second time we have presented a series of workshops on test-taking strategies. These particular workshops were so popular with the students the last time that some actually approached Deb Kelly (Jifundishe director) asking when we were coming back to do it again. It is always inspiring to work there because we meet so many students overcoming incredible challenges in order to

complete their education and we reconnect with so many others, like the women who are being helped by Ukuwaji (Swahili for growth) microlending program that was initiated with UP funding. This year Joe provided five business seminars for locals and that introduced us to another sphere of wonderful people.

Our time began with lunch with Innocence, a young woman Phyllis has been helping to support through law school. This was the first time Innocence had met Joe, and so this was a special moment for both of them. It is always great to connect with

Innocence because she has such a clarity of vision and such a desire to see that human rights are upheld that I am uplifted with every encounter. Her long-term goal is to become a Human Rights lawyer and ultimately a Judge. How appropriate to have Innocence meting out Justice.



**Here are some more inspiring people with whom we connected or reconnected:**

Cate attended the business seminars. She is Maasai and had a difficult childhood. At the age of nine, just after having been subjected to female genital mutilation, she was about to be given away in marriage. It was apparent to her that her parents did not want her. A Maasai couple from Kenya happened to be visiting her boma. At the last minute, just before the visitors left to return home, she hid in their trunk. The trip was 14 hours long and she was in the trunk, very near the equator for the whole day and into the night. When the couple arrived at their destination, they opened their trunk and found her there. The first thing she said to them was, "Please don't send me back." They didn't. However, after a while they did check out her story to make sure that the parents weren't frantically searching for her. They found that the parents had split and that neither one was looking for her. They raised her as their child. When she was 25 she decided to return to Tanzania, feeling a need to reconnect with her roots. When asked if she ever found her parents she reported that she had found her father. In her words: "We aren't particularly close, but every so often I buy him a beer." This resilient and forgiving spirit has gone on to establish an organization that helps young women to develop vocational skills so that they can gain some economic independence. Her work is so important to her that, despite several

surgeries and her doctor's pleas for her to stop work for a while or at least slow down, she claims she just can't. She is driven to help these women to escape the sort of trauma she lived through. We were able to give her a donation through UP (from Whitney's Surprise funds). She was so overcome that she actually fell on her knees. It is such an honor to witness good people helping other good people helping even more good people.



This is Bernadetha. We met her a year and a half ago when we went to Jifundishe to work with their Independent Study program. I have told her story before, but it is one that bears repeating, both because, sadly, it contains a thread that is common here and because it has an inspiring twist. Bernadetha

was orphaned when she was quite young. She went to live with her aging grandparents and quickly became their primary caretaker. She took care of them until they died and she became orphaned for a second time. Her aunt took her in at about the age of twelve. At this point Bernadetha knew no English and no Swahili and could not write in any language including her tribal language. The aunt had heard of Jifundishe and took Bernadetha there to see if she could enroll her in the Independent Study Program. The aunt didn't have enough money to send Bernadetha to public school. Deb had concerns about how Bernadetha could possibly fit into a program when she lacked any formal education; was unable to read or write in any language; and had no experience with Swahili or English (English is the medium of instruction in secondary school, which is the level of the Independent Study program). But Deb couldn't say no. Bernadetha's fellow students embraced her, worked with her, included her in every aspect of their studies, and this year, as she stood at her table to introduce all who were seated with her, she spoke in English and, when she didn't remember a student's name, she read the name tag. How wonderful that her aunt sought out this program; how wonderful that Deb could not say no; how wonderful that her colleagues accepted her so completely and supported her so effectively; how wonderful Bernadetha's fighting spirit; how wonderful that I could witness this.



Amina and I formed an attachment during our last series of workshops at Jifundishe. At the time, she attended the Form 4 class in the mornings during one week and attended Biology tutoring sessions that I delivered every afternoon over the course of two weeks. She hopes to become a teacher. She

is currently 1 or 2 credits shy of qualifying for Form 6 - pre-university studies. She also works full-time at night at a local orphanage. During the recent two weeks at Jifundishe, Amina was one of the nine Form 6/advanced students who volunteered to work with us every morning in addition to attending the Form 6 and business seminars every afternoon. Although exhausted from working all night, helping us in the morning and then attending the afternoon seminars (for which she was not even officially registered because she is a couple of credits short), she didn't miss a day. She and all of the upper level students who helped us are also a source of inspiration. They willingly and enthusiastically participated in every activity, translating into Swahili when necessary, serving as small group co-facilitators, and even coming in early to learn the warm-up activities for the day. Whatever we achieved, it would not have been possible without the help of these outstanding people.



Lucy is a young woman hired by Jifundishe as an English teacher and teacher of upper-level subjects. She is waiting to see where the government places her. First year teachers are sent to various places throughout the country - usually in rural outposts - to begin their teaching careers. Although she is a product of traditional teaching methods, she was surprisingly and refreshingly open to the strategies that we were introducing. She frequently asked what the advantage of a particular strategy was or what the goal of a particular exercise was and then would break into a big smile as the rationale and potential impact became clear to her. She was an invaluable resource while we were there, serving as a

translator, particularly for Form 2 students whose English was often sketchy at best, and helping us to further understand what students needed in terms of help with test taking. She promised to continue to use some of the strategies we introduced and asked for a complete set of the teaching aids that we had developed. We had a lot more prepared than we were able to use, so it is an additional bonus to have Lucy so willing to use some of our material. Broadening the range of pedagogical techniques being employed is also not a bad thing.



The Independent Study program at Jifundishe has evolved over the years. Starting with a small group of students who were attempting to self-school so that they could sit for national exams, Deb has formalized the program, bringing in teachers part-time in various subject areas, developing a lab-on-wheels so that students can pass the lab practicum requirement, and reimbursing the enrolled students who persist in the program for the cost of the national exams. Her students have consistently fared better than the national average on those exams. We were at Jifundishe before all of the results for the National Exams had been reported. We had a total of 91 students in Forms 2 and 4. After the

National Exam results were made public, the total numbers swelled to 115. Victims of their own success, Jifundishe now has to decide how many students they can accommodate without compromising the quality of the education these students are receiving. There are some tough choices ahead.

Lately, our contribution has been to try to teach them some test-taking strategies that emphasize independent and creative thinking, logic, and use of their own life experiences. Education in Tanzania has traditionally emphasized rote learning rather than critical understanding and our goal has been to simply introduce some other ways of mastering material that might be easier and might result in longer retention of information. Starting with warm-up activities that get them relaxed and comfortable with one another and also often teach lessons about effective teamwork, we move on to classroom activities that take advantage of these students' natural tendency to work together. It is difficult to measure the impact of our efforts, but I hope it is safe to assume they are at least positive. I know that their impact on us is tremendous.





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