

"Support Sophie": Francis Holland Community Supports Female Education in Africa

At Francis Holland School, Sloane Square, we are aware of our good fortune and are always looking for means by which to use our time, talent and treasure to make and to be the difference in society.



28th March 2022 — In keeping with our Christian Foundation, we value humility, compassion, courage and hope and look to encourage in our girls, staff and families a desire to serve and support others. We enjoy strong and mutually beneficial relationships with charity partners Katherine Low Settlement (KLS, which was set up by an FHS alumna in 1924) and In-Deep. Our Lower Sixths volunteer weekly at the Love to Learn Homework Club at KLS, while we run regular Music Therapy sessions at In-Deep.

We also hold partnerships rather further afield; a prime example being Mvumi School in Tanzania. In addition to the annual sponsorship of four students at Mvumi, FHS raised no less than £40,000 as part of the Clean Hands, Pure Heart Campaign to fund the construction of a new ablutions building at the school last year. Indeed, supporting girls' education in Africa is a cause particularly close to our hearts, which was furthered at our recent Burns Night celebration. Here, we vastly exceeded our target of £5,000 and raised £8,250, thanks to the overwhelming generosity of our FHS Community.

Please read on to find out more about the important causes this money will support and the poignant context behind them.

The Lewa Education Programme

In December 2020, London-based painter Pie Herring was invited to Kenya by Lewa Wildlife Conservancy; a non-profit, UNESCO World Heritage Site in northern Kenya which invests heavily in local communities through programmes ranging from education and healthcare to clean-water projects and micro-enterprise schemes for women.

Pie was asked to visit the communities surrounding Lewa and to document and give a platform to those directly affected by the drop in tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She spent 6 months in Kenya, creating a stunning body of work in response to her time at Lewa. Each piece tells a unique and inspiring story of resilience and love in the face of a global pandemic. The resulting works have been used to raise awareness and support for the individuals she met with.

At FHS, we have been immensely inspired by Pie and her work and have partnered with her to support Lewa's Education Programme (LEP). She has produced the most beautiful artwork (featured) of Maasai mother and daughter Pamela and Sophie, which she has very kindly donated to FHS in return for us surpassing our fundraising target.

Through the Lewa Education Programme, support will be used for the development of girls' education and well-being in Kenya. Within a programme that benefits over 8,000 students annually in northern Kenya, Francis Holland support will be used to improve access to academic and health education and to mentor girls in primary and secondary grades along with recent secondary school graduates. Backed by a team of highly-skilled and dedicated education professionals, Lewa's Education Programme assists individuals, including Sophie, by providing mentorship and guidance necessary to pursue a university degree. Pie's painting will be displayed pride of place at FHS for years to come as testament to our ongoing commitment to supporting girls' education in Africa.

Sophie's Story

The Beaders (2021), is an oil portrait of Pamela and Sophie - Mother and Daughter. Pamela is her husband's third wife and Sophie is her only child. There is a tradition of hierarchy in Maasai culture which has resulted in Pamela becoming the main provider for Sophie's education.

With the help of Lewa's micro-finance support scheme for women, Pamela has been able to set up a business whereby she creates beautifully intricate pieces of jewellery and sells them to the tourists visiting Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. Due to the pandemic lockdown and school closures across the whole of Kenya, Sophie began to help her mother to create the beads. *The Beaders* depicts a tender moment when a necklace Sophie has been working on has become loose and Pamela is helping her to fix it.

Pie has attributed the painting to an unforgettable moment that occurred on one of her visits to Pamela and Sophie's home;

"We were in their living room one morning before any photos were taken, just chatting and learning about each other. They were in a tricky situation with a complete halt on the sales of their designs but Pamela did not show any signs of fragility.

"Sophie had often positioned herself further away from us and appeared almost disengaged from our presence. We wondered if maybe she was shy or perhaps there was a language barrier."

“Whilst we spoke to Pamela about their situation, Sophie suddenly stood up. She walked over and stood directly in front of us. She proceeded to speak very passionately and eloquently about the importance of female education and how she as a young girl in her community has a high chance of being forced out of school because of the lockdowns. She defiantly told us of her goals in life and what she wants to achieve and how that will only come about with access to an education.”

“It is an incredibly brave and special action as a 16-year-old girl to stand up for your rights in front of two uncommon and unfamiliar people. A moment I will never forget.”

We are so grateful to our community for again displaying immense generosity, and to Pie for bestowing us with such a wonderful, unique work of art and spreading awareness of this important cause. We look forward to hearing about Sophie and others’ journey and to supporting many more such meaningful initiatives in future.