

## **Getting Up Close and Personal with Ugandan Children on New Year's Day**

1 January 2016 was a special New Year's Day for 25 student members of The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education (HKAGE) and 28 Watoto Children's Choir members from Uganda, as these youngsters spent a memorable evening having a meaningful cultural exchange at Lions - YMCA Junk Bay Youth Camp, rounding off the Choir's successful Hong Kong tour.

The event was part of Service in Action, a service learning programme, of the HKAGE. It was the first time for the Watoto Children's Choir members to meet Hong Kong students for cultural exchange, though previous members of the Choir had staged performances in Hong Kong before. To give the Ugandan children an appreciation of Chinese culture, the event provided an opportunity for them to learn Hung Kuen, a Chinese martial art, together with the HKAGE student members. Under the martial arts instructors' guidance, the young learners got started with the basics such as kicks and the horse stance, followed by a series of fundamental skills and tricks in Hung Kuen. While Chinese martial arts were something new to the Ugandan children, most of the HKAGE student members were also first-timers. The "kung fu experience" brought them great excitement and enjoyment, breaking down cultural barriers instantly. Afterwards, the student members offered the children Chinese style ornaments, red lucky scrolls with words of blessing and encouragement, couplet scrolls, and a folding fan as a gesture of goodwill.

In the sharing session, the Choir members talked about their feelings during the Hong Kong tour, arousing the student members to reflect on their experiences. "It stirred my heart when I heard a few of them say they were thankful for being able to survive. The things we take for granted were hard earned by them! Because of their words, I'll treasure whatever I have," said one of the student members who considered it a valuable experience to meet African children in person. "Although the Watoto children do not have the qualities of life and resources that can compare with ours, they stay optimistic about life and hopeful about the future. Their positive thinking has inspired me." The event ended in a joyful atmosphere, where the youngsters enjoyed a Hong Kong style barbecue dinner together.

Apart from the cultural exchange, a number of HKAGE student members have volunteered at 4 of the 75 concerts performed by the Choir on their Hong Kong tour from October to December 2015. The student members helped sell souvenirs and promote the Sponsorship Programme to the audiences so as to raise funds for Watoto. They were very pleased to have taken part in the volunteer service; one said, "I'm so glad I could make a contribution by serving people in need and see them happy!"

The HKAGE students will help Watoto Asia Office prepare life education materials. In addition, 5 students will give presentations entitled "Service, Learning, Zero Distance: Direct Interaction with Watoto from Uganda" at the Service-Learning Expo 2016 organised by the Chung Chi College, CUHK this April. Those who have excellent performance in Service in Action will get the opportunity to visit Watoto Village in Uganda during this summer holiday and meet the Choir members again. They will care for the local orphans and vulnerable women through teaching, building community facilities and paying visits.

### **About The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education**

The HKAGE, a non-profit-making organisation, was established in 2008. It aims at providing educational services in Hong Kong, offering high standards of information support and appropriate learning opportunities to all stakeholders engaged in gifted education, including students, teachers and parents. Most of its programmes are provided free-of-charge.

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Snapshot

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**About Watoto**

Watoto is an holistic care programme that was initiated as a response to the overwhelming number of orphaned and vulnerable children and women in Africa. It is positioned to rescue an individual, raise each one as a leader in their chosen sphere of life so that they in turn will rebuild their nation. The Watoto model provides for physical care, medical intervention (including HIV/AIDS treatment), education (formal and vocational), counselling and emotional well-being, moral and spiritual discipleship. Since 1994, Watoto Children's Choirs have toured internationally as ambassadors for Watoto. The vision and mission of Watoto is presented through music and dance, which is an energetic fusion of contemporary gospel and traditional African rhythm. These 'Concerts of Hope' are a lively demonstration of the life-changing love of God experienced by the children of Watoto. The experience of travelling with the choir benefits the children academically, socially, emotionally and spiritually, and is designed to train and equip them as future leaders.

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The youngsters practise the basics before learning Hung Kuen skills.

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The children are excited about Chinese martial arts.



Everybody enjoys the kung fu lesson.

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The student members learn more about Uganda through conversations with the Choir members.



The student members offer the children Chinese ornaments, red lucky scrolls with words of blessing, couplet scrolls, and a folding fan as gifts.

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The Watoto children get their first taste of Hong Kong style barbecue.



The student members and Watoto choir adult get to know about each other's culture and life during a fireside chat.