

# Ministry in Uganda offers hope to refugees from Sudan

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Eight years ago, a woman from South Sudan fled armed conflict in her homeland, seeking refuge in Kampala, Uganda. Today, she spearheads a sewing ministry that provides livelihood for refugees.

In 2011, [Refuge & Hope International](#), a Christian nonprofit organization in Uganda supported through the [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering](#), provided her a scholarship to attend sewing classes. After she learned basic skills, she returned to train other displaced people at the organization's Center of Hope.



Refuge and Hope

International's Center of Hope provides classes in English, computer, math, history, science and geography, as well as providing counseling, Bible studies, and cultural events. (Refuge & Hope International Photo) She and a colleague teach classes where women not only learn to sew, but also enjoy fellowship, discuss their challenges, and share their faith journeys, joys and accomplishments.

"The laughter and fun that they have and the tears that they shed together are as important as the sewing skills they leave the classroom with," said

Linda Carpenter, finance and administration manager with Refuge & Hope.

Refuge & Hope works with refugees—primarily from East Africa—to provide holistic assistance, meeting both physical and spiritual needs. Jade and Shelah Acker, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel, direct the ministry in Kampala.

More than 400 students from 10 countries attend classes at the organization's Center of Hope. Many more who want to attend are on a waiting list, the Ackers noted.

The center provides English-as-a-Second-Language and basic education classes, as well as counseling, Bible studies and cultural events. In the Bible class, students study the Scriptures in chronological order.

"After one year, the students will hopefully have a greater understanding of the Bible and how it fits together," Jade Acker said. "Also, they will be able to see how Jesus not only fulfills the promises of the Old Testament, but also how he is the way, the truth and the life."

The center also sponsors a program for refugee youth who often face many challenges adjusting to life in Uganda.



“Many youth already feel confused and unsure of themselves. So, when you add on the struggle of not living in their home country with their home culture and traditions, it can present even more problems for them,” Acker said.

Youth meet five times per week and study curriculum focused heavily on the Bible. Many are not in school because their parents are unable to pay for their education. So, they attend the center’s morning educational program and then participate in afternoon activities.

The center’s staff members are encouraged to share their faith with students and to pray with them. Students from varied faith backgrounds attend a weekly worship service. Students also participate in a program led by Christian counselors.

After the Ackers graduated from the [Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) in 2001, they worked with the [Samaritan’s Purse](#) two years in Sudan.

As they developed relationships with the young people in Sudan, they helped nine teenaged boys relocate to Kenya, where they attended a Christian school to complete their elementary education.



The Ackers in 2009 with their daughters Kealah and Anna-Grace, and Lino, a Sudanese refugee they adopted. (Fellowship Magazine Photo) In 2008, when the Ackers moved to Uganda, they reconnected with some of the Sudanese youth, and most of them elected to finish high school either in Uganda or Kenya.

The Ackers adopted two Sudanese youth—Lino and Angelo—who went on to attend Mercer University in Macon, Ga. Angelo is completing his sophomore year at Mercer, and Lino recently joined the U.S. Army.

Five other Sudanese youth still are in Uganda, and three are attending Ugandan universities. They are unable to return home to Sudan because of the ongoing war, Acker said.

After South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011, Sudan sealed off its borders. Genocide followed in the areas that had supported the south, and the five youth who remain in Uganda are from that region, Acker noted. They cannot return to their home and currently are applying for refugee status in Uganda.

Many of the refugees with whom the Ackers work have been physically

assaulted, and most are very poor, without a job or income to sustain



themselves.

The Center for Hope provides a program specifically for refugee youth - a safe place where they can form support groups and find healing in meeting with each other. (Refuge & Hope International Photo) All have been deeply wounded emotionally by loss, and most don't feel secure. Many experience anger and forgiveness issues, but they find community, healing and the love of Christ through Refuge & Hope.

"We always strive to invest in individuals and to emphasize hope," Acker said. "It is amazing how just a glimmer of hope can bring so much healing to very traumatized and displaced people. We always tell them that knowledge can never be stolen or taken from them by any government or rebel group and that God loves them and has a plan for them."

Many of the teenage refugees to whom Refuge & Hope ministers want to attend school but because their education has been interrupted by war or displacement, they cannot join Ugandan schools unless they retake elementary school classes.

In providing practical and spiritual care for East Africans, the Ackers consider themselves fortunate.

"We feel blessed and are amazed by God and his work," he said. "It is an

honor and a privilege to know each individual who is a part of Refuge & Hope and to be here serving."