

# OPEN DREAMS

Opening Dreams All Over the World in 2018



## OUR GLOBAL SCHOLARS!

- Muki & Elvis – University of Edinburgh
- Bryan – University of British Columbia
- Peace & Theodore – University of Botswana
- Daphne – Ashesi University (Ghana)
- Nathan – KNUST University (Ghana)
- Liyuek Reynald – African Leadership University (Mauritius)
- Forsi Ferdinand – Yale Young African Scholars, Rwanda
- Rodney Ngho – ALA Academy (S.Africa)
- Arthur & Wisdom – University of Cape Town (South Africa)
- Ramish & Precious – American University in Beirut (Lebanon)
- Joyce – University of Zimbabwe
- Odette – University of Botswana
- Bonaventure – ALU Rwanda (Mandela Scholarship)

**“EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.”**

**- Nelson Mandela**

As Father Time turns the pages on yet another calendar year, we look back upon 2018 as the most successful and eventful year yet in the brief history of Open Dreams. With more scholarships awarded, mentees welcomed into our Academy, partnerships established and global networking conferences attended than ever before, we are raising the bar for standards of excellence as we look forward to our 5th full year of operations. With our expansion to 3 new cities, we are establishing our roots as the premier college access organization across Cameroon, sourcing top scholars throughout the country. As more alumni graduate our program and take up residence at their respective universities across the globe, they have matriculated as mentors to the younger generation, completing the virtuous circle of mentorship we have envisioned since our inception in 2013. As always, we owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to our fearless and indefatigable country director, Akaba James, who has shined brightly pushing the boundaries of what one human can possibly achieve to promote the education of so many. Along with Claudette and a number of mentors, teachers, advisors and colleagues,

Open Dreams is expanding its reach, building bridges and creating more impact than ever before. While the civil strife has severely crippled operations in our headquarters in Bamenda, it has failed to restrain the educational dreams and aspirations of our ambitious scholars, who have worked tirelessly to secure a better future for themselves as well and their community. .

### Global Scholars Expanding Horizons & Scholarships Awarded

The global community of Open Dreams university scholars is rapidly expanding geographically as we now have scholars in such diverse places from Scotland and Mauritius to Canada and Ghana. All told, 8 scholars embarked on their respective journeys via fully-paid (housing/travel/tuition) scholarship packages, highlighted on the previous page. We are proud of all of their accomplishments as they embark on the most important period in their academic careers. The reports from their first semesters have all resounded positively although many have discovered the rigors and tribulations of academic effort required at the university level.

In addition, we have an upcoming cohort of recently-anointed scholarship winners who will be starting this Fall at the University of Botswana, University of Zimbabwe, African Leadership University in Rwanda, and the American University in Beirut. Whether by coincidence or intent, we are happy to see that many of our scholars will be attending schools along with their Open Dreams peers, easing the transition from life in Cameroon to that of a university campus, which can be daunting and intimidating for any incoming freshman.

### Networks, Organization and University Relationship Building across the World

One of our core goals coming into 2018 was to develop stronger partnerships and relationships with organizations and institutions aligned with our goal of college access. In this endeavour, we have exceeded our targets by leaps and bounds with several conferences attended by Open Dreams leaders. Akaba James attended the International Association of College Admission Counseling (IACAC) global conference in New Orleans as well as the Conference for the Council of International Schools in Nairobi, Kenya, meeting many university admission officers. Blaise Buma attended the African Leadership Academy's 25-year Anniversary conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, connecting with one of our primary institutional partners. Over the Christmas holidays, Blaise visited 2 of our scholars studying in at the University of Edinburgh, Elvis and Muki, to provide them with face-to-face guidance. Hans Kullberg attended the High-Achieving Low-Income (HALI) Access Network in Lake Elementaita, Kenya building relationships with other established college access organizations across Africa, sharing ideas and cross-collaborating on best practices, striving for a common goal. A few HALI organizations, like Bridge2Rwanda and KenSAP have established a solid presence on the continent, historically placing their students into some of the most prestigious universities worldwide – a model that we're seeking to emulate. Hans also visited our 3 Open Dreams scholars based in Moscow, Russia (Kenneth, Bleck & Rex) who are diligently studying mathematics and computer science within one of the toughest curriculums in the world. Finally, Akaba James has built significant relationships directly with universities in attending Mastercard Foundation's annual conference in Rochester, New York as well as a professional development conference for college counsellors hosted by New York University in Abu Dhabi.



UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA

## THEODORE

*"Open Dreams nurtured me as I grew up from a toddler who knew nothing to someone who envisions a world of talent manifestation and seeks to solve problems in whichever domain of life that presents itself. Open Dreams brought to me a sense of identity that I didn't know existed. She taught me to cherish failure and see it as an opportunity of getting something far better, and learning from the failure. Open Dreams is limitless in giving young aspiring students dreams to believe and live them. This is my family. "I did not do it because it was easy, I did it because it was difficult". This is my Open Dreams, what is your dream?"*



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

## ELVIS

*"Edinburgh is the best thing that has ever happened to me. None of this would have ever been possible without Open Dreams."*





UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA

## PEACE

*"Open Dreams is an organization made of people whose hearts are all out to see others achieve and live their dreams and this they do with no iota of favoritism. They give their all and full attention when needed and I'll forever be grateful to God for using them to help me and many others out there who are actually living their dreams."*



AFRICAN UNIVERSITY  
ZIMBABWE

## JOYCE

*"Average people stop when they're tired,  
The greats stop when they are done.  
If a dream is not an obsession,  
Don't expect a manifestation.  
We do not get where we want to  
By quitting when we are tired  
But we stop when we are done completely."*

### Internal Growth & Development Initiatives

Over the past year, we embarked on several growth initiatives to expand our reach and presence throughout Cameroon. With a goal to push the boundaries of how many scholars we can impact as well as finding the most qualified, talented applicants, we expanded operations to Yaounde (30 scholars), Douala (15 scholars) and Buea (5 scholars). We have had interactive online conference calls with Admissions officers and Duo Lingo representatives, broadcast over Zoom and GoToMeeting so that scholars from across the country can partake in the question & answer sessions, receiving pertinent information necessary to achieve a successful outcome.

Throughout the year, we have had 16 blog posts submitted to build enriching content on our website and we're not close to achieving 2 blog posts per month, elucidating the arduous and fulfilling journeys of our scholars. We hope to use the blog posts to connect with our donors and supporters on a regular basis as well as build an appetizing platform to encourage more scholars to enrol in our academy. Over the summer, we reinforced our technology resources with 4 new Laptop computers, printer ink cartridges and a new projector along with over 100 books to enhance our scholars' reading capabilities. With support from the HALI Access Network, we have received 30 SAT Exam vouchers, 60 CSS Profile Waiver fees and over 25 scholars have taken the Duolingo English Proficiency Exam free of charge, amounting to over \$20k of in-kind donations. We are especially grateful for the partnership with HALI as we have been their largest recipients of SAT & CSS fee waivers.

For the first time in our history, we have received donations made directly by Alumni, the proceeds of which were used to refurbish our office and procure new chairs, a desk and TV. In addition to their donations, more alumni than ever are matriculating as mentors, dedicating their time to enriching those following their footsteps and providing a model upon which we'd like to build upon going forward. With more events and outreach, we've broadened our brand nationally by conducting 6 national radio appearances and 3 national TV interviews. Acknowledging a need to update our academic curriculum to account for computer skills, we have integrated a 6-week computer programming requirement for all pre-mentees to fulfil, taught by our very own Open Dreams alum, Ramish Shu, who has studiously taught himself how to write computer code over the years. Ramish was also our initial scholar to enrol in the first, globally accredited online university, University of the People, which we hope will open doors to many other mentees that don't receive full scholarships to receive a quality university education within the comforts of the Open Dreams Learning Center.

The inception of a Drama Club was also new to the summer academy curriculum, helping our scholars expand their creative and artistic boundaries of self-expression, providing an outlet typically devoid in a typical high school classroom size of 100 students. As a vital way to integrate a sense of dedication to one's community, almost 30 Open Dreams pre-scholars volunteered 8 hours per day over 2 weeks to improving their communities as part of our Community Service requirement. We are proud of our scholars' commitment to their country and community and we're confident this mindset will encourage them to return to empower and further develop their homeland.

## Ongoing Challenges & Issues

The Cameroon Civil Conflict, which is evolving towards a full-on genocide against Anglophones, continues to inflict a lot of violence and strife within and around our headquarters in Bamenda. Curfews between 6pm and 6am and imposed on a daily basis, limiting the travel and business operations on the ground. Internet blockages have rendered communication unpredictable and internet unreliable. We have received reports of up to 5 murders on a daily basis and the total death toll exceeds 5,000 with conditions failing to improve. Conversely, conditions have only worsened with sounds of machine gunshots heard on a daily basis and we strongly urge all scholars and staff to take extreme caution and seek safety.

Thankfully, we have not experienced any accidents or fatalities within our own ranks, but we acknowledge that the situation is very perilous at the moment with little international attention being given to this crisis.

Without fail, however, our scholars have shown incredible resistance and perseverance throughout these trying episodes, never losing sight of their ultimate dreams of higher education. We will continue to persist through these struggles, however stifling they become, and we remain committed to the community of Bamenda and the needs of our dedicated scholars. From an operational perspective, we are encountering the traditional challenges that come along with growth as we expand our operations domestically, namely resources and staffing. The need for an Open Dreams Yaounde office keeps growing bigger with more demand and quality applicants attending our information sessions and matriculating as virtual mentees without a dedicated center. Managing this country-wide effort has become a tedious task for the services of just one man, Akaba James, as he traverses across the country spreading the Gospel of Open Dreams to ardent followers. Many times, due to the travel restrictions and curfews stemming from the civil conflict, he is risking his health and safety – a true warrior for the advancement of others. Finally, while many of our scholars received Mastercard Foundation scholarships, they were not able to attend their orientation session in Rochester, New York due to a denial of the US Visa restricting travel into the United States. Another scholar, Rodney, encountered the same difficulty entering South Africa after he was awarded a scholarship to attend the African Leadership Academy. We continue to strive diligently to overcome these obstacles and view them as temporary roadblocks along the path to ultimate success.

## Looking Ahead – Lofty Goals and Aspirations for 2019

While we have accomplished a lot in 2018 and have taken significant strides in our development, we are not resting on our laurels and will continue to push the envelope of progress. Aligned with our core mission of bridging the gap between high-achieving students and university opportunities, we plan to fully open another center in Cameroon, most likely in the capital city of Yaounde. With this development, we need to identify a dedicated protagonist to spearhead the advancement of higher education ideals in or around Yaounde. Ideally, this will be an enthusiastic teacher, counsellor or supporter of higher education, similar to the mold of our indefatigable Akaba James. English-speaking is a basic requirement as most universities require mastery of the language and we're open to receive qualified applications effective immediately ([info@open-dreams.org](mailto:info@open-dreams.org)). With further expansion comes necessary financial obligations required to finance the expansion (computers, rent, desk, books, etc.) which is a bit more expensive in Yaounde than Bamenda.



SOCIAL AUXILIARY WORKER

## MELUSI

*"I want to thank Open Dreams for the wonderful opportunity they have given me. It is true that you have to believe in someone else's belief about you until your belief in yourself grows. I have grown from strength to strength for what they saw in me. I hope Open Dreams continues to grow too."*



ASHESI UNIVERSITY

## DAPHNE

*"I never imagined I would meet people in my life who would believe in me more than I believed in myself, but Open Dreams came in to clear this doubt. I had an amazing mentor from Open Dreams and happens to be the first person I run to when I have problems in school now. I would like to tell those walking the same path "Trust Your Struggle". Trust that when all is said and done, you will get to that point you want to get to."*





African Leadership University

## Reynald

*"This chapter of my life would have never been opened without Open Dreams. Every day I am reminded how far I have come and of course the amazing family Open Dreams is. They have supported me all along and I am so thankful for this amazing family."*



Kwame Nkrumah University

## Nathan

*"The greatest and most valuable gift I received from Open-Dreams is the awareness of venturing into changing things that I don't like in my community by volunteering, and engaging in leadership projects, and Community transformation programs. Thanks to Open-Dreams for setting me up for success, I am optimistic and exited about the future."*

Thus, we are embarking on fundraising efforts using a Global Giving campaign program which should hopefully broaden our awareness and appeal across donors and supporters. As a 501c3 Non-profit registered in the United States, we are required to raise at least 1/3rd of our funding from individual, small donors in order to keep our status, a requirement that we haven't historically fulfilled. Thus, it will be imperative to collect donations from individual contributors, alumni, friends and family that are supportive of our cause of providing access to higher education. As part of our outreach, we plan to increase our presence on social media via Twitter (@OpenDreamsOrg), Instagram (OpenDreamsOrg) and other outlets in addition to our very active Facebook site. Donations can be made directly on our website donation page, which we're currently upgrading from BluePay to Global Giving. While we have historically focused on university education, we have realized there are other educational areas that we can expand our reach within the United States, namely through financial literacy which so many Americans struggle with on a daily basis. Thus, we have embarked on scoping this project to outline a potential roadmap and course curriculum along with the help of Emzingo alumni who are providing logistics, research and curriculum development on a consulting basis. We are exploring options for partners to pilot our initial program, potentially with local high schools or community organizations as we believe there is huge potential to make a big impact in the financial literacy education space. In terms of operational logistics of our core program, we have closely studied other successful college-access organizations such as KenSAP in Kenya, which has placed over 20 students in Harvard University alone, and we have found that they place great emphasis on selecting only the cream of the crop of talented students across the country, typically sending invites to just the top 0.5% of A-Level students to apply for entrance. While this is highly selective and restrictive to only A-Level students, we will be implementing hard cut-off rules on the academic criteria required to matriculate as a full-fledged Open Dreams scholar. This is in addition to the community service, essay writing, interviews and test preparation which has typically comprised our summer academy curriculum. While our scholars received 8 full scholarships last year, we're committed to improving on those results and we're aiming for at least 10 full scholarships this year and 15 for the following academic admissions cycle, incrementally expanding our success with measured progress.

### Concluding Thoughts

All told, it has been a fruitful and abundant yet trying and challenge-filled year at Open Dreams. While our scholars are beginning to reap the fruits of the seeds planted just 5 years ago, we are yet a sapling yearning to blossom into sprawling tree. As that tree bears more fruit, its seeds will inevitably fall to the ground wherein it will spawn yet more beautiful creations and success stories. This is the ultimate vision of Open Dreams and through prudent care, constant watering and tender attention, we hope to build the future leaders of tomorrow, not just in Cameroon but within Africa and the world at large. That is our ultimate dream and we are resolute and determined to open more doors, knock down barriers and build the bridge upon which our scholars will transform their lives and their communities.

Onwards and Upwards,  
Hans Kullberg  
Co-Founder