



**NEWS BULLETIN 312  
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## **Accessible Toilets Boost School Enrollment and Inspire Parents in Northern Uganda**



**The Big Dig: Parents dig the latrine pit at the Awach school.**

When The Advocacy Project (AP) met Lydia, 11, a student [at the Ogul Primary School in Uganda a year ago](#), she was avoiding the school toilets. The floor would move under her feet and Lydia - who has a visual impairment - was afraid she would fall into the pit. When nature called, she would pick up her school bag and leave for the day.

A year later, the Ogul school is equipped with new accessible toilets and Lydia's life has turned around. As she recently told [Chris Markomanolakis](#), an AP Peace Fellow, she happily attends school every day unless she is sick.



**Close friends: Lydia and Monica both have minor disabilities but feel more comfortable at Ogul School now that girls have their own safe toilet.**

Lydia (photo left) is one of 866 students at two schools in Uganda who are benefiting from a unique partnership between teachers, parents and advocates. By replacing ageing toilets at remote primary schools the partners hope to boost school enrollment and attendance, improve hygiene, and even reduce bullying against students with a disability.

The project is led by the [Gulu Disabled Persons Union](#), a prominent advocate for disability rights in Gulu. Funding has been provided by AP, [Givology](#) and Peace Fellows who have volunteered at GDPU.

So far it seems to be working. New toilets have been installed at the Tochi primary school and Lydia's school at Ogul. Enrollment rose this year from 406 students to 460 at Tochi, and from 375 to 406 at Ogul.

When Mr Markomanolakis, this year's Peace Fellow at GDPU, visited Ogul last week he was told that the new toilets were largely responsible

for the increase. Attendance has also risen. Several students with disability said that they face less bullying after GDPU provided inclusivity training.



**Man on a mission: John Bosco, the Principal at Awach is committed to creating a healthy and inclusive school environment.**

Encouraged by these results, GDPU and AP are installing toilets at Awach, a large school with 991 students - 53 of them with a disability. The need is certainly great. When Mr Markomanolakis visited Awach he found that the toilets were almost overflowing and could not be drained. Only four of the 9 stalls were usable. One toilet for girls had collapsed.

The involvement of families is critical. Scores of parents helped to dig the latrine pit at Ogul last year and several told Mr Markomanolakis that this had protected the new toilets against vandalism. Christine Akot, the school principal at Ogul, agreed. "The community helped construct this latrine, so they respect it," she said.

The new project at Awach School has aroused similar enthusiasm. More than eighty parents helped to dig the latrine. They included Rosalda Adero, an 82 year-old grandmother of students who said she had come to "dig for our children."

The success of the toilet project owes much to the leadership of Patrick Ojok from GDPU and the energy of Peace Fellows. Mr. Markomanolakis served in Tanzania with the Peace Corps before enrolling at the University of Maryland. He has raised over \$3,000 for the Awach project and was [recently profiled by his local newspaper](#).



**Many hands:** Chris Markomanolakis, center, has raised over \$3,000 for the Awach toilets and joined the big dig.

With the Awach toilets now under construction, GDPU is reaching out to the local authorities in the hope of getting the model replicated throughout Gulu district.

The response has been encouraging. The Awach village council (LC1) helped to organize the latrine dig and the

District Education Officer will accompany the GDPU team to the school next week. GDPU and AP hope that their enthusiasm will work its way up and influence budgets.

***Want to get involved? We'd like to hear from you!***

- \* [View Chris's photos here](#). His photos are used in this bulletin.
- \* Meet the amazing Peace Fellows who have worked on the toilet project: [Rebecca Scherpelz](#) (2011); [Dana Macri](#) (2012); [John Steies](#) (2013); [Kathryn Dutile](#) (2014); [Josh Levy](#) (2015); [Amy Gillespie](#) (2016); [Lauren Halloran](#) (2017); and [Chris Markomanolakis](#) (2018).
- \* [Donate to Chris's crowdfunding page](#).

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