



Followings Foundation

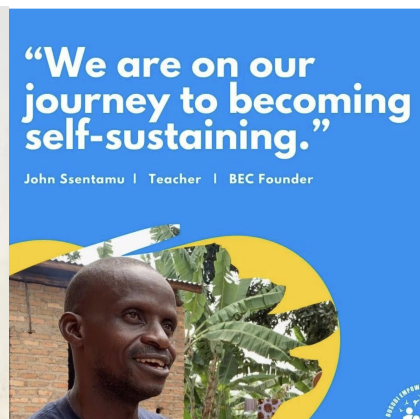
2023 Annual Review

Reconnecting, Rebuilding, and Reaching New Heights

Leap now, your wings will follow.

"Followings Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work, live, and gather, and pays respect to Elders past, present, and emerging. We extend that respect to the communities of Busubi and Kyetume, whose land, leadership, and resilience make the work of the Busubi Education Centre possible."

Busubi Empowered Communities, Uganda · followingsfoundation.org



Welcome

Founder message

Lauren Exton

Director, Followings Foundation

Welcome to the 2023 edition of the Followings Foundation Annual Review.

2023 was a year of profound reconnection. After four years away, I finally returned to Busubi in March — and standing inside the BEC Learning Centre, seeing what this community has built and the hundreds of trainees who have passed through its doors, was a powerful reminder of just how far we have all come.

This year marked an historic milestone: Followings Foundation received its first ever institutional grant — from SMEC Foundation. It was received not just as financial support but as recognition that our approach to community-led development is worthy of investment. We are profoundly grateful.

BEC students and staff continue to astonish us with their skill, dedication and joy. Thank you to everyone who donated, fundraised, and cheered us on. Webale nyo.

"Reconnecting with our partners here in person, after almost four years, fills me with that 'the sky is the limit' feeling all over again. My eyes and ears and heart are wide open."

— Lauren Exton, Director — March 2023

Key partner message

John Ssentamu

Director, Busubi Empowered Communities

It has been a wonderful year at BEC Learning Centre. We welcomed Lauren and her team back to Busubi for the first time in four years - COVID19 made travel hard for so long. Seeing the growth of the Centre and our programs through their eyes reminded us of how far we have come.

The SMEC Foundation grant was a transformative moment. New machines for the tailoring room, new computers in the lab, new instruments and costumes for the cultural troupe — every investment has been felt across the entire community.

Our tailoring students are making school uniforms for local schools. Our cultural troupe is performing for hire. Our bookkeeper is tracking every shilling. We are growing stronger, together, every single day.

2023 at a Glance

A\$18k Raised (FY 2022–23) plus \$30k SMEC grant in July 2023	96% Spent on BEC programs of all expenditure to the Centre	203+ School uniforms made first B2B tailoring contract	5 New computers installed expanded computer lab
---	---	---	---

Foundation Objectives

"We are so proud of our commitment to grassroots change. Both partners understand that the goal is neither to give nor receive endlessly, but to grow together. Side-by-side, BEC and Followings Foundation are committed to becoming beacons of change in both Australia and Uganda."

— Lauren Exton, Founder & Director

Objectives

To continue to support and fiscally sponsor the staffing, resourcing and maintenance of BEC Learning Centre as they move towards becoming financially independent.

To build a social licence and meaningful connection to communities in which Followings Foundation operates.

To increase the breadth of Followings Foundation's traditional corporate social responsibilities, ensuring the best possible social and developmental impact.

To create partnerships with non-government organisations and community groups addressing poverty, social disadvantage and environmental protection.

2023 Highlights

Q1

Lauren returns to Busubi

For the first time since 2019, Lauren Exton visited Busubi alongside Ross Hitt and Mel. The visit — described as a 'reconnect, reorient and reactivate' meeting — was the first in-person assessment since the pandemic.

BEC turns five

The BEC Community and Learning Centre celebrated its 5th birthday. What began as a timber frame is now a vibrant hub offering free classes seven days a week.

Q2

School uniform contract

BEC tailoring students — Mercy, Joan, Zaituni, Rehema and Sylvia — completed over 203 school uniforms for local primary schools: BEC's first ever B2B income-generating contract.

SMEC grant application

Followings Foundation submitted a successful grant proposal to the SMEC Foundation and SMEC Alumni Ross Hitt, marking the beginning of a transformative institutional partnership.

Q3

First institutional grant

SMEC Foundation (\$15,000 capital) and Ross Hitt (\$15,000 operational) grants confirmed. This was the first time Followings Foundation received institutional funding in its six-year history.

Computer lab expanded

Five new desktop computers and an income-generating printer were purchased. The BEC library room was upgraded to accommodate the expanded lab. Trainees immediately took to online learning programs.

Tailoring refurbished

4 new manual sewing machines + 1 electric machine for training, plus 5 new electric machines reserved for income-generating projects. Class numbers steadily increasing.

Q4

Cultural Troupe equipped

New musical instruments, traditional costumes and performance equipment purchased. Troupe is now fully available for hire at events across Masaka District.

Centre refurbished

Repainting of the Centre, Library, Office, Latrines and Dormitory completed. Floor repairs and improvements including installation of a large ceiling fan in the auditorium. Inspected by Ross Hitt and Rebecca Boon.

Bookkeeper trained

A full-time bookkeeper completed all training and financial management processes were established — a major step toward long-term financial independence for BEC.

Programs in 2023

Tailoring and Dressmaking

The tailoring program saw its most significant investment since the Centre opened. Following the SMEC Foundation grant, four new manual machines and one electric sewing machine were installed for training, bringing the total capacity to meet growing enrolment demand.

Five further electric sewing machines were purchased specifically for income-generating projects, including the school uniform contract. Class numbers grew steadily throughout the year, with trainees visibly energised by the upgraded equipment.

The school uniform contract — over 203 uniforms completed — represented a landmark first for BEC: proof that the tailoring program can generate real income for the Centre and sustainable work for graduates.

Computer Lab and Digital Literacy

Five new desktop computers were installed and the library room reconfigured to accommodate the expanded lab. A new black-and-white printer was added as an income-generating asset for the Centre.

Trainees — many encountering computers for the first time — embraced the expanded access. Online learning programs ran throughout the year, particularly during school holiday periods.

Cultural Performance Troupe

The BEC Cultural Performance Troupe received a major investment: new musical instruments, performance costumes, and staging equipment, all purchased with SMEC Foundation grant funds. The troupe is now fully equipped for paid performances and event hire across the Masaka region, generating small but growing income for the Centre.

Other Programs

Hairdressing, agriculture, library reading programs, and sports continued to run throughout the year. The Centre remained open seven days a week, with all programs offered free to the community.

Our Partners

2023 was a landmark year for partnerships. We are grateful to:

- Shallon Nakimwero — Manager, Busubi Empowered Communities
- John Ssentamu — Director, Busubi Empowered Communities
- SMEC Foundation — first institutional grant (\$15,000 capital expenditure)
- Ross Hitt — SMEC Alumni, personal supporter, operational grant (\$15,000)
- Rebecca Boon — Creative Director, on-the-ground inspection of refurbishment works
- All individual donors and community fundraisers

"On behalf of B.E.C I extend my heartfelt appreciation to SMEC and SMEC Alumni Ross Hitt. It is our humble appreciation that we can extend to you for creating space that can give hope and empower those vulnerable youths and children to be empowered with skills they can live on in their lives."

— Shallon Nakimwero, Manager, Busubi Empowered Communities

Financial Transparency

The figures below are from our audited Profit & Loss for the financial year 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023. Our financial year runs July–June; the SMEC Foundation grant of \$30,000 received in July 2023 therefore appears in our FY 2023–24 accounts. All funds go directly to program delivery and operational support for BEC in Busubi, Uganda.

Income · FY 2022–23	
Donations received	A\$18,047.85
Total Income	A\$18,047.85
Expenditure	
BEC Learning Centre	A\$14,672.48
Subscriptions (accounting software)	A\$385.00
Travel expenses	A\$145.99
Advertising and marketing	A\$24.21
Bank charges and fees	A\$8.85
Total Expenditure	A\$15,236.53
Result	
Net Surplus	A\$2,811.32

96% of all expenditure went directly to BEC Learning Centre programs and operations — consistent with our 'A for Excellent' CharityWatch.org efficiency rating.

Full financial records available at followingsfoundation.org/aboutus.

Looking Ahead to 2024

With the foundation laid in 2023, BEC and Followings Foundation are ready for another ambitious year:

- Grow tailoring training to 12 full-time and 30 part-time trainees
- Resume hairdressing program
- Expand uniform supply contract with local schools
- Explore a new income-generating enterprise — a community convenience store
- Continue building the Cultural Troupe's performing portfolio
- Plan another community visit by the Followings Foundation team

Thank you for your continued support. Step by step, village by village. Webale nnyo.