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Newsworthy

Visitors arrive in Bududa

We are blessed to have volunteers throughout June and July to enrich our programs and bring us expertise and supplies from North America. Presently visitors stay with local families who provide a locked room with a bed, mosquito net, and meals. For those who prefer a little more comfort than the villagers can provide, we are in the process of building a four bedroom guest house, with magnificent views, above the Bududa Vocational Institute. We know there is so much expertise that could benefit the people of Bududa that we hope new accommodations will make it easier to attract more of you to join us. The new cottage should be ready by September.

Program Updates

Bududa Vocational Institute

Under the supervision of our Brick Laying and Concrete Practices teacher, our students are busy putting their coursework to the practical test in the building our own guest house. They have dug the foundation. It was amazing to watch the hive of activity as all the materials—thousands of bricks, sand and gravel are carried by hand, head,

or shoulder up the hill. It is almost like a medieval scene.

The Nursery II students turned BVI into mini-mock classrooms to display and demonstrate the educational materials they created. The students were graded based on their creativity, use of natural and local materials, and their ability to explain the use of each tool. We think they did a fantastic job, but the real test will be when the outside examiner arrives for their assessments! Meanwhile, we are actively recruiting a new class of first year students to replace the Nursery II students later this term.

Our first craft training for the women of Bududa was a success. Maimuna, a craft worker from western Uganda taught the women how to weave baskets and make jewelry. Twenty eight women attended the workshops, with some demonstrating real flair for the crafts. For reasons we can only speculate, there is little art and few crafts practiced by the people in Bududa. Perhaps its relative isolation from markets to sell goods, limited exposure to creative ideas, or maybe just the effect of poor nutrition, inadequate to provide the energy needed for extra activities, have led to the dearth of art or crafts in this district. We hope to continue to find opportunities to bring skills to the community, particularly to the women of Bududa. Studies have shown that helping women in the developing world attain some financial independence is critical. Even earning a few incremental

dollars each month can make a meaningful difference in the lives of the villagers.

Children of Peace

The excitement in our Primary 1 and 2 Saturday classes was palpable last week when we distributed new books to our youngest students. While it may be hard to imagine, many students in Bududa don't touch printed material until they see their first mandated national exam. Imagine the challenge of mastering a second language from your teacher's words and printing on the blackboard! Thanks to a generous supporter, we have been able to provide a series of books to two classes and some Bible stories to be shared by the older students. We hope to be able to provide books to the other classes in the future.



Students from BVI's Nursery Teacher Training program volunteer on Saturday to gain experience and help us provide some individualized instruction. We have hired an additional teacher to enable Johnson, a talented music instructor to teach each of the classes. We have also introduced netball and volleyball play to bring both fun and exercise to our students. Music and sport provide a healthy balance to the educational program we provide.

African Great Lakes Initiative Bududa Projects encompass programs designed to improve the well-being of the people of Bududa, a poor remote district in eastern Uganda. Through the Bududa Vocational Institute (BVI) we offer vocational diploma programs and short courses to the community to develop job and craft skills. We also run the Children of Peace program, supporting 200 orphans in the district with supplemental education, enrichment, and necessities.

Visitor's Reflection

I truly believe that education is the most important tool for the success and empowerment of young people, regardless of geographical location or cultural context. Coming to volunteer in Uganda has made me realize that education, though crucial, is more difficult to access and to impart than I ever imagined. If I have gained anything from this experience, it is a better understanding of the immediate and devastating effects of poverty and disease on a child's ability to receive an education, and of course, how limited I was in my own experience before I came to Bududa.

Many of those things that I took for granted, like caring teachers and basic materials are missing from the education on all levels here in Uganda. Class size in the primary schools of over 100 students makes teaching and learning daunting. The education in Uganda I have seen has been the "learn by repetition" model. Children here are not encouraged to ask "why?" and "how?" but rather, to learn subjects like English and Math by repeating phrases and formulas. BVI and the Children of Peace program are working hard to change this, and to encourage and empower students towards more successful adult lives.

Hannah Mercuris is a graduate of Germantown Friends School and a junior at Columbia University. She is volunteering for five weeks in Bududa this summer.

Harriet's Story

Each week I am reminded of the importance the Children of Peace program plays in the lives of these kids. Harriet is about 14 years old and her story is not atypical. She is tall and very thin, but strong with a kind of a wooden expression on her face—no smile. Both of Harriet's parents have died and she lives with grandparents way up on the hillside. One Saturday she came to see the Canadian nurses with a rash all over her body. The nurse provided an antifungal cream to apply every day. Then, she thought to ask Harriet if someone at home could apply the cream on her back for her. She said, "No. There is no one." Harriet told us she lived with her Granny and Grandpa, but Granny had been in the hospital. Harriet's words still echo in my head, "She is not OK."

We suggested to Harriet as gently as possible that she could come to BVI each day and that I would apply the cream to her back. Sure enough, on the next rainy Monday morning, Harriet walked from more than an hour away. I could see the sadness written all over her face. She took

off her blouse and I rubbed in the cream as gently as I could, as I knew she needed lots of tenderness. She began to weep, silent, embarrassed tears. I almost wept myself for this poor kid. Harriet has come back every day since and the rash is still bothersome, but at least she is getting some attention. We have visited her home and found that Granny is indeed very sick and the conditions are deplorable.

Believe it or not there are hundreds of children like this all over these hillsides. In many cases they are the victims of the AIDS epidemic, but sometimes it is just poverty that has wreaked havoc in their lives. It is a fine thing to be able to help these wonderful children who endure despite overwhelming hardships.

I first wrote Harriet's story in March, but now I am happy to report an uplifting sequel. We suggested Harriet join the older women in the craft classes I mentioned earlier. Harriet was quite successful making baskets. She took some materials home. Even though she has no light at home and no scissors to cut the fabric, she has made six baskets. We sell them for her and give her



more fiber. Now she is teaching another women's group on the opposite hillside and they are delighted to have her help. She is still not quick to smile and is very matter-of-fact about her accomplishments, but she is meeting some success and has learned a skill that can bring in a meager income, but an income no less.

So thanks again to all of you for all your encouraging words and emails and offers of help and care packages. You have no idea what they mean to all of us. I see that every item goes to some needy child or for the Children of Peace. It is amazing how much it means to them to have our hand-me-down clothes and whatever else comes this way. Barbara