

SCAW NEWSLETTER



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A registered Canadian charity founded by Margaret and Murray Dryden

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UGANDA: May 27 - June 16, 2005: 5,000 Bedkits

**BY GRANT CLARK
MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO**

She was sitting on a hard wooden bench, a look of longing and sadness in her eyes. Her simple dress represented all of her possessions. Her feet had never known the comfort of cushion-soled shoes. Her hands were calloused from the hoe she had used for many months in the small fields by her home. She did not notice the five Canadians who had entered the room. She was locked within her own private world. She was eighteen and alone.

The pains had started two days ago and she was afraid. Childbirth in Canada brings anxiety to a new mother, but in a remote village in the mountains of Mbarara district, the risks are much higher. The decision had been made that she would walk to the nearest clinic, which was twenty treacherous miles away. She would not be accompanied by her spouse because, typically a husband would be away selling bananas or firewood at a roadside market. And, he might not return for many days, choosing instead to spend time with friends and often returning empty-handed.

On the day when the decision was made for this young mother-to-be to walk to the medical clinic, it was determined that two women would accompany her from the village. They would walk with her. If the labour pains would become more extreme, they would assist with the child's delivery. The young woman did not bring a blanket for her new child – she did not own one. She

brought no baby clothes or personal belongings. She had only her simple dress. If the baby was born before

they reached the clinic, the women would find a broad banana leaf from within a newly grown tree and make it ready to receive the new infant. This blanket, provided by nature, would be clean and soft to the touch. An outer banana leaf with a razor edge would be used to cut the umbilical cord. After this primitive delivery, a young African mother would hold her new gift of life – if no complications arose.

On this occasion, the sharp labour pains made it necessary for this young mother to stop many times during her two-day trek, climbing and descending the mountain footpath that led to the clinic. This medical centre offered little to assist in the delivery, but there was a trained medical assistant present. Also the clinic had no beds or blankets. The comforts that we take for granted in Canada do not exist in this remote village in Uganda. It was here that we met this young woman. Our team had brought some baby clothes and blankets for the clinic. We touched this young mother's hands and offered her gifts for her unborn child. Her eyes recognized our purpose and an expression of gratitude filled her face.

I have wondered since about this woman. Did her baby survive? Will we meet her in the future at a distribution if her child becomes fortunate enough to receive a bedkit? Will we see this mother's expression of gratitude and feel her embrace of friendship? The chances are remote. Uganda is a nation of almost 15 million children. Nearly 2.5 million of them are orphaned. The need is great. The generosity of the donations to SCAW allows us to bring a gift of peaceful sleep and hope to 5,000 children. As a tribal elder said to us, "This is but a pinch of salt in the ocean". But it makes a difference for each child and family who receives this precious gift, and it brings hope to an entire village. It also says clearly

that someone in a country far away cares about a young child in Africa!

The bedkit is similar to the one provided to the children in Uganda over the past several years. The devaluation of the Ugandan Shilling has made it increasingly more difficult to maintain all the bedkit items, but the women from the Inner Wheel of Kampala have again worked effectively with small manufacturing companies to obtain good quality items. The ground mattress, which consists of sturdy foam, covered with a brightly coloured textile, is the central feature of the bedkit. Once the children receive this plastic-covered mattress, their faces beam with happiness. They often do not even look at the other bedkit items because the mattress represents a value to them that is greater than anything they ever expected to receive! The colourful uniform, blanket, towel, bed sheets, basin and sandals complete the gift. The final item is a jar of antiseptic gel. This product is effective in combating ringworm. It also provides valuable information for villagers about an effective medicine that they can use.

For Leslie and me, this completes our fourth trip to Uganda. Our special friendships and memories make us long to return. Your commitment to this very special charity is the partnership that makes it all possible.

**BY LESLIE BANNER
MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO**

The disparity continue to grow over the four years that I have been part of a team distributing bedkits in Uganda. This year, our second distribution was at Entebbe. This is a large city, formerly the capital, almost next door to Kampala, where the international airport is located. I had expected to be in the midst of this bustling downtown

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MURRAY'S DREAM 1,000,000 BEDKITS - TO DATE 771,850!



for the distribution. Instead, we drove in the small bus, behind the airport to a clutch of makeshift huts and a community with little in the way of agriculture, animals or support. One of the women of the Inner Wheel of Kampala, our overseas volunteers, had discovered this very needy group of children, many from single parent homes, and orphans living with relatives.

The vista was breathtaking as we set up on the shores of Lake Victoria. Looking out at this vast lake (unfortunately infested with parasites which renders it unsafe for swimming), we saw fishermen in leaky old flat bottom boats, fishing for Nile perch and tilapia. With the mud huts in view and the lake as our backdrop we began our distribution of 550 bedkits.

What quickly drew my eyes upward was the roar of the jets taking off over the lake as the international planes flew tourists, government personnel and business people in and out of this country. As well, United Nations planes, both large and small, landed and took off from a separate area of the airport, where more than 50 brand new UN SUV's were parked. Conversely, the children who received your bedkits here were without shoes. They had tired, leathery bare feet, also many had ringworm on their heads and faces, and many also displayed the distended bellies of the malnourished. They certainly had never been on a plane, never in a new SUV, and did not know how to swim even though they live on the shore of this lake; in fact they didn't even glance up when planes accelerated over the lake into the air.

In a report entitled "The Silent Majority Child Poverty in Uganda 2002", completed by Save the Children, United Kingdom, it was estimated that 14% of the children of Uganda below 18 years of age are orphans. With a population of 26.3 million, Uganda is estimated to have the highest population of AIDS orphans in the world. UNICEF has stated that the number of orphans will rise to 3.5 million by the year 2010. This year we distributed many of the bedkits to orphans; some brought many miles by truck to receive the precious bedkits. We visited two orphanages as well, where we have previously distributed bedkits and saw the clean but worn covers on the foam mattresses and the blankets still very much in use. In one tidy room, 10 ft by 12 ft, 17

children aged 10 to 13 slept in triple-decker bunk beds.

The president of Uganda was quoted in a newspaper article while we were in the country, discussing the debt cancellation of 18 poor countries by the G8. He remarked that this is indeed laudable relief of the crushing debt that in Uganda's case is currently \$4.9 billion and costs \$100 million to service each year. He suggested however, that this was just relief, not a solution, and likened it to cancelling a poor person's debt without giving the person a source for producing money, thus causing another debt to be contracted.



He went on to say that the nations need a win-win solution allowing the poor countries to have access to the markets of the rich countries with the provision of being quota and tariff-free.

With the abundance of incredibly wonderful tasting fruit, aromatic rice, tea where one can almost taste the sunshine, coffee rich with flavour, and my favourite vanilla beans, so large and soft that some friends did not even recognize the beans as vanilla until they smelled the intense aroma, this country could well be poised to join the world market if allowed by the powerful brokers of the G8. Again this juxtaposition between what the country can offer, and what they are allowed to sell abroad, boggles our mind.

The women of the Inner Wheel of Kampala work for months in advance of our arrival in Uganda, visiting each area to ensure that the most needy children will receive the bedkits. One might argue that there are so many children who meet the criteria; they need not be so diligent. In fact, with teachers salaries at 70,000 shillings per month, (about \$50CAD), even their children could qualify for bedkits. However, the women ensure that they know which children are in the most dire straights, and work to obtain the very best prices for all of the bedkit items. Gas prices increased almost daily (to about \$1.25CAD per litre) while we were on distribution and this caused much concern, as the small bus seemed to use large amounts of fuel. This contrasts with the situation in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, the last leg of our flight to Uganda, where gas prices are so low they are not even posted and no one even enquires what they are, a mere seven hours away!

These women have chosen to meet weekly to take on tasks to better the lives of women and children throughout Uganda. We stopped at a well which they had recently finished as well as a small maternity hospital they are furnishing. Finally, we visited a destitute mother and her seven children that the Inner Wheel women support through housing and schooling. They fulfill the following creed:

There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the highest creed.

Albert Schweitzer

They have truly accepted the challenges of living in Uganda today and each day live to better the lives of others.

I read this poem in their honour at our last evening together.

What is Life?

Life is a gift...accept it
Life is an adventure...dare it
Life is a mystery...unfold it
Life is a game...play it
Life is a struggle...face it
Life is beauty...praise it
Life is a puzzle...solve it
Life is opportunity...take it
Life is sorrowful...experience it
Life is a song...sing it
Life is a goal...achieve it
Life is a mission...fulfill it.

Author unknown

BY KATHY DEVINE TORONTO, ONTARIO

Ten days before the SCAW team travelling to Uganda was to depart Toronto I was contacted to see if I would be able to join them. One of the team who was supposed to go had had a personal crisis. Having been to Uganda with SCAW in 2002 and 2003 and having fallen in love with the country and its people, I jumped at the chance! After a whirlwind nine days of getting shots updated, renewing my passport, getting time-off from work, organizing my family and packing I left with the other four members of the team on May 27th. We arrived in Kampala on Sunday night, May 29th and when we finally got to "Anne's Guest House" I felt that I had returned to my second home.

After one day of rest we had our first distribution in Wakiso, a District very close to Kampala, for 500 children. How happy I

was to once again see those beautiful children in their new yellow, green, blue and red outfits. I knew once again why I had come. Over the next 10 days we would distribute another 4,500 bedkits to the neediest of children bringing the total to 5,000. During the three times that I have travelled to Uganda I have taken part in distributing 17,000 bedkits at 47 different sites. One might think that after giving out that many bedkits and taking all those pictures that the children might all become the same – just another number, and that the miles and miles travelled across the country all roll into one. That is not the case! Each and every child continues to touch our hearts, and the country continues to unfold its natural beauty mile after mile.

As it had been two years since I was last in Uganda I looked for signs of progress and change. The traffic in Kampala was worse than ever, with cars and vans spewing out their black fumes. Construction was going on for some very modern buildings, and booths selling “air time” for people’s cell phones are found about every six feet. There are still street people and street children living in squalor.

As we moved out of the city and into rural areas more people now seemed to own a goat and not just chickens as we saw a couple of years ago. In some areas there appeared to be more bicycles. The closer I got to the children though it seemed that not a lot had changed. When you look at the photos you receive showing your bedkit recipients, you see happy, smiling children looking very bright in their new colourful outfits. You don’t see the blind and disabled children; some with open sores on their legs and arms; some with oozing infections complete with hovering flies; and some with ringworm covering their arms and scalps. In your photo you also won’t see the bare feet of children who may have walked 20 miles to receive their bedkits, and the feet are tough and wrinkled like an elephant’s skin and often infected. Sadly, there are just too many of these affected children.

Our SCAW team left Uganda to return to Canada on June 16th. June 16th is designated as the “Day of the African Child” (DAC). On this day the African community commemorates the children of Johannesburg, S.A. who were brutally

massacred by the apartheid regime June 16, 1976. The objectives of DAC are to:

- 1) Raise awareness on the problems of Uganda’s children at National, District and Community levels.
- 2) To reflect on the state of children and take stock of what the government has done to improve the welfare of children.
- 3) To help sustain political will and mobilize resources for alleviating problems affecting the rights of children.
- 4) To mobilize District and Community actions in favour of children.
- 5) To commemorate the children of Soweto who were brutally massacred by the then Apartheid regime.

Uganda has also developed a National Orphans and other Vulnerable Children (OVC) policy which was just launched this year also on June 16th. It is a strategic program and plan of intervention to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of such children and their families. A Yellow Ribbon has been adopted as symbolic support for each child that has been traumatized, abandoned and abused. The Yellow Ribbon is a symbol of the hope that every child will be safe and healthy and that every child will be offered a future that allows them to be all that they can be.



Hopefully with these policies in place we will continue to see an improvement in the lives of the children to whom we distribute bedkits. 5,000 is just a drop in the bucket, but 5,000 more children in Uganda now have a mattress to sleep on for the first time in their lives and their mother or grandmother can now cover them with a blanket at night.

I was honoured to once again go to Uganda with SCAW and will cherish the memories I have. I hope and pray that I can continue over the years to help fulfill Murray’s dream of providing 1,000,000 bedkits to extremely needy children.

BY MARY ANN KING BOBCAYGEON, ONTARIO

Defining moments – they may change the course of one’s life, but more often they simply serve to put things into perspective.

She was so beautiful with ebony skin glistening under a canopy of stars. Her purple satin dress was perhaps a size too large, but no doubt she

had chosen her best for the occasion. With hips gyrating to the beat of the drum, and a bike tire serving as a hula-hoop, she flashed a smile as big as all outdoors. She represented all that gives the African nation hope – the joyous laughter, and the innocent trust that the future holds something better for her, is all hers. In that fleeting time before the reality of growing up too quickly in a tough environment, she enjoys the moment. It was indeed a very special time, one of many, many special moments in Uganda.

Another defining moment followed quickly while the image of that young woman was still fresh in my memory.

The school was unlike the pristine, air conditioned one in which I work in Canada. The rough wooden benches, the dirt floor, the dimly lit interior were common to schools we visited in Uganda. Lacking an attendance register, the statistics were posted on a dull, chipped blackboard. Ages and names were recorded, followed by ‘P’ for present and ‘S’ for sick. It was the third designation which brought me up short. ‘D’ is for dead! That was the moment, more than any other, and it served to define the harsh reality of growing up in Uganda. No grief counselors available here, just a mother’s broken heart and an empty desk to mark the passing of one more beautiful child. In an area where medical assistance is scarce, and mostly unaffordable, this is life.

These are just two of the many moments in which I was moved to tears.

Like a mother who quickly forgets the labour pains when presented with her child, the hard times are already forgotten. The too-large shoes borrowed for the occasion, (but more often the rough, unshod feet), the open sores and the ringworm, the incredibly rough roads, the heat, the insane Kampala traffic, and the miscounted labels are done. In their place are the smiles, the shy thank-you’s and the grateful hearts.

Will I ever forget my very first distribution, walking into a church filled with smiling, singing, clapping children? Never! What about the young girl who tried to give the bedkit back, “Please, madam, I cannot pay”. Quickly reassured, she walked away smiling, the basin on her head, the mattress under her arm.

There were 450 kids dressed in the colourful uniforms from the bedkit, running alongside

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(Uganda, Mary Ann King, Bobcaygeon, Ontario, continued from page 3)

the bus, greeting us with clapping and singing, even the tiniest children smiling in anticipation. It would prove to be a day unlike any other for them. High in the mountains we crested a hill only to catch a glimpse of a sea of red, yellow, blue and green. Many had left their homes in the night to walk 20 miles, over very rough terrain, to reach the distribution site.

Every child was indeed beautiful, and each received a gift for perhaps the first time in his/her life. Until I saw it first-hand, the impact of this gift was lost on me.

Murray Dryden was one man who saw a need and worked to fulfill it. No doubt his life changed. Following his dream, my life changed! Blessed to be a part of a team for whom Uganda was very familiar, the uncertainty of travelling in a new environment was eliminated, so I was left to just soak up an incredible experience. Leslie and Grant took care to keep us informed and safe—"Thank you!" Getting to know Kathy was an added bonus! The wonderful Inner Wheel Women will remain in our hearts always! Coming to Uganda to deliver bedkits, we quickly realized that we were dispensing a ray of hope.

For each of you donors, you have changed a child's life and hugely impacted on his/her family. Those pictures you receive tell only a portion of the story, because the huge smiles come later. Every tenor of their being lights up as he/she is handed their bedkit. Be assured that you have, indeed, given a child halfway around the world a ray of hope.



NEXT SCHEDULED DISTRIBUTION TRIPS

**September, 2005
HONDURAS
5,000 BEDKITS**

**November, 2005
BANGLADESH
7,000 BEDKITS**

BY RON KING BOBCAYGEON, ONTARIO

As the plane touched down at Entebbe Airport, I began to wonder how I would communicate in this new land with various languages and customs. This concern began to evaporate as I was warmly greeted by members of the Inner Wheel of Kampala, a greeting that felt as though we had known each other forever.

The first day of distribution, again dispelled any concerns. Our arrival at the distribution site was heralded by singing, clapping and the most awesome sight I have ever seen; just imagine, 500 young people dressed in brightly coloured uniforms awaiting a gift that could and would change their lives.

Some of them smiled broadly while others had a look that said, "Is this really true? Is this actually going to happen?" With a smile and handshake some faces relaxed and a beautiful grin appeared, their eyes sparkled as they anticipated receiving that long-awaited gift.

With a bucket on the head and a bedroll tightly grasped under the arm, we often heard a small voice saying "thank you".

In the midst of one distribution, two youngsters appeared, each carrying a papaya which they offered to me as a gift. No words were exchanged for none were needed. Their eyes sparkled, mine were wet. They gave of themselves in a simple and loving way.

Another day, as a young girl left with her gift, I noticed tears flowing down her cheeks, while her smile conveyed her appreciation.

Dancing, singing and wonderful lunches, always including *matooke*, created many unforgettable memories.

Shaking hands with an elder in one of the villages, I heard his story of warfare and fleeing into the bush to save his family. Only recently, returning to the village where he again felt safe, his story revealed a life of hardship common to many Ugandans.

Travelling with our escorts from the Inner Wheel of Kampala was an adventure in itself. Their laughter, singing, jokes (which we didn't always get), and the friendship they offered was indeed special. They shared

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Kay Kelly, Harry Keating, and Maurice Kowanetz for publishing this newsletter

Milton van der Veen for maintaining SCAW's web site

Donors and volunteers for their continuing support!

their dreams and their concerns. Whether it was about a medical centre, a well project, a school or a home that required furnishing, I could sense a deep sense of commitment to improving life in a land where many face a daily struggle to survive.

Each time I handed a bedkit to a child, I was reminded of the generosity of Canadians who made the whole project possible.

I trust that I was a good ambassador for you, the donors, and that I was able to communicate your love and concern for the children of Uganda.

As I write this I look at tomorrow, the day we leave Uganda, but a part of me will remain in a country I have grown to love over the past few weeks. Despite differing languages and customs, I have been reminded that communication takes different forms: a smile, a handshake, a hug, a look, and above all the giving of a gift are universal methods of communicating.

I feel richly blessed to have been part of Team Uganda, 2005.

SCAW'S GOAL - 1,000,000 BEDKITS BY 2010!