

in war-torn Congo to the meeting rooms of the United Nations, Friends projects are helping peace efforts in the Middle East (the Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement) as well as pulling people out of war and poverty with CIDA-funded farm co-op and education programs in Nicaragua and Guatemala. Closer to home, [the Society of] Friends has supported action around reform of the justice system and stood in solidarity with native peoples. It has spoken out loudly against the persecu-

tion of minority communities under the Anti-terrorism Act, [and] is currently campaigning with its U.S. counterparts against torture and helping American Iraq war resisters seeking asylum in Canada. In their tradition of standing with marginalized people, Quakers are one of the few faith groups to support the Civil Marriage Act. A shining example of courage and determination.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: THE 22 DECEMBER

2005 ISSUE ([HTTP://WWW.NOWTORONTO.COM/ISSUES/2005-12-22/NEWS_STORY2.PHP](http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2005-12-22/news_story2.php)) OF *NOW MAGAZINE* FEATURED THIS ARTICLE “PACIFISM’S POWER SPOTS: HERE ARE THE TOUCHSTONES OF A CITY BLESSED WITH A RICH HISTORY OF ANTI-WAR ACTION” BY JOHN BACHER. THANK YOU TO *NOW MAGAZINE* FOR PERMISSION TO REPRINT THE SECTION OF THE ARTICLE ABOUT FRIENDS HOUSE, AND TO JO VELLACOTT FOR SUGGESTING WE DO SO (DESPITE THE FEW INACCURACIES, ESPECIALLY THE VATICAN BIT).



Elbow grease with love

By Sheila Havard

This spring I signed up, with some trepidation, for a work-camp run jointly by the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) in the U.S., Evangelical Friends Peace Community Development (Quakers), and Child Care in Uganda. The work-camp I was privileged to attend was in July 2005 in the stunningly beautiful village of Bududa in eastern Uganda. The work-camp was a great success on two counts: because the nine North American, two non-Ugandan African work-campers, and approximately a dozen Bududan volunteers, completed the assigned construction of the vocational school, and because of the spirit of unity and fellowship the joint effort inspired in all the work-campers. Our work-camp, the best of the four AGLI work-camps according to our U.S. coor-

dinator, seems to become a vocation for participants, who return home enthusing about the project; with the exception of one work-camper with a conflicting commitment, we all said we would consider returning in 2006.

Bugisu, the eastern province in which Bududa is located, has the highest population density in the nation, up to 250 people per square kilometre. As a result, almost all land is cultivated and the standard of living is much lower than in the central portions of the country. Pressure on the land is such that all the volcanic mountains around Bududa and circling the Mount Elgon National Park are intensively farmed. With families commonly comprising eight children, settlement has crept up to the peaks within living memory, causing conflict

with park authorities as poachers with guns and unauthorized settlers have to be evicted. This same higher fertility rate, coupled with increasing subdivision of the land, has created an army of the unemployed. Bududa is a village of 80,000, but still a village, not a town, sociologically speaking. Walking down the potholed main road at whatever time of day, one encounters streams of people, walking, and passing the time of day. Gainful employment is negligible.

The Bududa project is a double-pronged attempt to address the issue of unemployment and the increasing population of children orphaned by AIDS, landslides, and the wars in the northern provinces of the country. The Children of Hope orphans, selected on the basis of dire need, receive counselling and remedial

education on Saturdays. In addition, sponsors have been found for about 175 of the 200 orphans, and the sponsored children receive materials to help them with their schooling. When they go on to secondary school, sponsors will be asked to pay the school fees and, if this is not possible, new sponsors will be found. The plan is to train the orphans free of charge, from the summer of 2006, when the vocational school opens, in secretarial, typing, carpentry and mechanical skills.

On arrival at the work site the first day, we found a brick structure consisting of four mud-floored classrooms, two tiny offices and a muddy corridor piled high with lumber. The upper floor was barely started and it had no roof. Primary school children were using the downstairs rooms, which were equipped solely with a few locally made wooden desks and pitted blackboards. By the time we left, after one month, the building was roofed over and the downstairs rooms were "finished" inside, which meant that whitewash had been painted over the cement. Everything was done by hand and the foreign work-campers set about the tasks with as much gusto as the Ugandan volunteers, but with considerably less skill and strength. Exchanging jokes and learning the local language, Lugisu, as we proceeded, we mixed cement, handed up bricks and cement to the skilled bricklayers perched on the walls, hauled muddy water out of a pipe-filled puddle in jerry cans up to the upper floor, and trundled a dilapidated wheelbarrow full of sand or cement up a steep and wobbly wooden ramp. There was constant progress, but no assigned tasks, production goals or pressure.

We all chipped in where the need was discovered, according to our individual interests and abilities.

During down time, while we waited for a load of the brittle, roughly shaped bricks to arrive or when the puddle needed refilling, there was time for camaraderie, cultural exchanges, and assistance with the medical needs of both the Ugandan volunteers and the orphans. In the rainy season, malaria is rampant and increasingly resistant to the drugs sold in the sparsely equipped medical centre. Our first-aid kit and our own personal supplies of painkillers were soon depleted and unfortunately many patients had to be escorted to the dispensary for the \$2 of medication they could not afford.

Other non-manual assistance included home visits paid to investigate the orphans' background and requirements. We also organized a storage room of medical supplies from the donations each work-camper had brought from home in the required 70-pound suitcase of "stuff," the stuff in question consisting of clothing, stationery and medication. In addition, many projects were visited, solicitations and proposals for financial assistance were received from all possible quarters, and reams of notes taken describing the various projects and proposals. Last but not least, to offset the complete lack of teaching materials and as a lasting testimony to the work-camp, a beautiful map of Uganda was painted on a classroom wall. This was an eye-opener to the Ugandan volunteers cooperating on this week-long project, and probably the first time they had seen a pictorial reproduction of their native land.

One of the strengths of this particular AGLI work-camp was that the work-campers lived with local families, rather than sleeping dormitory-style in public buildings. Our hosts were, without exception, charming. Our muddy shoes were snapped up on our arrival and meticulously cleaned with an inch of water and a panga (machete), and dirty clothes were gathered up and returned neatly ironed with an iron using hot coals, given the complete lack of electricity in the village. Material comforts acquired a whole new meaning after we had spent four weeks with our host families, washing in two or three litres of water that had been hauled up the mountain and heated on a wood fire, and eating two identical starch-laden meals a day. Yet the warmth of our hosts' welcome more than compensated for the simple lifestyle; everywhere we were greeted with, "How is life?" and "How was your night?" After a half-hour trip to the local store, neighbours would call out: "Welcome back!" Perhaps the most universal greeting was: "Are you well?," a question which assumed new significance given the incidence of disease.

Without exception, we were inspired by the joyfulness of the villagers' homes, the closeness of their families, many of which have taken in almost as many orphans as they have children, and their fervent religious faith. We were constantly pressed to return. 🔄

NOTE: ANYONE WISHING FOR FURTHER DETAILS ON THE WORK-CAMP, THE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM, OR CONTACT INFORMATION FOR AGLI, MAY GET IN TOUCH WITH ME AT: HAVARDTRANSLATION@ISP.CA.

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