

Students at Capilano University in the Global Stewardship program volunteer in the community and throughout the world. My name is Kasha Butler and I am a second-year student in that program and the daughter of long-time faculty member, Pat Hodgson.

I choose to spend my volunteer time working in Uganda, Africa at the Kampala Children's Center (KCC). The purpose of this organization is to help children who have been orphaned by AIDS and the civil war in the north of Uganda. Children orphaned by AIDS and war are often cut off from basic needs such as healthcare, education, food, clothing, and shelter. While Ugandan extended families traditionally support orphans, the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the war has overburdened that traditional "safety net." Foster families and guardians, who already have limited resources, are often not equipped to assist the growing number of orphans (over 2.3 million orphans in Uganda estimated in this year).

As a competitive ringette athlete at the national level, I wanted to combine my passion for helping others and my passion for sports. I wanted to bring the children at the Center a range of sports equipment and uniforms and to help the Center to develop a sports program and expose the children to new sports. I began asking for donations of sports equipment that I could ship over to Africa. When I approached Milt Williams at the Capilano University Sportsplex to ask if they had anything they could donate to the children, I didn't expect such a generous response. When I arrived to pick up the donations I was blown away by the boxes and boxes of uniforms, socks, balls, pumps and other equipment that he, Deano Oppermann and Joe Iacobellis had gathered up and were excitedly donating to the KCC children.

I raised a large sum of money through various fundraisers and many generous people in order to have the equipment shipped. I had no idea what work was involved in shipping an untaxed aid parcel to Africa was, but with the networks and support offered by the Global Stewardship program and some research it finally came together. After months of fundraising, pages of paper work and days of folding and organizing, the equipment was successfully shipped to the Entebbe airport just outside of Kampala, where exciting employees of the center received it.

The Kampala Children's Center (KCC) is an orphanage that is located in a small town just outside of the capital city Kampala in Uganda. I arrived there for a 3 week stay in late June, excited to show the kids not just the equipment that had been donated, but that people on the other side of the world who didn't even know them, loved them and wanted to support them. Although poverty, heartbreak and struggle were very apparent in Uganda, I learned that kids are kids. They are the same all over the world. They are happy, excited and want to be loved and cared for just the same. When I opened the bags and laid out the uniforms and balls the kids were overwhelmed! They put on the uniforms and didn't take them off for three weeks! KCC has a soccer team that is made up of kids from the orphanage and also from the surrounding village. While they had the opportunity to play other teams, they sometimes felt very disheartened as other teams had matching uniforms and the KCC children often did not even have shoes. For them to receive matching home and away uniforms was a transforming experience for them.

Needless to say the kids from the Center were more than grateful and excited for such generous contributions and wasted no time changing into the new uniforms and playing.

There are many things about KCC that set it apart from other organizations and orphanages in Africa. Most importantly I would like to emphasize that they are actually legally adopting the children and have high standards of excellence, trying to raise them so that they will go out to be leaders, "movers & shakers" and change Ugandan society for the better. They are committed to "giving the best to the least" and I love that! That ethos is reflected in the quality of the building work and even the layout of the grounds. For example, they have given over a large space on the central driveway to a heart shaped roundabout to show the children, in a very visible way, that they are loved and valued.

So many orphanages in Africa are like shacks with too few staff to give the children real love, affection and quality time, but KCC prides itself in not over extending and placing the kids in families of 12 with a mix of ages and two women (mum & auntie/assistant) to care for each household. But more than just the outstanding care for the children and the commitment to raise them, not just care for them, KCC is also committed to capacity building in the community in which they live. When KCC gets an opportunity to expand its facilities they seek men from the North of Uganda who come down for a few months to work and earn some money. The North has been plagued by rebel warfare for years and the infrastructure has totally broken down and there are no jobs, so KCC is also having a positive impact on men from the north and their families by giving them an opportunity to work and share their trade knowledge with the children.

It is easy to only hear all the bad things that go on in Africa, but there are organizations like KCC all over Africa who are making a positive change and impact. I feel so lucky to have had to opportunity to serve in one of these organizations and have Capilano University support me in my endeavours and bless the children of KCC in the process.