



Students Adopt School in Uganda

IN OUR LAST ISSUE of Moeller Magazine*, we wrote about how our students are “shining a light” on the “invisible children” of Uganda. Thanks to an alumnus, Michael Zimmer '67, they are doing more than raising awareness; they are now adopting a school.

In June, Zimmer contacted Connie Ring, the faculty moderator of the students who are involved with Invisible Children. “I was very pleased and proud when I read the article in the recent (magazine) about Moeller’s involvement with the Uganda issue,” said Zimmer. “My wife and I have decided to focus our charitable work on children’s issues, and this one really grabbed us. Seeing Moeller students involved was just a super and pleasant surprise.”

Zimmer and his wife, Jill, work with a teacher in Uganda who is running a school in the city of Gulu that serves as a safe haven from the rebels who would abduct the children to become soldiers. The school also offers them hope for a future free from the terror that haunts them every day. Uganda is suffering from two decades of civil war.

“Last year I read a series of articles in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*** about the plight of the children in northern Uganda,” said Zimmer. “Through the series I became aware of an amazing woman named Abitimo Odongkara who runs a school in northern Uganda.”

Zimmer eventually met Odongkara and decided to form a non-profit group to help Odongkara’s school, the Upper Nile Institute for Appropriate Technology (UNIFAT). He named the organization Friends of UNIFAT and has already begun work to expand and upgrade Odongkara’s school. “At present, the children are taught in rooms that have no windows, mud floors, brick walls, and one blackboard,” said Zimmer. “We hope to make a visible difference at Abitimo’s school... It occurred to me that Moeller might adopt the school as a ‘sister’ school.”

The response from Moeller was a resounding “YES!” said Ring. “This is all awesome. We’re adopting this school — it’s a done deal. The guys are committed.”

At Moeller, the students have been hard at work for more than a year sounding the alarm about the Ugandan humanitarian crisis. “We are already on the move,” said Ring. “We informed about 2000 students and parents about it using Invisible Children’s (IC) media last year and already have several screenings (of the IC movie) booked this year. Also, I have spoken with students from at least four other high schools (Kings, Mount Notre Dame, Loveland, and Princeton), and the kids there are also really fired up about helping to sponsor Abitimo’s school.”

“There is nothing we can invest in that pays more down the line than education,” said Zimmer. “Paying for this school’s operation is one of the best investments we can make in the future of our world. This is, indeed, an opportunity for the Men of Moeller to make a real and definitive statement about what they stand for.”

Ring agrees, and says the Moeller students involved in IC are working tirelessly to make a difference. “The team is working with the kids at Good Shepherd to plan an Invisible Children overnight event here at Moeller in late February,” said Ring. “They have amazing ideas in the works, including simulations, speakers, and very creative ways to educate the public about the current situation with Uganda and UNIFAT. Folks from California are coming, and Michael and Jill Zimmer have graciously agreed to attend and keep us up to date on UNIFAT and their needs. We are looking into invitations to influential people in Washington as well.”

* The article from our last issue is available online at www.Moeller.org under “News & Events,” click “Moeller Magazine,” then “Spring/Summer 2006.”

** These articles can be accessed online at www.gophilly.com/Uganda.



Zimmer’s most urgent efforts are directed toward raising funds to shore up Odongkara’s buildings and to help defray the cost of the many orphans who attend. “The school currently has two main classrooms,” said Zimmer. “They lack windows, electricity is limited, and they have structural problems. A third building needs to be completed. We are also considering a security fence around the school to enhance its function as a safe haven. Most importantly, though, we need to ensure that the doors remain open to any needy child. We are working toward a scholarship program for this.”

Invisible Children Transforms Students’ Lives

“MY UNDERSTANDING OF justice and service has dramatically changed, because this is one of the worst injustices of our time,” said Eric Werner ’09. “My involvement has strengthened my faith journey. We need to continue to tell their story and keep pushing the leaders of our country until the situation in Uganda is finally peaceful.”

“My commitment to Invisible Children has done two things for me,” said William Tardio ’07. “It has humbled me as a person to be able to commit to something that will change lives, (and it has enabled me) to see the change that this organization has already provoked, (which) shows the value and influence of today’s youth... I want to be an example for others, showing people that all it takes to make a difference is dedication, time, and the will to help others. The Invisible Children movement shows that anyone can make a difference, that everybody is influential in their own way.”

“My involvement in this effort has shown me there is more to service than sending money, care packages, or fixing buildings,” said Adam Tardio ’09. “Service can be praying, raising awareness, and just devoting time. (Something) we take for granted here in the United States is peace. Even though our country is at war, it isn’t in our country. I have learned that nothing can happen or prosper when there isn’t peace in a country.”