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Mason parents, students unify for UNIFAT

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Three years ago, Mason parent Connie Ring saw "The Invisible Children," a film about the Civil War in Uganda.

The story of these children trying to stay safe in the midst of a brutal war deeply affected Ring and her students at Moeller High School where she is a teacher.

After a chance meeting with the founder of a school in Uganda called the Upper Nile Institute for Appropriate Technology (UNIFAT), Ring knew she had to get involved.

She and several Moeller students created Unified for UNIFAT, a group dedicated to raising money for this school and sponsoring students so that they can receive an education.

From that initial group at Moeller, nine other chapters of Unified for UNIFAT have evolved at area high schools, including a new chapter at Mason High School.

Mason Intermediate's Christine Work learned about Unified for UNIFAT from Ring's daughter, Maddy, who is a fourth grader in Work's class.

Maddy helps to sponsor a child by donating part of her allowance each week, and she has formed relationships with Ugandan children through her mother.



Maddy Ring from Mason Intermediate, Bridget Walsh from Madeira High School and Eric Werner from Moeller High School share their experiences about working with Unified for UNIFAT with Christine Work's fourth-grade class. Students from Mason High School recently started their own chapter of Unified for UNIFAT. Mason

To involve all of Maddy's classmates and to enhance a unit on friendly letter writing, Work and Ring developed a pen pal project with students at UNIFAT. Work and her students also plan to donate a portion of the money they raise during the class Read-a-Thon to UNIFAT.



Mason Intermediate fourth-grader Maddy Ring shows her class a doll from Uganda, named after a Ugandan friend she met through Unified for UNIFAT. Mason

On Sept. 26, Ring and members of Unified for UNIFAT visited Work's classroom to share information about Uganda and about how their group is helping students at UNIFAT.

Bridget Walsh, a student at Madeira High School, formed a chapter there last year. Since then, her chapter has raised money to sponsor four children in Uganda.

One group member at Madeira raised \$700 at her birthday party by asking guests to donate money to this cause instead of buying birthday gifts.

Moeller student Eric Werner, along with Ring and other Unified for UNIFAT members, traveled to Uganda for the first time last summer.

Werner was amazed at the hospitality he was shown by the Ugandan people, but the highlight of the trip was meeting the young lady he and his family sponsor.

According to Werner, the entire experience has given him "a global perspective" that he didn't have before. "We're all connected in this world," said Werner. "It's been amazing to experience that firsthand."

Mason High School students Annie Durham, Jessica Kenneally, and Drew Sinha initially worked with Ring and Unified for UNIFAT as part of a National Honor Society service project.

However, "Connie inspired us to start our own chapter to include everyone, not just members of NHS," said Kenneally.

The Mason High School chapter is hoping to "teach younger kids" about the situation in Uganda so that the group will only grow stronger.