

Uganda Field Trip 2008

The latest Water for Kids field to Uganda was again successful, it provided safe water for the first time to three rural communities and worked on health projects in collaboration with Daventry Friends of Iganga (DFoI) and the local District Health Services.

Before the arrival of the group, consisting of 21 people including 9 Environmental Health Officers, WfK's Ugandan partners bought materials for the projects that had been planned for action during the visit.

Members of the party had hoped to get their hands dirty and be involved with planned projects, but this is often difficult when the local people insist on doing the work themselves and try to stop the visiting 'Mzungus' getting involved. However, although the digging of water sources and building of protected facilities did take place the majority of the work done by the group involved cleaning, painting and putting the final touches to ongoing projects.

In one Community DFOI had been building a new health centre for a large village comprising up to 8,000 people all living some 8 km from a suitable health facility. Much of the £20,000 cost was raised by retired Northamptonshire EHO and WfK member David Walsh's home village of Rothersthorpe, which is twinned with the village of Namunsaala in Iganga District. However, the health centre had a problem of no on-site water and a 200m walk to the village borehole recently repaired by WfK. So WfK provided the funds for their first water harvesting project in Uganda by providing roof gutters and storage tanks to store the rainwater falling on the health centre roof. All installed with the aid of a local plumber. The contract was completed very quickly and for much less than planned. So with the money saved WfK were able to provide a high level tank to which the harvested water could be hand-pumped and then it would gravitate to basins and showers within the health centre. By the time the health centre was completed and handed over officially to the local District Medical Officer, rainwater harvesting was also provided to the latrine cubicles providing nice and easy hand washing to the community using the facilities. The contribution from WfK was less than £2,800 and everyone was thrilled with the completed project which is hoped to be the first of many similar projects in the area.

The group from the UK also helped protect a village spring serving a large village of up to 1000 people, including many children, 20km south of Iganga in a beautiful wetland area. The existing spring water available to the village was an unprotected source badly polluted by containers used to collect water and by animals and birds, let alone children playing in it. Local Iganga Senior Health Assistant Muzamiru Bidondole, with his assistant Mason Salongo, had earmarked the source as one in great need of protection. Materials were already on site with the works underway when the visiting group arrived. However the site still needed completion with much movement of rocks to fill the hole left by excavation of the source and to filter the water to ensure it reached the surface clean. The hard work soon became great fun as the local villagers worked with the visiting strangers to fill the hole and cover it with plastic sheeting and a top layer of soil to make sure the site was well protected.

Daventry Friends who have been working in Iganga for over 10 years have recently become further linked with the Iganga District Hospital. This new friendly relationship has led to requests to assist with improvements to the hospital that serves a very large district of over 700,000 people. It sits on a busy highway linking Uganda to Kenya and with import and export traffic involving very large lorries. Sadly many accidents occur and the hospital can be very busy.

As the visiting group was made up of a majority of women, one of the first places to visit was the maternity and children's wards and the poor condition of these facilities was all too easy to see. With limited funds and materials to work with and a shortage of time, group members set to cleaning the children's ward ready for some badly needed painting. Cartoon type pictures brightened up the days of both the children and parents. New curtains were made and fitted to the labour and children's wards. However, it soon became apparent that there was a serious problem with water and toilet provision at the hospital, as almost none of the hand basins and sinks were working and flushing toilets and showers were again all broken. With some spare funds available,

WfK was able to swing into action. With the help of the local plumber we were able to repair many of the water services on site. Before leaving we were able to see some very happy staff and families able to wash their hands again on the wards, use suitable toilets and even have the facility of a proper working shower. This is only a start and it is hoped that many more improvements will take place in the future.

DFOI recently received a donation of £6,000 from employees of Northamptonshire County Council in memory of one of their colleagues who died in a car accident. The donation was to be towards the purchase of an ambulance or similar vehicle for Iganga District Hospital. After much discussion over what would be suitable; sending a second hand Ambulance from the UK or buying one in Uganda and who would maintain it; a 4x4 wheel off road vehicle was purchased. Much celebration took place at the hospital when the vehicle was handed over to the Medical Superintendent. It is now in use to take hospital staff on extremely poor roads to reach remote rural communities. "Out-reach Clinics" are essential to ensure immunisation of children, health promotion and education and care for the mother and child.

Before ending the visit, which for the 4th year running was a great success, the party were able to really get their hands dirty digging out a small rural muddy pond. They built protection for the natural spring feeding the pond and provided the villagers with another valuable clean and safe water source for use by many people living nearby.

The work the people on the trip did will make a real difference to the people in these four communities; it is likely to save lives and will improve health. Many of the people on the trip all promised they would return soon to carry out more similar work and to meet the many friends they had made.

If you are interested in joining future visits to Uganda then see the How You Can Help/News and Events page on this website or email administrator@waterforkids.org.



Water for Kids

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