

Spring 2015

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The Newsletter of UNH Global Engagement

Spring 2015

WITH SUPPORT FROM THE EMERITI COUNCIL, UNH STUDENTS WITHOUT BORDERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN UGANDA

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(l. to r.) Nicolette Niemiec, Megan Burke, Ashley Filion preparing for a meeting with the Lukodi Water Board

On January 5th, 2015 three UNH students: Nicolette Niemiec, Ashley Filion, and Megan Burke boarded a plane headed for the village of Lukodi, Uganda in Eastern Africa. They were joined by UNH faculty member Tom Ballestero, the project's professional mentor. After 30 hours of plane travel and 7 hours of driving to reach the village, their feet finally touched the ground at Child Voice International (CVI). CVI has served as UNH Students Without Borders (SWB-UNH)'s host while in Uganda for each of the chapter's past five trips. The mission of CVI is to restore the voices of children who have been affected by the Ugandan civil war. This non-government organization is located about 30 minutes from the nearest town (and source of electricity) and is right in the middle of the village of Lukodi, which has allowed the group to form a strong bond with the community. They have been a great partner for SWB-UNH and have strengthened the chapter's efforts to connect with the community and get work done.

In January 2014, UNH-

SWB sent students to Lukodi to treat 12 wells that were contaminated with total and fecal coliforms. Many people who resided in the village complained of unexplained illnesses and water that did not taste normal or look good to drink. After each well was treated with shock chlorination by the 2014 SWB-UNH team, they had been successfully cleared of total and fecal coliforms. As well as treating the wells, the students built fences around some of them to prevent animals from contaminating them (the main source of fecal matter getting in). During this January 2015 trip, all wells were tested again, to see if any had become re-contaminated. Two tested positive for re-contamination. After permission was granted for one of the wells to be re-treated, the students de-contaminated the well again and advised the local water board (the group of individuals who care for the wells in Lukodi) to maintain fences to prevent the re-contamination of more wells. While in Lukodi SWB-UNH met with the water board to hold an open discussion (with a translator present) about the project, discussing the benefits and downfalls the community has experienced



Megan Burke collecting a water sample from one of the villages boreholes to test for contamination.

over the past year.



The SWB-UNH team with the Lukodi Water Board after meeting to discuss the project's impact on the community

While in Lukodi SWB-UNH was contacted by the small nearby village of Cet-Kana, which is having water issues of its own. Like most of the villages in Uganda, Cet-Kana residents struggle to gather water for their everyday use. Many people walk up to 6 km round-trip to find a water source, filling their jugs and cans to bring back to their huts. Some have to refill 5-8 times a day, making the substantial trek to find what we in the United States can simply walk into the kitchen and see flowing from our faucets. After meeting with the local district engineer, unprotected groundwater springs in Cet-Kana were located and recorded, in the hopes of a future project which would establish a spring box well for the community to use. This well would serve as a new, more convenient, clean water source for the village of Cet-Kana, and would affect a

population of about 150 people residing in the area. SWB-UNH plans to travel to Uganda again this May to assess the site and talk more with the community for the beginnings of this project. This trip will be possible using the remainder of the funding generously granted from the ECSISI Grant.

Not only did SWB-UNH members gain hands-on experience with something they were passionate about; bringing clean water to communities, they also had the chance to experience the local culture, living side-by-side with the Ugandans in mud brick huts. Along with the smiles and laughter the Ugandan children and villagers provided, the SWB-UNH team was also able to experience how the residents of Lukodi live their daily lives; the students enjoyed the occasional night spent staying up late learning Ugandan card games (to which there are no clear rules) and enjoying the abundance of fresh pineapple. At the end of the trip, the students left with an experience which will affect them for the rest of their lives. Although it is hard sometimes to see what life is like in a developing country, it is even harder to be the one who has to live it. Although, SWB-UNH cannot fix the world in one day, the group hopes to do what they can to brighten the days and improve the health of the communities they come into contact with, as these communities in turn brighten the lives of the students working with them. SWB-UNH's January trip to Uganda would not have been possible without the EC-SISI grant, and especially the generous donors who made the grant possible. Thank you.