

## Providers bring medical aid to Uganda



**By DIANE COCHRAN  
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Despite losing their parents in a ghastly war and suffering other inconceivable horrors, the children a Billings-based group of American missionaries met in Kitgum, Uganda, had the broadest grins the Americans had ever seen.

"They have such big smiles," said Dr. Marty Lucas, an oncologist affiliated with St. Vincent Healthcare. "They can smile bigger than any other group of people. They smile with their whole faces."

"They have so much strength and just live life for the day," said Nadine Hart, a certified physician assistant with St. Vincent Healthcare. "They're thankful for the day."

Hart, Lucas and three other medical providers traveled recently to three regions of Uganda, an African country ravaged by conflict between its government and the Lord's Resistance Army rebels, or LRA. The missionary group, which also included several nonmedical members of Calvary Chapel, delivered medical supplies to Kitgum, Entebbe and Masindi and spent time teaching people there basic medical information.

"What they wanted was a lot of education about prevention - things about sanitation, hygiene and clean water," Hart said.

Many Ugandans are without clean water, and they do not have access to health care.

In the country's northern regions, where the LRA is prevalent, displaced Ugandans live in camps without enough food or other basic supplies. There are few men - most are killed in conflict - and many of the women have been raped or otherwise tortured.

"The children are so weak they can't even lift a foot up or clap their hands together," Hart said.

Despite pledges of international aid, the group encountered children with bellies distended from hunger.

"That really got to me," Hart said. "How could this happen?"

The missionaries hauled 30 50-pound plastic totes from Billings to Uganda filled with first-aid materials, vitamins, antibiotics, plastic mattress covers, antifungal shampoo, blankets, tin pots, mosquito nets and other items.

Donations from individuals and from the St. Vincent Healthcare Foundation helped foot the bill.

"Many of our caregivers and donors are generously making commitments to worldwide health care, and we are, too," said David Irion, executive director of the hospital foundation. "They have kind of a larger vision of St. Vincent Healthcare's ministry. They are supportive of the fact that it exists beyond our borders."

The missionary group spent about two weeks in Uganda, including some time at a self-sustaining farming project in Masindi.

There, people displaced by the war are learning to grow their own food, but they don't have fresh water for irrigation.

It would cost \$8,000 to dig a well, and Lucas hopes to raise that money and return to Masindi next summer. A well wouldn't solve all of the community's problems, but it would make a difference, she said.

Understanding that a single group of missionaries couldn't save the country kept the trip from feeling overwhelming, Lucas said.

"There was a realization that we can't cure them," she said. "We can't fix them. We can just offer them compassion and love."

"I think every American kid or teenager needs to go (to Uganda) and see what the world really is. We are so sheltered," she said.

"And spoiled," Hart added.

It was Hart's second trip to Uganda. She traveled there in 2003 to minister to children with AIDS.

After returning to the United States, she arranged for a young man she met there, Kenny, to come to Billings to be treated for sickle cell anemia and malaria. Kenny is now a student at Central High.

On this trip, Hart and the others partnered with Far Reaching Ministries, which is an offshoot of Calvary Chapel in California.

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