

*This article was featured in the Fall 2005 issues of the College of Social Work newsletter; In Touch. Due to space restrictions, it was not featured in its entirety. More information about the Southern Sudan Education Project is included here.*

## **Happy, Happy We Are!**

### **Children receive aid from half a world away from the Southern Sudan Education Project**

*Abraham Gai, BSW Student*

All the logistical problems in Kenya are instantly forgotten when 350 backpacks, exercise books, pens, and pencils are distributed to happy, singing children at Yomchiir Primary School and Leilir Primary School in Southern Sudan. School buildings in Sudan consist of mud huts that crumble during the rainy season, forcing many classes to be held under trees. The excited chatter of children fills the mud hut classrooms as we open our bags to organize the supplies we have brought. Tiny faces crowd the doorway, peering in at the items donated by friends half a world away – just for them.

The Southern Sudan Education Project was founded by Abraham Gai and Kristy Swapp. The goals of the project are to provide basic supplies to schools in Yomchiir and Leilir villages, construct a permanent primary school in Yomchiir, to provide programs for the community, including adult education and leadership training, and to educate people in the United States about Sudan, including its history and current issues.

We have collected nearly one ton of school supplies, but shipping and Kenyan customs are outrageously priced, costing \$15 to take a backpack into Southern Sudan. In June of 2005, we brought what we could afford to bring. The last time these schools received supplies was in 2000. There are no books, no pens, and no pencils. Instead of paper, the children tear boxes from food distribution to use for exercises. When boxes are not available, they write in the dirt floor of their school.

As we wandered through the village and nearby markets over the weekend, we saw our students proudly carrying their bags. Every time they saw us, they stopped to wave and yell “thank you” to us. It was no surprise to see many more students in school on Monday, hoping to receive supplies. The teachers are also grateful. Many of them work for free and are happy to have resources to use for their teaching.

The teachers and community leaders have committed to increase the number of boys in school by 10% and the number of girls in school by 25% in the next 6 months. Numbers will increase from there once a permanent school building is constructed. We have made our commitments too. We have plans to build permanent buildings for a primary school and, later, a secondary boarding school. Grain mills and water pumps will free more girls from work at home and allow them to pursue their education. Less than 8% of children are enrolled in school, and currently, less than 24% of the students in Sudan are girls.

After construction of the primary school, the project will provide teacher training and will set up internship programs, with schools like the University of Utah, sending students

interested in gaining international experience to Southern Sudan to assist in or lead training workshops. Anticipated workshops include leadership training, peacemaking training, gender equality programs, social welfare, adult literacy programs, vocational training, and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programs.

As we leave Yomchiir Primary School, the children sing "We are the future of the new Sudan." And they are. These bright, happy children, who have lived their entire lives in war, are now seeing the benefits of peace and education. They are the future of the new Sudan – and the future of the new Sudan deserves quality education for all.

*Mr. Gai is a student in the University of Utah's College of Social Work and is one of the Lost Boys of Sudan. Ms. Swapp is a graduate of the University of Utah and worked in financial services before transitioning to humanitarian aid and development. The project was founded when Mr. Gai and Ms. Swapp were planning a trip to Sudan and wanted to take some supplies along from friends in the United States. From there, the project grew until school supplies came in from across the country. For more information about this project, find a link on the College of Social Work website at [www.socwk.utah.edu](http://www.socwk.utah.edu).*

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AIDS is not yet an epidemic in Southern Sudan as it is in other African countries. War has isolated the people in many ways. However, with 4.5 million refugees returning to South Sudan, the risk is high. Early HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programs have a chance at preventing an epidemic.

Programs cannot be run without a facility for training, so the first goal of the project is to build a permanent building for Yomchiir Primary School. Aid Sudan Foundation would like to send volunteers to construct the school. Construction must take place during the dry season. School construction will cost \$20,000. This money must be raised by December 2005 to facilitate construction before the rains come and before the beginning of the next school year. This the only time volunteers are available.

For more information about The Southern Sudan Education Project, or to donate to this project, please contact Abraham Gai at 801-792-9745 ([abraham@globalhealing.net](mailto:abraham@globalhealing.net)) or Kristy Swapp at 801-671-5869 ([kristy@globalhealing.net](mailto:kristy@globalhealing.net)). You can also visit [www.globalhealing.net](http://www.globalhealing.net). Click on the link for "Africa Projects."



Yomchiir Primary One class meets under a tree (February 2005)



Kids at Yomchiir Primary School sing happily after receiving backpacks and other school supplies (june 2005)



Steel frame for the new Yomchiir Primary School. Permanent cement walls are planned in December 2005. \$20,000 is needed by December to construct the school