



Submitted Photo

Gwennan Richmond of Portsmouth, a student at Ohio University, visits with a sponsored student in Uganda. According to the Empower Campaign, there are about 25 million orphans in Africa today.

HELPING AFRICAN WOMEN HELP THEMSELVES

Portsmouth West grad and OU student part of Empower Campaign

By **RYAN SCOTT
OTTNEY**
PDT Staff Writer

Gwennan Richmond graduated from Portsmouth West High School in 2007 and embarked into a world much larger than many in Scioto County will ever realize. Now completing her political science degree at Ohio University, in Athens, Richmond became involved in the non-profit student group known as the Empower Campaign, whose mission it is to educate orphans in Africa and empower them to strengthen their communities.

Through her work with the Empower Campaign, Richmond has visited Ethiopia and Uganda to witness their troubles first hand.

“What we do is purchase jewelry and handicrafts from women cooperatives in Uganda and we bring them back to the States and we sell them. We buy them first hand because it provides the women who are making them with initial

income,” Richmond said.

According to the Empower Campaign, many of the women are living with HIV and need this income to purchase their medication. The CDC reported in 2006 that only about 10 percent of the world population lives in sub-Saharan Africa, but the region is home to 64 percent of the world’s HIV population. Transmission is primarily through heterosexual contact, and more women are HIV infected than men.

The items are sold in the United States and on the Empower website, and all the proceeds are donated back to the African community to build schools, pay tuition and buy supplies and uniforms. In addition to the jewelry sales, the student group also hosts other fundraising activities, such as a 5K run and Rock to Empower concerts.

“All of that goes toward raising awareness and educating people in this country about the issues going on in Africa,” Richmond said.

According to Empower, there are about 25 million orphans in Africa today, and many grow up without an opportunity to acquire an education or create their own future. The campaign is currently serving seven primary schools (more than 2,000 students) with educational materials.

“Most of the students we sponsor either have a single parent that’s died of H.I.V. or is a double orphan, which means both parents are dead,” Richmond said.

According to a January 2006 study published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 85 percent of primary pupils in Europe, Asia and North and South America advance to secondary school, and 75 percent of African countries do not. But Richmond said their mission of education goes much further than the classroom. They also sponsor sustainable development using the community and its own local resources, and help restore its economy through greater education

and employment.

Richmond said her favorite part of visiting Uganda last year was seeing the Bigodi School, which was started by the Bigodi Women’s Group.

“Although fast-paced, the trip was incredibly rewarding,” Richmond said. “It was an honor to meet the women we are working with. It is clear how important what we are doing here – thousands of miles away – is to them and their communities.”

Now completing her final year at Ohio University, Richmond plans to spend a year doing disaster relief with AmeriCorps followed by two years in community development. After all of that, she said she’ll be eyeing graduate schools in the United Kingdom.

For more information about the Empower Campaign, or to purchase items to benefit the orphans in Africa, visit them online at www.empowercampaign.org.

RYAN SCOTT OTTNEY can be reached at (740) 353-3101, ext. 235, or e-mail rottney@heart-

About the Empower Campaign:

The Empower Campaign is a holistic, community and school-based initiative designed to help children, including those that are orphaned or vulnerable, receive an education in Africa. They accomplish this through a four-step approach with partner communities in Uganda.

1. Provide a safe and sound place to attend school by building and reconstructing debilitated schools.
2. Provide educational materials for students attending school.
3. Provide one meal per day for all children attending school.
4. Provide access to health care and information at school

Source: empowercampaign.org



Submitted Photo

Above, some of the jewelry made by the Ugandan women: (from top) a turquoise zig-zag bracelet, a multi-spiral bracelet and a red triple-strand necklace. The jewelry is sold in America and on the Empower Campaign website to generate income for the Ugandan women. Left, Richmond sorts beads at the Kampala market in Uganda. Richmond became involved in the non-profit student group known as the Empower Campaign, whose mission is to educate orphans in Africa and empower them to strengthen their communities.

