

Education, medication central to ROWAN's commitment to women and orphans

BY PETER FRETTEY

When Kelsey Hargadine made a commitment during her college years to live in Uganda for two months, she had no idea just how much of an impact it would have on her life. When she arrived in Uganda, it was a true culture shock. However, her host, Pastor Paul Nyende, almost instantly became family.

"We quickly established an amazing relationship. He was born and raised there, and was very passionate about sharing their culture. It was clear the widows and orphans left behind because of HIV/AIDS were his largest challenge as pastor of the community," she said. "They were turning to the church for help, and it was easy to hear their cry."

Hargadine had the opportunity to go back a few years later, which is when Pastor Paul presented his idea to co-found ROWAN. "He passed me a bound document with the objectives, goals and dreams for something called ROWAN (Rural Orphans Widows AIDS Network). Inside it said 'founded by Pastor Paul and Kelsey to empower all widows and orphans to sustainability'."

She said yes because she knew in her heart that it needed to happen. "It was their idea, and I was going to serve as the microphone for what Pastor Paul was already doing," she said.



Kelsey Hargadine and Pastor Paul Nyende

The faith-based organization has since refined its focus to provide both education and medication for the widows and orphans. "We offer classes around health, budgeting, and business management. We are focused on providing them with a means of self-reliance including micro-enterprises," she said. "The medical component provides the medication, training and

nutrition crucial to keeping people alive."

According to Hargadine, those on the ground have truly taken ownership, and ROWAN's model has worked for them. Of course, she also has goals. For instance, she looks forward to building ROWAN's facility, expanding the board and staff, and growing through replication into other geographical areas.

"Pastor Paul told me early on that we need to start with smoke and end with fire, not start with fire and end with smoke," she said. "A lot of organizations get big fast but cannot handle the growth. Instead, we have taken a methodical approach that has allowed us to slowly grow to support these widows and orphans."

Fundraising – including the ongoing sponsorship program started in 2013 – plays an instrumental role in supporting ROWAN's mission and ongoing efforts. In addition, ROWAN has an online shop (loverowan.wazala.com) where people can purchase products made by the widows. Hargadine also encourages people to visit the website (www.loverowan.org) to participate in the ongoing sponsorship program.



ROWAN's fundraising efforts are making a difference.