

Kasaana People Living with HIV

by David Albert

Dr. Connie Vasek, Friendly Water for the World's U.S. Medical Officer, and I recently returned from a nine-day visit with three of our programs in Uganda.

The first one we visited is one of our oldest projects – Kasaana People Living with HIV, in western Uganda. This is a community of 59 HIV-affected families, founded in 2009 by Yubu (he is the man at the left of the picture) so that these individuals and families would not feel so isolated in their struggles.



Initially, they were not doing well. Deaths were common. Even with anti-retroviral drugs, opportunistic infections struck, as the medications were being taken with unclean water, which can reduce their effectiveness up to 80%. People were becoming too weak to work their small gardens and banana patches, and were becoming hungry as well. Children were being taken out of school, both because their parents could no longer afford school fees, but also because they were needed to carry water, often from as far as 5.5 kilometers away. (While we were there, we still saw some children carrying water an hour each way, three times a day).

As Yubu tells us, in 2013 he found out about Friendly Water for the World from a street sign. He called the number, and quickly met up with our Uganda Country Representative Richard Kyambadde (who wants it to be known that he too has HIV). Within two weeks, Richard came to the community, and helped repair their well and spring heads (thus reducing the walk for water.) With the aid of the community, 59 BioSand Filters were built and installed. Then with assistance from One Days Wages in Seattle, and the Rotary International Foundation, Richard and the community built rainwater catchment systems. Finally, with another grant from Friendly Water, Richard trained the community to manufacture “Friendly Soap”.

The community perked up. Yubu notes excitedly that since Richard turned up in 2013, THERE HAS NOT BEEN EVEN ONE AIDS-RELATED DEATH IN THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. People have put most of their children back in school, and we met several who are now in college and university. Several members of the community have opened stores and started small businesses (we met one woman who now makes an excellent pineapple drink!) Friendly Soap is selling as fast they can make it (and they need a motorcycle to reach markets further away.)

We talked with many families while we were there. The next step is to train the community to build, distribute, install, and maintain BioSand Water Filters under our Building New Lives program, which supports communities of people with HIV in bringing clean water to the larger community. We are grateful to the Conant Family Foundation for a grant to do exactly that.

Yubu and Kasaana People Living with HIV are very proud of what they have accomplished so far. Oh, and lest I forgot, the cost – the initial investment in the Kasaana project was under \$2,500. As we continue to note, very small amounts of money, intelligently applied, and with creative, innovative partnerships, can make really massive differences in people’s lives.

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David Albert is a member of Klamath Falls Friends Church (NWYM).