

Feature

Changing the world – one day at a time.

Colborne resident and Cobourg District Collegiate West principal Jeff Kawzenuk spent three weeks in the remote village of Kilema, Tanzania last month.

He relates some of his experiences and challenges to Bob Owen.

Why does a person spend time in a remote rural village in Tanzania moderating the suffering of a few people when there are literally millions in similar conditions?

Colborne resident and Cobourg District Collegiate West secondary school principal Jeff Kawzenuk faced that question as he worked in the Catholic village of Kilema, Tanzania. The answer was a painful one. There is so much suffering and the people have so little. Thousands and thousands of the children are orphans, their parents taken from them in the AIDS pandemic. How can this happen in our world? How can so many need so much? While the global questions remain unanswered, Mr. Kawzenuk knows now: you have to start somewhere, helping a few kids.

He returned to Canada firm in his belief that every child has the

right to food, drink, proper nutrition and an education. All are problems the world could solve tomorrow if the will was there. And everyone has the right to die in dignity. No one in their final hours should have to endure the agony and squalor he witnessed, he believes.

The secondary school principal followed the lead of his counterpart at East Northumberland Secondary School in Brighton, Steve Truelove, and took three weeks to help others in a country most of us only know as a name in an atlas.

What Mr. Kawzenuk found was unimaginable. But, he returned convinced he has gained more than he gave.

In the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro where he worked, over 100,000 people live with no hydro, no refrigeration and no

clean water. Infrastructure as we know it is almost non-existent. Barely passable roads, primitive health care and limited education inhibit any movement toward a subsistence lifestyle.

One in four mosquitoes carries malaria. Kindergarten children whose parents can afford the \$250 a year to attend school walk eight miles up and down the foothills to school each day. The school of 350 is served by two outdoor toilet pits. Lunch is an unpalatable mix of rice and beans cooked over an open fire in an unventilated cookhouse. When lunch is done, the kids rinse their bowls in the creek and then fill them up to drink.

Painkillers don't exist. Women requiring Caesarian sections endure them with no morphine.

People in need of a doctor walk to the village and line up for four hours in the early morning in the hope of seeing one.

AIDS has eliminated almost everyone between 25 and 45. It is a generation wiped out. The orphans of the dead have no chance to improve themselves without sponsors to pay the \$250 school fees. With school comes a daily lunch – a necessity for the orphans fortunate enough to attend.

The prospects are grim — and this is in an area receiving assistance from the Canada Africa Community Health Alliance.

Mr. Kawzenuk was one of 22 workers who traveled to Tanzania with the alliance in February, carrying with them 50-pound hockey bags jammed with school supplies and tools donated by Liquidation World, Staples, students and teachers.

up the portable panels, in many cases, on the homes of orphans. The group tried to get as many as possible in the homes with kids who went to school so they could read at night.

The solution is a simple low-tech one which was gratefully received. It safely extends the day at no cost. The panels were set up so that they could be taken in at night. Tanzania is relatively crime free, but the solar collectors are a valuable resource.

The AIDS pandemic

The effects of AIDS in Africa are gripping.

Grandparents care for parentless children. One toddler he met was being cared for by his great, great grandparents. The baby's mother was 14 and left soon after bearing the child. Her parents and grandparents were dead or gone. Mr. Kawzenuk stopped to talk to the great great grandfather. His wife wasn't available – she was out working.

He grew to know a little more about another little one named Dennis. His mother sold bananas and papayas outside the AIDS Centre. Their home was one of the better ones with mats to sleep on and a valuable chicken tied by its leg to a table. Dennis's dad's grave was 10 feet from the door. He died of AIDS in 2004. Dennis is not in school.

Mr. Kawzenuk was cautioned by the women with whom he spoke about sponsoring Dennis. There are thousands who are far

worse off, he was told/

The village of Kilema has a hospital. But painkillers don't exist and there is a general lack of cleanliness. Malnutrition brings with it assorted complications. Legs break easily. In his rounds at the hospital Jeff saw a patient in traction – a couple of sticks to prop up the leg weighted down by a bag of dirt and held by twine.

The night air was perforated by the screams of the sick and the dying.

On one tour, Mr. Kawzenuk passed a man with only a few hours left to live. His arms were sticks; he had no idea where he was, lying in his own feces. The doctors try to give comfort but there is no dignity dying that way.

This community is better off than most.

There is an AIDS Centre. People come in for counseling and their antiretroviral drugs.

Before he went to Tanzania, Mr. Kawzenuk did not understand why AIDS could not be prevented. He can rhyme off the list of reasons now – infrastructure, education, economy, healthcare.

The people do understand that antiretroviral drugs will allow them to live longer healthier lives.

When posed with the question of why they don't have smaller families, one of the Tanzanian workers on the project explained: his children will one day care for him.

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