

# Lifestyles

## Jennie latest in Kiddle family to help others far away

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

**P**erched above South Africa and west of Mozambique is a land stunning in both its lushness and desolation.

And earlier this year, Zimbabwe became the land Milton social worker Jennie Kiddle opted to spend three months of her life in.

"I wanted to do some volunteer work," said Ms Kiddle, 27. "I thought this was the best time."

Though she made the trip on her own, compassionate travelling is in her blood.

Since 1986, Ms Kiddle's family have been involved with Sleeping Children Around the World, a charity set up by Murray Dryden, father of hockey brothers Ken and David Dryden.

Each Kiddle member has made at

least one volunteer trek to far-flung areas such as India, Ecuador and the Philippines through the charity.

After landing in Zimbabwe, Ms Kiddle settled in Bulawayo, a half million strong former colonial city cloaked in startling contrasts.

The thunderous Victoria Falls — one and a half times as wide as Niagara Falls and spewing 150 million gallons of water per minute — are within travelling distance.

So is the Hwange Safari, where giraffes, elephants, kudu, jackals and zebras wander.

But fast food restaurants also pepper the city, which sports a shiny, modern-looking shopping mall like a badge.

And violence in Zimbabwe can sometimes be just a heartbeat away.

"Right when I was leaving, the black war veterans were occupying the white farms and people were getting killed," said Ms Kiddle.

One reason for the unrest is money. Inflation has gone through the roof,



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Jennie Kiddle recently travelled to Zimbabwe.

while the economy has fallen through the floor.

With no universal health care in place, buying food is often a higher priority than birth control. The result-

ing babies are sometimes subsequently abandoned by parents unable to afford them.

They're then taken to one of several local orphanages to live with abused kids or those whose families were wiped out by a raging AIDS pandemic.

Without access to stabilizing drugs, the disease often sweeps through families, infecting both parents and their children.

Accustomed to dealing with fragile emotions on this side of the world, Ms Kiddle soon found herself in a place where life itself is fragile.

Her job there was fundamental — feeding, changing diapers and carefully clipping tiny finger and toe-nails with a razor blade.

"This was basic, natural life skills," she said. "Some of the children were HIV positive, some had hepatitis B, others had tuberculosis."

During her stay, the local situation was worsened by an unusually rainy

season, the fall-out of three cyclones which had ravaged Mozambique.

Whipped by the tail end of the storms, Bulawayo's crops and animal herds were devastated.

"They were being swept away or their feet were rotting from standing in all the water," said Ms Kiddle.

For humans, malnourishment is kept at bay through the consumption of sadza, a bland mix of maize and water resembling mashed potatoes.

And photographs from the trip show Ms Kiddle surrounded by smiling children with spirit-lifting names such as Talent and Rejoice.

Back home, Ms Kiddle's friends and family collected \$600 to donate to a Bulawayo orphanage.

The equivalent of about \$15,000 in local currency, she used the cash to buy books, toys and clothes for the kids.

Since her return, another \$500 has been collected, along with packages of used clothes.

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