



# COMMUNITY

## Concern for children knows no boundaries

*Local moms set to travel to Kenya to help build school for young orphans*

By **Stephanie Hounsell**  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

**A**s mothers of six children between them, Judy Boivin and Mary Schroder can't imagine their kids having to survive without parents.

But in Africa, there are 13 million children who are orphans after losing their parents to AIDS and who are living with grandmothers or on their own in child-led households.

It's a heartbreaking statistic, and one Boivin and Schroder want to help reverse. Education, they feel, is the key to unlocking the pain and hardship that seems to enshroud the continent.

On July 30, the pair of Miltonians will be traveling with a team of 30 mostly high school teachers to Africa to help build a school in rural Kenya. They're traveling with an organization called Leaders Today, which is affiliated with Free the Children, a humanitarian organization founded by then 12-year-old Craig Kielburger.

The long-time friends will spend three weeks in an area so remote it takes a 10-hour bus ride to get there after stepping off the plane.

Now is an ideal time to build schools in the country because in 2002 the government waived the school fees, explained Boivin, who's a physiotherapist in town.

It's now free for kids to attend school, but there's little infrastructure in place.

Schroder said education is a value that's dear to her heart since she's a high school teacher in Mississauga.

"I've always gone by the quote, 'Give a man a fish and you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish and you have fed him for a lifetime,'" Schroder said.

In the afternoons when they're not building, the team will be teaching lessons to the hundreds of students who'll no doubt turn out to watch the school being built.

### Most children orphaned

For tragic reasons, adults are a novelty in Africa, since much of that generation has been wiped out by AIDS, Schroder said.

"They just want that adult touch and companionship," she said, adding, "They just latch on, from what I've heard."

Schroder and Boivin will be teaching science in a fun, hands-on way. Some of the other teachers on the team will be teaching other subjects.

They're not sure yet how much of a language barrier will exist. The people there speak Swahili and some speak some English. Schroder said she's attempted to learn a bit of Swahili, but hopes she won't have to depend on it too much.

Although they're going as teachers in addition to builders, both Schroder and Boivin believe they'll learn more from the children than the children learn from them.

"I hear people talk about how happy they are there despite having so little and I think that's an important lesson to learn here in North America," Boivin said.



**LOADED UP FOR TRIP:** Judy Boivin (left) and Mary Schroder show some of the soccer jerseys and school supplies they'll be bringing to Kenya.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

They've been collecting donations of school supplies to stock the school once it's built, and money to purchase supplies. They also came up with the idea of collecting used children's soccer uniforms to take with them, and so far have 300.

"We got this idea from our kids," Boivin said. "Soccer's very popular in Africa, yet they'd never have shiny, fancy uniforms like we have here."

For the two friends, this trip has been a long time in the making and the culmination of much dreaming and planning.

"We're both very concerned about the situation in Africa. There's so many problems with poverty and AIDS," Boivin said. "The only hope they (the children) have is to get an education."

Boivin's sister is a doctor who's traveled to Africa and talked with the family about what she's seen. Those first-hand accounts are part of what motivated Boivin to do something herself.

Of course, both Boivin and Schroder have their share of trepidation. Fortunately, they have each other to lean on for encouragement, and Schroder said it works out nicely because it seems when one is fearful, the other is excited and vice versa.

Schroder said her defining moment came when she bumped into Stephen Lewis, who was the United Nations special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, at the airport. She told him what an inspiration he was and how his book *Race Against Time* had affected her.

"He was such a humble man... so passionate about his work with the orphans and he actually thanked me for what we are about to do. I knew then that what we were doing was the right thing," she said.

Family support has been extremely important, over the past few months, both women said, particularly that of their husbands.

And their children have helped raise money for the trip, with Boivin's daughter even holding a lemonade stand to contribute.

They said their children serve as a constant reminder of why they're going and what they hope to accomplish.

"If they can't go to school, what's going to become of these kids?" Schroder asked.

Donations of money, school supplies and soccer uniforms can be dropped off at Milton Physiotherapy Clinic, 3006 Derry Rd. suite 203, across from Milton District Hospital.

Stephanie Hounsell can be reached at [sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com](mailto:sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com).

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