

Community

Volunteers devoted to cause

Lisa Joy
Globe Editor

It's the children that motivates Cindy and Richard Wright to go to Africa year after year with Lacombe charity A Better World (ABW).

Volunteering was nothing new to Cindy, who has worked as a legal assistant at Warren Sinclair for 30 years. She helped out in Red Deer at the Canadian Blood Services, Loaves and Fishes and the Cancer Society, the in-school mentoring program, Titans Track Club, and Red Deer Minor Hockey.

But she wanted to do more.

Then about six years ago Richard saw an ABW ad in the paper to go on a combined safari and humanitarian mission in Kenya.

"I instantly contacted Eric Rajah, co-founder of A Better World," she said.

After the first trip, Richard and Cindy began taking a small group to Kenya about a week before Eric would bring the main, larger group.

"We were able to do some real hands-on with a smaller group and also ensure that everything would be ready when the big group arrived," she said. "This year we were able to repair some playground equipment and their play room at St. Ann's Baby and Children Home."

Kenya—even though it is the best developed country in eastern Africa—is ravaged with unimaginable poverty. More than half of Kenya's 31 million people are poor and 7.5 million live in extreme poverty.

Thousands of children are left homeless as their parents die from AIDS/HIV or poverty. These children are vulnerable to abuse, starvation or sickness. The plight of these children tugs at Cindy and Richard's hearts, pulling them back to Kenya each year.

"We have fallen in love with the children of Kenya," said Cindy.

For a number of years the couple has sponsored a girl named Rose at East African Mission Orphanage, which is partially supported by ABW.

"It is great to go and visit her," said Cindy. "A few years ago we weren't sure she was going to survive due to illness but when we saw her last November she is very healthy and taller than I am."

Then there is Jackie from Ndanja.

"When we first met her a few years ago she was crawling in the dirt. She had spinal bifida. Now she is walking with crutches and getting regular physiotherapy. She is always excited to see us.

"We met Seline from Naburi near Kendu

Bay," she added. "She is only six years old and had to have both legs amputated just below the knees due to burns. The artificial limbs she had didn't fit her correctly and were making her poor little legs raw. We were able to arrange for her to get a new set."

Small things can make a huge difference in some of these children's lives, says Cindy.



It is nice that A Better World helps here and around the world.

— *Cindy Wright*

"We went to visit a secondary school in Kisumu and when we asked the kids if they needed anything, they said it would be so nice to have 'our own bar of soap.' Can you imagine?"



One of Cindy's friends had given her some money to help while in Africa so she went to the local Nakumat and bought the 16 kids soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, pens, calculators and math sets.

"They were all smiles," said Cindy. "You would have thought we gave them a million dollars. Moments like this make the whole trip worth it."

Volunteering in a developing nation outside of your comfort zone poses some chal-



A Better World photos

Above: Red Deer resident Cindy Wright has dedicated her yearly holidays, from the law firm where she is a legal assistant, to volunteer work in Africa with Lacombe charity A Better World (ABW).
Left: Her husband Richard Wright also dedicates his time to ABW.

lenges and frustrations.

"They are on 'African' time," said Cindy. "They aren't usually in a rush. I am so used to being so scheduled and that doesn't always work over there. I have learned to be a lot more patient than I used to be. And, of course, some days can be very emotionally draining. You see some very sad things and we just can't help everybody. There is so much need everywhere. It just reinforces that we really need to count our blessings."

But the couple knows they are making a difference.

"We love to see the great progress that A Better World is making with all of our projects. We love the excitement of the Grand Openings (of the schools). At one school opening last November there were closet o 1,000 people. It can become quite emotional but it is joys like this that overshadow the challenges and frustrations."

And the couple continues to volunteer

here at home with projects A Better World is involved in locally.

"We still have a group of A Better World volunteers that help out each month at Loaves and Fishes," said Cindy. "A couple of years ago my daughter, Amy, and some other A Better World youth helped renovate People's Place and also got some steel-toed work boots from Marks Workwearhouse for the homeless. This year A Better World adopted three families for the adopt-a-family at Christmas time. It is nice that A Better World helps here and around the world."

None of the volunteers for ABW, a registered charity, are paid. They all pay their own way to travel to other countries and to help. Cindy also uses her vacation days each year for her trips to Africa. But for her, it's all worth it.

"My mum always said 'Cindy you can't save the whole world,' but at least we can help one child at a time," she said.