

NEWS OF BEGA KWA BEGA SEPTEMBER 2,000

BEGA KWA BEGA THE OFFICE

**Concepta's parents'
house in the background**



The latest volunteers spent two weeks in Uganda during August. There were twenty in all, the majority being Americans, with Jane Walby and two of her friends, Pat Gill, Anne Shea and her partner Alan, and Martina, all from the UK. Apart from Alan all the volunteers from the UK had taught in Uganda in the 60s and 70s. The American contingent included a vet, several nurses, an inventor of solar ovens, a psychiatrist, a vicar, and various others who were engaged in building work. Seven water tanks were installed by houses which contained a large number of orphan



PREPARING GROUND FOR A WATER TANK

The veterinary scientist worked with the farmers showing them how to use local herbs to keep their animals in good health.

The main task was again teaching the teachers: nursery and primary one and two. Children will not be accepted for primary education unless they are able to understand and speak some English, so nursery education is all in English. Since some of the teachers' English is not brilliant this can be difficult to accomplish. In addition, classes at Infant and Primary levels are somewhat over subscribed. In Kitale, Martina spent a day in a nursery school where 68 children from 3 to 12 were somehow squashed into a very small room. Not unusually, classes have between 50 and 140 children with primary teachers paid £75 - £100 a month and Secondary £100 - £150. Primary education is of a higher standard than nursery.; the teachers have been trained, but there are few books and even less equipment.



PREPARING BREAKFAST

The teachers came to the centre from 8 - 10 different schools for the four hour classes which held on three consecutive days. Some had walked 8 miles to attend. Games were also in demand, not only netball, volley ball and rounders

but all sorts of ball games which can be used in Nursery and Primary one. Martina facilitated the games section and was surrounded by over a 100 students every time she approached the 'games pitch'. She was shown by a Ugandan teacher how to make a ball from a blown up plastic bag

surrounded by other plastic bags kept in place by many rubber bands. She discovered it bounced well and lasted a surprisingly long time.

ADULT EDUCATION CLASS

2,000



For the first time, some of the volunteers were engaged in adult education. This was an enormous success. The volunteers had been told to expect around 8 - 12 people. Up to a hundred attended. Local volunteers

were used to translate and classes were held in both Luganda and English. Many of the participants were Boda-Boda drivers. Boda-Boda are motor bikes used to transport people who perch behind the driver. They became a popular mode of transport during the time that Kenya closed its borders with Uganda. People were forced to get off public transport and find their own way. The other largest group who attended these classes was women who wished to help their children by becoming literate in both languages.



The man who had invented a version of a solar oven demonstrated this to a large number of women. The oven was made from a cardboard box lined with aluminium. At the end of the day, the “pupils” all went off with their ovens, carrying them on their heads, on bicycles or tied to their backs. Another volunteer taught them how to make bread using corn meal.

There was huge excitement in Kitala village the day WATER came out of the bore hole which had been recently dug. A family in Scotland wished to pay for a well in memory of the mother of the family who had recently died. The well has been named ‘Moyra’s Well’ in her memory. Martina had taken photographs for the family at every stage. There were often as many as 50+ yellow plastic 22 litre containers waiting to be filled. The pump is hard work and the containers heavy to carry but it saves many a 6 mile walk to obtain the same amount of water. Water in many villages is THE priority. The sinking of a well costs between £4,000 to £5,000. Bega kwa Bega charges 50 Ugandan shillings (about 2p) for a 22 litre container where most will charge 200 shillings (roughly the price of a biro in the shops). The money is for maintaining the well and paying someone to man it (and it is manning it!)



MARTINA AND CHILDREN

TRY OUT THE PUMP

CONTAINERS LINED UP

WAITING TO BE FILLED



As Martina travelled round, she was struck by the impact frequent death was having on the country, the villages and individuals. Before the AIDS epidemic, families would spend the days before a funeral mourning the dead person accompanied by other villagers and extended family. After the funeral, several weeks were an official time for mourning. Now, although family and friends try to get to the funerals, even this cannot always be accomplished. Most villages will experience one to two funerals a day of friends and neighbours dying from AIDS, malaria and 'old' age, hastened by exhaustion and lack of good food. There are no medicines, even for malaria. Poverty in the villages is frightening. One consequence is that cash has to be obtained by any means: for example, bananas and other fruits which used to be given to the children for snacks are now sold.

As last time, one of the biggest problems was the Americans' desire to "evangelise". Since the murders in Mbarara evangelising by Ugandans has been prohibited. This however, does not stop others arriving from all over and attempting to carry forward their own forms of Christianity. Concepta's brother was forced to lay down the law, telling them that Bega kwa Bega would be finished if they attempted in any way to give even the slightest impression that that was part of the age

TEACHERS'

QUARTERS

Concepta herself did not accompany the volunteers. In the weeks prior to the volunteers' visit, she had seen an advertisement for the Associate Director of the Peace Corps in Uganda. She realised when she received the job description that there could be few people who matched up as she did to every experience and qualification for which they asked. From having sent for this job description out of curiosity, she now thought about the job seriously. She received a phone call from the Headquarters of the organisation the day they received her application and spoke to her for well over two hours. She was, after interviews, offered the job but not without a good deal of 'politicking' in the background. Apparently it was the first time someone who had not been a Peace Corps volunteer was being 'let in' to the organisation. They wanted her to go out to Uganda very soon after the interviews and after a week of vigorous and intrusive medicals. She was also to attend a 2 week training programme, but was unable to go for the first week as she had to give notice to her employers, the equivalent of our local authority, where she was a social worker in the children's division. She did however attend the second week and after that had to go into the

offices in Washington everyday to familiarise herself with the set up. At the same time she was organising her two sons and her house for a long absence. The appointment is for two and a half years with an option for another two and a half. Fortunately the Peace Corps not only pays for carriage of goods to Uganda and storage if needed in the States, but they come and do all the packing. She was also told she could take up to 50 lbs worth of food out with her. She was astounded at this and did point out that food was obtainable in Uganda. Her two sons have supported her all the way in her new venture and would come back every evening while she was awaiting the results of her interviews with shouts of "have you heard yet Mom?" They are excited at being in charge of the house and had spent the last two weeks in changing things round to their own liking and those of 3 close friends - all male - who are to share with them. The elder son is beginning his last year of a Masters degree and will come back from college every weekend. The younger is at college locally. They both plan to go out to Uganda in May.

Concepta has already told the Director of the Peace Corps in the States that there are other needs in the country besides those of secondary schools which has been the only work undertaken so far. He expressed surprise when she said that Primary teaching was more important. Apparently she will have free rein to ask for the people she wants and organise everything as she thinks best. The Peace Corps left Uganda a couple of years back after some bombs went off in Kampala, so this is a new start. She has a Director who takes on all the political and social side (for which she is very grateful), a staff of four local Ugandans, a house with all found and a car. The 20 volunteers are not appearing until January. She does not think it will take her long to place these as one of her best friends works in the Ministry of Education. She considers what does give a bad impression is that her boss is white and does not speak the language. Although she is now an American Citizen (she would not have got the job if she had not been) realistically it is the first time that a native of a country has been appointed to such a position.

All this came up just before the volunteers went out to Uganda to work for Bega kwa Bega. It was of great concern to her that she would not be able to accompany them but everyone told her that she should forget her worries and get on with applying and being interviewed for a job she was, by then, desperate to get. In the meantime, the manager of the project, David Ssagala, coped well and with Jane Birungi ruling the kitchen (and a good deal else besides) that side of the operation went very smoothly.

Now that the project has been in operation for over two years and has experienced several visits from groups of volunteers, Concepta is rethinking the role of such groups. Much of the work goes on all year with the training undertaken by Ugandans. There will always be specialised training which will need people from abroad, but to take everyone who wants to come is, she feels, getting out of hand. The needs of the people are beginning to come second to the needs of the volunteers. She felt angry when the American Pastor, in charge of the American volunteers, asked her if he could bring out on a yearly basis a group from his university for purposes of looking at how the project was working. She replied with an unequivocal NO. Matching the requirements of the country with people who are willing to volunteer their services for such a brief but costly time is not easy. To put prospective volunteers through the gruelling interviews which the Voluntary Service Overseas and the Peace Corps volunteers experience, would be impracticable.

In January there will be a small contingent from Scotland going out for 17 days. Someone has donated 2 new knitting machines. One volunteer will be teaching the women how to use them. A weaver is also needed. Immaculata Mubiru (Ssemakadi) who lives with her husband and eight children in Nabbingo village has a loom but does not know how to use it so a search is on for a weaver. There will be a children's holiday 'camp' to be run by a volunteer who will be working with 37 Ugandan Nursery and Primary teachers who have offered to help.

In High Wycombe, Mary and the Parish are working towards having 4 Ugandan teachers over for a short course in nursery education in 2,001. The two women who came over last year benefited so much from the experience. Another bit of research is taking place in finding cookery courses for two Ugandans who are already qualified and experienced, but find it difficult to get well paid jobs unless they have a bit of paper supplied in Britain and who have not the confidence to set up in business on their own. Most businesses are run by Asians invited back into the country who offer poor pay and conditions. There are well qualified Ugandans, scientists, architects, engineers etc who would love to work in Uganda, but, if they work for the Government, and many jobs which are to do with building up the infrastructure of the country are Government led, they are badly supported and receive little pay which is forthcoming only at irregular intervals, if at all.

