

Water, Hope & Love

By Roy Williams, Matthew C. Kane and Jay M. Mitchell

PROS FOR AFRICA (www.prosforafrica.com), an international, non-profit relief organization headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma makes its primary focus the health and well-being of children in Africa. Reggie Whitten, an Oklahoma City attorney and founder of the organization, has ensured that one of its priorities is to assist in efforts to provide clean drinking water in the most remote areas of Africa. Why? The answer is simple – waterborne diseases account for 6,500 hundred deaths around the world every day. Approximately 5,000 of those who die from drinking contaminated water are children. To put that in perspective, more than 1.8 million children perish each year simply because they do not have clean water.

On a recent trip to northern Uganda, PROS FOR AFRICA partnered with two local charitable organizations to address significant drinking water shortages in the region. WATERisLIFE (www.waterislife.com), an Edmond based non-profit, produces the aptly named WATERisLIFE Straw. This small, portable filtration device provides pure, clean drinking water when it is immersed into anything containing water. Utilized just like a normal straw, the WATERisLIFE Straw filters out waterborne bacteria and other impurities through a series of filters and iodine crystals. Each straw provides a year of purified water for its owner. In March, PROS FOR AFRICA distributed 2,000 of these straws to people in and around Gulu, Uganda. The team also demonstrated the proper use of the Straw, including the “suck and spit” technique to be utilized before swallowing the water. This process makes the Straw filter ready to use by removing initial charcoal fragments. Oddly enough, it also provided the hundreds of children at the distribution site with a new form of entertainment.

Of course, the WATERisLIFE Straw, while meeting an immediate need, is not a long term solution to the water crisis. For that, PROS FOR AFRICA turned to the Water4 Foundation (www.water4.org), another Edmond based non-profit. Water4 utilizes hand-drilling technology where the normal time, expense and effort to bring in a mechanized drill rig is prohibitive. For this trip to Uganda, Water4 employed sliding hammer cable tool drill technology which its engineers are constantly developing and refining. Basically, the ingenious “low-tech” machinery is so well designed that it merely requires elbow-grease (and lots of it) to turn a couple of wrenches until you hit water. Because of its basic construction, it can be duplicated in-country, with locally available materials, to facilitate the transfer of appropriate technology and promote sustainability and economic development. Amazingly, each drilling unit only costs a little more than \$4,000 and can often be used to drill up to fifty wells before requiring maintenance or repairs, resulting in wells for less than \$100 each. Because the process is relatively simple, Water4 is able to train local residents to utilize the equipment which Water4 leaves behind to continue to drill new wells.

Dick Greenly, who headed up Water4's Ugandan efforts, described the well-drilling aspects of the trip: “We were able to drill and complete a well for the Restore Academy on

the site of their new 37 acre location and we trained 5 teams on the Water4 hand drilling methods. 5 teams trained instead of one and clean water for 250 kids!! Because PROS FOR AFRICA strongly encouraged us to ship two drilling kits instead of our normal one, now two teams will be drilling clean water wells each week! The immediate impact will be clean drinking water for around 600 people per week for the next several years...this is literally ‘life’ for tens of thousands of people.”

An effort to address the clean water shortage in northern Uganda was only one of many PROS FOR AFRICA objectives for this trip. Another key objective, though much less labor intensive and more enjoyable for all involved, was simply to bring joy to the children of the region. Specifically, those children who are victims of widespread human rights violations, including abduction, mutilation and sexual enslavement at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). But everyone in the region was greatly affected – tens of thousands of children would flee the rural areas at night for the relative safety of larger cities during the height of the conflict, others lived in constant fear. Though the area is relatively stable now, it is obvious that severe mental and emotional scars remain.

PROS FOR AFRICA and its volunteers set out to do whatever they could to bring smiles to the faces of the children they encountered and this is where NFL players Roy Williams, Mark Clayton, Tommie Harris and Adrian Peterson took center stage. Watching Tommie Harris play goalie during a friendly soccer match was an unexpected treat. Frequent volleyball matches that often appeared as competitive as the Olympics, though far more comical, were intense. And a dance-off between Mark Clayton and several local school girls was pure entertainment. But perhaps the most touching moment was the first game of Simon Says ever played at St. Monica's Girls Tailoring School. Roy Williams, whose charisma and charm served him well as the emcee, garnered laughs and crowd roars which simply cannot be overstated. Sister Rosemary, the school director, commented that it was the first time she had ever seen some of the girls smile.

Outside of the games and sports, children of all ages enjoyed posing for photographs, shaking hands and giving hugs. Often, PROS FOR AFRICA volunteers would simply take a picture with a digital camera and then show it to the children. Though it sounds basic, this would inevitably lead to more children seeking pictures and increasingly amusing antics to be captured for a momentary review. Though, on a few occasions, pictures could actually be printed on portable printers and given out like candy. Both the children and parents alike were delighted to have such a keepsake to be treasured long after PROS FOR AFRICA had departed.

PROS FOR AFRICA volunteers, whether NFL players, doctors, attorneys or other professionals, also left with similar intangible gifts. Stepping away from their daily duties in the United States, each volunteer had an opportunity to evaluate what was really important. Water, hope and love, a few absolute necessities of life, were expanding exponentially in northern Uganda, all thanks in part to the efforts of a few Oklahomans.



“Interacting with these children was life-changing. These kids were attentive, hanging on every word and gesture. They were yearning to learn more, without any other agendas, were clinging to each experience, treasuring every opportunity and reveling in each moment.”

Roy Williams – Cincinnati Bengals

Clockwise from top:

Roy Williams & Tommie Harris playing Simon Says with St. Monica's students.

Adrian Peterson using the WATERisLIFE straw while Roy Williams, Reggie Whitten & John Hargrave observe.

Dick Greenly of Water4 & Mark Clayton drilling waterwell on Restore Leadership Academy campus.

Adrian Peterson covering a pass from Roy Williams

