

Ugandan orphans rest well, thanks to Olney church

September 27, 2012

OLNEY—When [First Baptist Church in Olney](#) discovered the need for beds for orphans in Uganda, members of the church didn't need to sleep on it.



Josephine Ssebambulide, national director of Sweet Sleep in Uganda, expressed appreciation for the role First Baptist Church in Olney played in providing beds for children.

When Renee Russell and other leaders attended CentriKid camp last summer as sponsors, they heard about Sweet Sleep, a faith-based nonprofit organization that provides beds to the world's orphaned and abandoned children.

"Immediately after the worship time was over, there were three young ladies who had come to camp as assistants who were overwhelmed with excitement and ready to go and provide beds to children," she said.

Upon their return to Olney, they called [Sweet Sleep](#), and the church began praying about the opportunity.

Early this year, the church began raising the \$80,000 necessary to make the trip a reality. The church sold more than 5,600 cake balls for Valentine's Day—almost two cake balls per person for everyone in the community.

The church sent more than 30 one-gallon jugs of water home with families to drink and then fill with coins in a "Bottles for Beds" campaign.

The church also engaged in other fund-raising activities, like a crockpot lunch, selling wickless candles, a baked potato and homemade quilt auction, a garage sale and a churchwide collection of scrap metal.

Several church and team members took on extra jobs to raise money to donate to the project, and they sent letters to friends and family requesting financial support for the mission endeavor.

"We raised \$80,000, which is more than 20 percent of our annual budget," Russell said.

Her husband, Kelly Russell, is the church's pastor.



During their 10-day journey to Uganda, the mission team from First Baptist Church in Olney distributed 559 beds, Bibles and mosquito nets to children.

"We've been emphasizing missions for a while, so for the last few years, we've been putting seed money back for missions support, and that had begun to grow," he said, explaining another source of funds for the trip.

Forty-nine percent of the Ugandan population is under age 15, and of that, 20 percent live in orphanages. Uganda has the highest proportion of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS worldwide, accounting for an estimated 1.2 million children under the age of 17.

The Olney team first travelled 8,500 miles to the capital city of Kampala and worked in an orphanage there. In addition to playing with the children, doing crafts, singing songs and telling Bible stories, they also constructed beds and installed mosquito nets.

The orphanage, with more than 30 boys and 30 girls, owned only six mattresses before the team arrived.

In addition to HIV/AIDs, malaria carried by mosquitoes is one of the biggest killers of children in Uganda. Malaria kills a child somewhere in the world every 30 seconds, and 90 percent of deaths from mosquito-borne illnesses occur in Africa.

The team later travelled to Gulu, a village in northern Uganda. There they also distributed beds, Bibles and mosquito nets. They also registered 412 more children as having HIV/AIDs, enabling them to receive anti-retroviral medication for their illness, as well as beds and mosquito nets.

Renee Russell said some groups of orphans walked more than a day to receive their beds.

During their 10-day journey, the Olney team distributed 559 beds, Bibles and mosquito nets to children.

Josephine Ssebambulide, national director of Sweet Sleep in Uganda, was grateful for the Texas team's help.

"Celebrating three years of Sweet Sleep's work in Uganda with the children both in Gulu and Kampala with the Olney team remains something to be proud of and worthy to keep thanking God for his continued provision and protection. ... They have come and ministered love to so many children," she said.

Renee Russell noted she will remember most clearly Ugandan people who "were overwhelmingly appreciative and are so willing to share whatever little they have."

Kelly Russell said the trip affected more than the 16 people who made the trek to Africa. He said the fundraising was a churchwide effort, but more than that, members who stayed in Texas were connected to the team through their prayers. Church members also wrote letters of encouragement to the team that they carried with them and read in Africa.

"The trip will remind our church of two things," he said. "One, there is a bigger picture than what we see each day. God is at work all around the world.

"Two, it draws us closer together any time we cooperate, and that's certainly the case when it comes to missions."