

Seeds of Enrichment reaping what they sow

TANYA FOUBERT CANMORE

Canmore local Elizabeth Lewis has been pursuing her passion to explore and help communities she visits around the world for almost 16 years.

That drive and passion has been an inspiration for those around her and those who contribute to her mission to enable those she helps to continue helping themselves.

But it was only in the past several years that her work has amalgamated itself into a registered non-profit – Seeds of Enrichment.

She said even from an early age she was interested in other cultures and languages and took her first solo trip to Mexico City when she was 17 and followed that with volunteering at a school in Guatemala.

“When I turned 18, I sponsored a child in Africa and that was the first connection to Africa,” she said. “I eventually went to meet the child, but the money was not going where it was supposed to go, so that was another drive to do something myself.”

The connection to Africa was made and Lewis has since travelled to the same area of northeast Uganda seven times.

On one of those first trips she stayed at an orphanage and met former child soldiers. She noticed dorm rooms for the children did not have mosquito nets, which are one of the easiest ways to prevent malaria, and when she returned to Canmore, the local Grade 5 class helped her fundraise and purchase for the orphanage, which is also a primary school, 400 nets. She has since helped them start a pig farm as well.

“In all our projects we are a hand up, not a hand out, so we train all the villagers and we start the project, but they are trained so they take over and have ownership of it,” Lewis said.

She said by providing things like mango or pineapple trees to a village and helping villagers learn how to harvest fruit and care for the trees, they don't have to rely on international aid as much – the benefits are ongoing.

Her work has also taken her to Rwanda, where she met three men who received prosthetic legs from Lewis, who saw them walk for the first time.

“I got to meet them and watch them walk for the first time,” she said. “It is amazing – I almost do not have words to describe it!”

She asked a 12 year old, who lost his leg to a rocket, what it felt like to walk again.

“He just looked at me and he smiled,” she said. “He had no words to express the gratitude, it was amazing.”



“That is the amazing part of helping people; to see where it ends up going.”

The work has been especially meaningful for Lewis and in 2014, Seeds of Enrichment was officially registered as a non-profit. She said with bigger and bigger projects taking shape, it was time to formalize the organization.

This year also saw the biggest project Lewis has undertaken in the 18 years she has been doing this work – she helped drill two water wells for a pair of north-eastern Uganda villages. She said the two wells now provide 1,000 people with clean, potable water and she raised \$16,000 to make it happen.

“It was our largest project to date, but it was hugely rewarding and successful,” she said.

Each village votes for who will form a water committee and Lewis said those representatives are trained on the use of the pump, its maintenance and repair.

“It is essentially in their hands to care for and they have ownership of it,” she said.

Through her work, she said she has a network of close friends in Uganda and a team of amazing people to help with the projects once they are chosen.

For example, Lewis heard about a village from a Ugandan friend that took in 34 vulnerable children orphaned by conflict or disease as part of 34 families. She said although those families



Elizabeth Lewis on site at a well project (top), and with African children (above).

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were already poor, they took in another mouth to feed and child to educate and clothe.

“We partnered with that village and brought them 68 goats – one male and female pair for each family that took in a child,” she said. “That was last year, and now those goats have produced more goats. It is very exciting to see.”

With Seeds of Enrichment, Lewis said she is very excited for where it will go in the future. She

said it is a very important point for her to pay her own way to work on projects in Africa, so that all donations go into the work.

“We have a good reputation over there, people are really starting to know about us and we get a lot of respect,” she added.

Lewis is also hosting a Christmas market on Dec. 12 at the Canmore Miners' Union Hall to raise funds for the organization's work and crafts on

sale will include items made by the communities helped – including beaded bracelets, yoga bags and aprons. Other vendors will have items for sale at the marketplace.

“These are empowering projects,” Lewis said. “We plant seeds and people's lives are enriched.”

To find out more about Seeds of Enrichment, visit the website at www.seedsofenrichment.ca or visit their Facebook and Twitter pages.