

## W.E.E.P for Southern Sudan

Background- W.E.E.P. (Women's Educational Empowerment Project) for Southern Sudan is a non-profit organization founded by the students of a faith based organization at Murray State University in Kentucky, whose self proclaimed mission is "to create an opportunity for the young women of Southern Sudan to receive an education that will help them support their communities and exponentially impact future generations."<sup>1</sup> Twenty-five percent of jobs in Sudan are specifically reserved for women, but demand an education through the high school level; therefore, many women miss out on these opportunities. Although education of women in Southern Sudan is encouraged, it is generally not a high priority; women are often married at a young age, become pregnant, and fall to relying on the support of their husbands while raising the family. Therefore the education of women is somewhat neglected and receives little funding. W.E.E.P. attempts to provide these women with an education through the high school level, increasing the number of women with jobs, and bettering the quality of life of both these women and their families. Short term goals include the sponsorship of young women through at least high school education. Long term goals include the construction of school houses to place in Southern Sudan, specifically for the education of young women, and raising awareness of the tragic state of Sudan.

I first became interested in this project during a retreat involving leadership councils from multiple Baptist Campus Ministries across the state. The students at Murray made a presentation involving the goals and vision of their organization along with a video documenting their journey to Kenyan refugee camps in order to choose the girls others had committed to sponsor. During the presentation I was moved by stories of turmoil that surround Sudan. I was inspired by the passion with which these students were trying to improve the quality of life of Sudanese women, and as a subsequent result, the quality of life of their families. I was also impressed by the commitment of these women to an education I often take for granted. Furthermore, I felt a connection to this project because I feel strongly that all who seek an education should obtain one, and I have a desire to reach and aid others on an international scale. Finally, this organization fulfills an immediate need and is intended to project itself into the future, impacting the greater population of Sudan rather than just a small group of girls. I believe that educating the people of Sudan through these women, which would also improve the quality of life of the Sudanese people, would lead to an eventual alleviation of many of the problems plaguing Sudan, such as religious persecution and genocide. The prolonged success and expansion of this project is dependent on the cooperation and interest of other campuses and

organizations. I have decided form an organization similar to that of Murray State University, but which takes individual ownership of its purpose, expansion, and goals.

W.E.E.P originated due largely to the mission of Gabriel Akech Kwai, a lost boy from the Southern Sudan region, who was given the opportunity to receive an education in America. Through Gabriel's contacts within Kenyan refugee camps and within Sudan itself, this project is made possible. Gabriel acts as a consultant to Murray students with regards to Sudanese culture and to travel, in order for these students to go within refugee camps. It is Gabriel's contacts to whom funds are now sent, and it is Gabriel's vision to construct a school, and to return these women to Southern Sudan.

The struggles of Sudan are connected with the Displace Me movement, which is already present on UK's campus. Within both organizations, students attempt to reach similar areas in Africa. It is my hope that the heavily publicized event and group associated with Displace Me may be a spring board from which to launch W.E.E.P among the larger student population, raising awareness and support on campus.

Proposed Project- General: (1) My project is, therefore, two-fold. I wish to enlist the support of local churches and businesses who will commit to sponsor individual girls over approximately four years, or as far as the individual girl wishes to go in her education. These churches and businesses would then provide a consistent support basis on which to found the project, fulfilling its major short term goals of individual sponsorship. The second aspect of my project would be to start a student organization, beginning with several faith-based organizations, and moving outward to incorporate the larger student population as a whole, committed to the prolonged awareness and support for the tragedies occurring in Southern Sudan. This student group would be ideal for raising awareness in general about the state of Sudan and for raising support for a school house. The student organization would not, then, commit to supporting individual girls, and would not be held accountable for raising any certain amount over a time period.

Specific: (1) I will form a small core of interested students within my Baptist Campus Ministry, and we will visit individual churches and organizations in which we either have influence or deem appropriate for sponsorship. Criterion for sponsorship might include, but may not be limited to, previous interest in international affairs or missions (or a general humanitarian interest), stability of the organization, influence in the community, and easy travel/access from UK's campus. Churches are ideal for this type of sponsorship. Southland Christian, Immanuel Baptist, and Calvary Baptist are three churches in which we have known influence as active members. We will attempt to approach

other churches, of varying faiths, and pitch W.E.E.P. with the aid of literature and films obtained from the students at Murray (the same materials used to pitch to us at the aforementioned conference). I will use several of my contacts within the UK hospital to inquire if and how I could go about convincing the hospital to take on the sponsorship of several girls. The rest of our sponsors will be determined by this core group of students and me. Once sponsorship has been obtained, we will establish a system by which to channel funds, assigning one student who has a contact within the organization to each site in order to ensure that money is transported correctly and consistently. This money will then be collected by our BCM treasurer/secretary, and transferred by the appropriate means to our sponsored girls within the refugee camp. Our goal is to obtain at least ten sponsors within the Lexington area by May 2009.

In order to take ownership of our chapter of W.E.E.P. and our role within this organization, a trip to the specific Kenyan Refugee camp in which many of the girls are located would be organized and put into effect, potentially in spring of 2009. A team will be selected and work in tandem with the BCM in order to travel overseas to pick the maximum amount of girls we can support, administering standardized tests and conducting interviews in order to select those who will receive sponsorship. All profits will go to these girls and their continued education.

Specific: (2) Obtaining a support base within the student population will require brainstorming and further planning within the smaller group I first intend to handle W.E.E.P. I will first attempt to reach out within my own BCM, obtaining a firm base by which to enlist support. Next I will present W.E.E.P. to the several other faith based organizations on campus, beginning with their campus ministers, and expanding to a larger group presentation, including the Catholic Newman Centre, Campus Crusade for Christ, Christian Student Fellowship, the Church of Christ group, and others, in order to raise awareness and support in the form of volunteers, potential board members, etc. Using our interns and council members specifically assigned to internationals ministry on campus, I will attempt to obtain a venue in which to present W.E.E.P. to a larger portion of the student body. Possible target groups are those involved with the Displace Me movement on campus, fraternities/sororities, etc. These target groups will be determined after consultation and brainstorming within the aforementioned smaller student set. Fundraising may be performed within individual groups, or through large, campus-wide events. The amount of interest shown to the project will determine its target base within the larger student population. I hope to enlist Gabriel's help as a speaker in order to recruit organizations on campus to our cause.

The form of this project is simply composed of a larger student group and individual sponsors taking the forms of churches, businesses, and larger organizations. I believe this form is appropriate to

the need, largely because it has been tested by Murray State and their student organization, and has succeeded. My goal is to expand W.E.E.P., using a larger campus and community to enlist a larger support base. The education of these women will not benefit them alone, but their families and the general quality of life care needed to help stem many of Africa's problems, including AIDS awareness and prevention, malnutrition, infant mortality, basic sanitation and disease control, etc. In this way we are not attempting to fulfill simply one of these needs, but all of them over a general scope in the broad form of educating the family caretaker. Gabriel tells us that educated women are welcomed within the Sudanese culture and society, and that these girls will be able to integrate well and be allowed to share what they have learned within society. Furthermore, the school that targets only women will provide girls with an attainable education needed right within the country, encouraging higher learning and reaching a larger base than sponsorship can now provide.

Schedule- (A loose timetable of dates by which we wish to attain certain goals is given)

- November 2008- Have met with Gabriel to discuss details involving funds in order to present to sponsors. Have obtained information from Murray students to present to sponsors, solidifying the basic form of the presentation. Have established a small group within the BCM, willing to commit themselves to the project and raising awareness/support. This group will be the first official/unofficial board which unilaterally acts to make decisions. This group will meet at least once in the month of November to plan out a strategy for reaching the larger student body and other faith organizations, as well as choosing sites for potential sponsorship. Attempt to assign students to each site and worked out a way to channel funding.
- January 2009- Begin to reach out to the sponsors chosen in November. Reach out to the other faith organizations on campus, possibly through a larger awareness/fundraising event in which we bring Gabriel to speak. Determine a structure for a board/council that will run W.E.E.P. now and in the future, leaving spots open for other interested students within the larger body. Possibly reach out to other BCMs around our area, encouraging them to also take up W.E.E.P. and to use Murray or ourselves as an example.
- March 2009- Have obtained our goal of at least ten sponsors (ten girls sponsored) within the Lexington area. Have planned out our attempt to reach the larger student population, possibly through some kind of awareness event that also serves as a general fundraiser for the year.

- April 2009- Launch a fundraiser to raise awareness and gain support, possibly using Gabriel as a speaker.
- September 2009- Reconvene all those who have agreed to participate in W.E.E.P., assessing and possibly redefining goals for the year. Also, assessment of sponsorship and the stability of the student group ought to take place. Possibly present W.E.E.P. at a Displace Me event. Discuss fundraising ideas for the upcoming year. Discuss the possibility of a trip to the Kenyan refugee camp, and all needed materials for selecting our girls.
- January 2009- Select a board for the following year, replacing graduating members especially. Potentially obtain more committed sponsors, as well as determining those students committed to each site for the following year.
- March/April 2009- Travel to Kenya with other students from other participating campuses to pick our girls and distribute the first of our funds. Possibly document this trip through film and photography (most likely students will do this).

Budget- The budget for this non-profit will largely reside on the shoulders of sponsors, which will need to pledge approximately \$30 per month for one girl's needs. Other smaller expenditures include gas money for driving to and from churches, materials needed to make the presentation, and whatever expenditures would be involved in our fundraising events (to be determined later). These fundraisers, however, could easily be cost effective depending on the venue and nature of the fundraiser. All ideas considered will keep cost in mind when planning. Plans for building the school are largely in the air, and may not be taken on as a responsibility of our chapter.

Potential Jurors- I will have included on my jury a member of the University of Kentucky's International Studies/Affairs faculty, and a member of the Baptist Campus Ministry's International Ministry.

\*\* I have realized in writing this proposal that there are many questions regarding the scope and direction of my project yet to be considered and fully answered. I am continuing develop this project and its proposal, which are subject to change, in the hope of answering many of these questions

Sources-

<sup>1</sup>"W.E.E.P. for Southern Sudan." 27 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.weepforsouthern Sudan.org>>.

<sup>2</sup>Phone interviews with Tamsyn Garner (Student in charge of W.E.E.P. at Murray State).