

LNP | LANCASTER, PA

DRUG PREVENTION

Trip shows impact of global outreach

Willow Street woman behind GOAL sees success as students embrace drug-free lifestyle

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In 2020, Mary Theresa "Terry" Webb helped launch a drug prevention program in Ugandan schools, Global Outreach for Addiction Leadership and Learning, with Lancaster nonprofit Global Addiction Recovery Partners.

The Willow Street woman traveled to Kampala, the capital of Uganda in eastern Africa, from Feb. 10 to 20, with GOAL board chair Steve Brubaker and board treasurer Carmen Medina, on a trip to advance the program's mission.

And she did so at age 90 — a testament to her dedication.

GOAL, with offices at 313 W. Liberty St., works to "prepare and support the community to address the challenges of addiction and recovery" through global outreach, Webb says.

The February trip was in response to an invitation from the Rev. Canon Captain William Ongeng, provincial secretariat of the Anglican Church of Uganda, whose responsibilities include mission, outreach and health. Funding for the trip was provided by local churches.

In 2019, GOAL formed a partnership with the Ugandan church to address addiction. The recent visit, Webb says, was to see the progress of the evidence-based school prevention drug program started in 2020 at Uganda's 640 secondary schools.

In the program, a lead counselor trains the students using a curriculum that explains the effects of alcohol on the brain and importance of addiction prevention.

Students use the information to inform their peers, sometimes through skits.

There are two levels at the schools: one for students in grades 8 to 11, and another for students in grades 12 and 13. (Student years are organized differently in Uganda, but grades 8 to 13



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Ugandan students who are part of their school's Drug Free Schools Club, part of GOAL's programming. Below, from left, Steve Brubaker, Carmen Medina and Mary Theresa "Terry" Webb of the GOAL team.

MORE INFO

● Learn more about GOAL at goalproject.org.

are considered secondary schools.)

And students in those years are up against more than just test scores. PLOS One, a peer-reviewed science and medicine journal, published a 2022 report that 60% to 71% of Uganda's school-age children and adults (ages 12 to 24) use addictive substances.

"Drug addiction has been a major problem for children in Uganda," Webb says.

Alcohol is most prevalent, with 19.3% of students using it, according to the PLOS One report. But marijuana, cocaine, heroin and cigarettes are issues as well, as well as shisha (tobacco smoked with a hookah) and khat, leaves that contain cathinone, which is a Schedule I drug in the U.S. That's according to a 2021 report by the Makerere University School of Psychology, a Ugandan school.

In 2014, Dr. Joseph Mussalo, a counselor at Uganda Christian University, invited GOAL to launch a drug-free program at the school. Webb and Amy



Sechrist, certified prevention specialist, stepped up to start workshops in Uganda.

"Freeing the Ugandan child of the substances in schools is very timely, as the problem of addiction is bigger than you can imagine," Mussalo says.

He credits GOAL with providing comprehensive training which led to addiction treatment centers.

Ezra Napoleon Tumuhirwe is the church coordinator who's cultivated training programs in the schools.

"Our goal is to have all the schools

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participate in the drug-free curriculum," Brubaker says. "Currently 20 schools and 20,000 students are in the program."

He says the difference between this mission trip and other organizations is returning and connecting with the same project under local leadership. It's about relationships, he says, and privilege of working with the highest level of the Anglican Church.

Medina found it surprising that the country has many university graduates who can't find jobs, are homeless and use substances.

"Youth were begging for money in the streets, probably sent by parents, to buy alcohol and drugs," Medina says.

Closing the schools in 2020 because of COVID-19 was a setback for the program. But in 2023, the program resumed and is regaining momentum.

Mission team trip

The mission team visited a Drug Free School Club at Wampeewo Ntakke secondary school in Kampala. Out of 1,000 students, 100, mostly female, are in the club. They sign pledge cards to be in the program. Marijuana use has been significantly reduced because of the impact of the club.

"The students were animated and proud to convey their message of being drug-free," Brubaker says. A male student read a poem and others performed a skit about the subject for the visiting mission team.

Medina was touched by

the students' sincerity to be drug-free and keep younger students from addiction.

During the trip, the team met with the National Drug Authority Uganda. With their influence, the authority signed an agreement with the church to help pay some of the expenses of the Drug Free School program. GOAL continues to financially support the program.

The group met with church authorities to renew their official partnership by signing a new agreement. The act supported Tumuhirwe's \$600 a month salary. "A few dollars go a long way in Africa," Webb says.

The team visited a memorial for Christian missionaries and the Mengo Hospital, part of the Ugandan health care system.

Unfortunately, Brubaker's first trip to Uganda ended with a torn Achilles tendon

after he accidentally stepped in a sidewalk hole. He had to wait until arriving home for surgery. Still, he sees the trip as a success.

"Our mission to renew our partnership with the church and witness results of GOAL helping Uganda communities reduce addiction and increase resources to support sustainable recovery was accomplished," Brubaker says.

Brubaker and Medina, both Lancaster residents, say this trip won't be their last.

Medina, who at 31 was the youngest GOAL member on the trip, was amazed by Webb's energy during travel and weeklong activity.

For Webb, who lives at Willow Valley Communities and is also an author and educator, the trip was bittersweet.

"I believe God kept me alive just so I could lead this last mission and turn it over fully to GOAL," Webb says.