

# AVSI-USA NEWS

Volume 12

February 2009

## AVSI-USA IS PART OF THE AVSI NETWORK

AVSI-USA Mission: To support the AVSI network by leveraging resources and contacts in the U.S. in order to enhance and broaden the achievements of member organizations in promoting human dignity in developing countries.

### **OPPORTUNITY: A Unique Giving Program to Share in the Adventure of Life** **Pgs 2—3**

AVSI-USA launches a new program designed to be an invitation for private donors to become “Partners” with AVSI-USA in supporting three long-term partners in Brazil, Mexico and Kenya. This relationship will be able to provide both financial support for the selected AVSI programs as well as an opportunity for donors to engage with a reality far from their own.

### **WINGS: Innovative Approach to Impact Evaluation and Programming** **Pgs 4—5**

In January, AVSI-USA, together with AVSI-Uganda, launched a new income generation support program for women in northern Uganda. The program is exciting and innovative due to the dual nature of its approach: through WINGS, AVSI will not only provide direct assistance to young women to begin or grow their small business activities, but will do so within the framework of a sophisticated impact evaluation component carried out by the research group Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and a team of professors from Yale University.

### **AVSI’s Response to Tragedy in the DRC** **Pg 5**

AVSI suffered an unfortunate casualty to its team in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with the tragic loss of Boduin Ntamenya. Boduin was a senior member of AVSI training team for students and teachers involved in education in post conflict areas. A scholarship fund has been established to help support the family he has left behind.

### **An Education in Presence: A Medical Student’s Experience in northern Uganda** **Pgs 6—7**

Mandy Reimer, a second year medical student at the University of Alabama, describes her time spent at Meeting Point- Kitgum and the way it impacted both her studies and her understanding of what it means to be a presence.

### **AVSI’s Emergency Response in Gaza Strip** **Pg 7**

Present in the region since 1993, AVSI responds to the recent humanitarian crisis in Gaza and invites others to contribute to the effort.

### **Updates from the Field** **Pg 8**

Read about two of AVSI’s exciting new initiatives in the educational sector which took place recently in Thailand and Uganda.



## Opportunity

A Unique Giving Program to Share in the Adventure of Life

Pope Benedict XVI recently stated, at the World Day of Peace, “What the fight against poverty really needs are men and women who live in a profoundly fraternal way and are able to accompany individuals, families and communities on journeys of authentic human development.” These words provide the perfect backdrop for the launch of AVSI-USA’s new private fundraising initiative, *Opportunity*.

### Opportunity: A Unique Giving Program to Share in the Adventure of Life

Opportunity is a giving program that invites individuals and groups into a long-term relationship with AVSI and partner institutions in developing countries. It is a commitment to share in the task of supporting these

selected institutions in their mission of reaching out to the most vulnerable members of their communities.

### The Role of AVSI-USA

AVSI-USA will serve as the intermediary of this relationship between the donors (or Partners) and the beneficiary institutions. In this capacity, AVSI-USA will serve two main functions. First, AVSI-USA will ensure that donations are channeled directly from Partners to the institutions. Secondly, AVSI-USA will share information and updates from the local organizations, including photos, written correspondence, and more. In fact, more than facilitating a monetary transaction, AVSI-USA seeks to facilitate the growth of a relationship with limitless possibilities for mutual exchange. By

receiving information and having the chance to communicate with the institutions they support, donors will be able to give a human face to the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity, and charity.

### Opportunity’s Partner Institutions around the World

AVSI has greatly contributed to the development of the Cantinho da Natureza (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), DIJO (Oaxaca, Mexico) and Cardinal Otunga High School (Nairobi, Kenya) through continued, committed support over many years. It is clear that each of these institutions is exemplary in its capacity to engage the lives of those in their respective communities and have proven to be successful in addressing local needs with a “bottom-up” approach. Though successful, none

*Continued, page 3*



## AVSI’s Urban Upgrading Success Published

AVSI’s work in **Brazil** was recently highlighted in the book, *Alagados: the Story of Integrated Slum Upgrading in Salvador, Brazil*. The book tells the story of how AVSI along with several other development groups worked with the Cities Alliance and the State Government of Bahia (Brazil) from 2001 to 2006 to provide integrated assistance for the people living in the slums of Salvador de Bahia. The book articulates the lessons learned from their approach, drawing from the use of AVSI’s distinct method.

The book is available at [www.citiesalliance.org](http://www.citiesalliance.org)



## Opportunity

A Unique Giving Program to Share in the Adventure of Life

of these institutions currently has the capacity to be completely self-sufficient. Given the fact that they serve highly marginalized populations, they are severely limited in terms of access to local funding and income. Furthermore, each institution has hopes of expansion in the face of growing needs and increasing capacity.

### How to become a Partner with Opportunity

Donors should complete a Registration Form available on the AVSI-USA website. On this Form, one can select an institution to support, indicate an annual contribution and provide contact information. AVSI-USA will respond quickly with a welcome letter, receipt for tax purposes and the first of many updates from your partner institution.

Groups, families, businesses and schools are encouraged to register as partners as well.

Please visit our website for more information and a list of *Frequently Asked Questions*. ■

### Cantinho da Natureza, Rio de Janeiro, BRAZIL

The Cantinho is a multi-functional community center with a full-time nursery school, after-school programs for at-risk youth, activities for adolescents and evening classes for adults. The center directly challenges the common mentality of resignation and indifference so prevalent in the Brazilian favela.



§ A contribution to the Cantinho will help to expand after-school programs including career counseling, giving adolescents an alternative to spending their free time on the streets. §

### Desarrollo Integral de la Juventud Oaxaquena, Oaxaca, MEXICO

DIJO is a community organization that runs activities in five centers in poor neighborhoods around the city of Oaxaca in central Mexico. After-school programs including remedial lessons, recreation, arts and sports provide crucial support to children along their personal and educational paths.



§ A contribution to DIJO will ensure access for children and pregnant mothers to regular, nutritious meals through the expansion of community kitchens. §

### Cardinal Otunga High School, Nairobi, KENYA

The Cardinal Otunga High School is the fruit of an exceptional undertaking by parents and teachers concerned about the quality and limited access to secondary school education available to their children. The school provides a holistic education for the children of this urban area outside of Nairobi regardless of their ability to pay.



§ A contribution to the Cardinal Otunga High School will increase the number of scholarships available and will contribute to a resource fund for the library and laboratories. §

## Innovative Approach to Impact Evaluation and Programming: a new collaborative initiative is launched

AVSI and its network organizations have had a long-standing relationship with the people of northern Uganda. It has been one shaped by sharing in the distress and coping with the difficulties inherent to life in the war-torn region. This month marks the beginning of a new initiative to reach out to the most vulnerable young women and youth through a micro-enterprise program known as **WINGS**, the **Women's Income Generating Support Program**. WINGS is a three-year program managed by AVSI-USA and implemented by AVSI-Uganda with financing from private, U.S. based donors.

An exciting and innovative aspect of WINGS is the **dual nature of the project design**. Through WINGS, AVSI will not only provide direct assistance to young women to begin or grow their small business activities, but will do so within the framework of a sophisticated impact evaluation component carried out by the research group **Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)**. The goal of the parallel research component is to measure the impact of AVSI's methods and to compile evidence about the effectiveness of various methods to most successfully address the severe vulnerability of women in northern Uganda. The findings will provide insight into programming challenges and opportunities more broadly.

With the dual nature of the project also comes a dual expertise so essential for the success of WINGS. AVSI offers a strong knowl-

edge base that comes from a prolonged presence in Northern Uganda as well as prior experience with income-generating activities. Furthermore, AVSI staff is privileged to have established personal relationships with the women and their communities, providing a starting point of trust. IPA brings research expertise and knowledge of the context, based on years of field research and academic pursuits from a cross-section of disciplines including economics, political science, and psychology.

WINGS has already benefited from the relationship between AVSI and the IPA researchers. The WINGS approach draws from the findings of a previous collaborative effort, **SWAY, the Survey of War Affected Youth**, a large study examining children and young adults affected by the war in northern Uganda.



The WINGS program essentially offers

AVSI's already established "livelihoods support methodology" to young women in selected villages throughout Kitgum and Gulu districts. The circumstances for many young women in northern Uganda are desperate. Twenty years of violent warfare have left the vast majority of the population displaced from their homes and living in extreme poverty. Also troubling for these women is the lack of access to continued education. The obstacles to secondary school are many and well-known, and the problem has recently grown more severe. However, it has been shown that when girls are able to generate income from part time work, they are more inclined to continue with their education.

The basic model is simple. Young women aged 14-30 will receive basic business skills trainings and will be invited to create a business plan with the help of members of the AVSI team. Start-up capital equivalent to \$150 USD will be extended once their business plans have been approved. Under careful observation and guidance, the women will be given the tools, skills, and resources to begin their businesses. Another possibility will be the chance for participants to form small mutual help groups amongst themselves, allowing them to share in each other's experience in order to learn together and succeed. AVSI intends to support a total of 1,800 young women over a three-year period.

### About the Research

The research team working with the WINGS program includes **Christopher Blattman**, PhD, MPA/ID of Yale University. Dr. Blattman will design and implement many of the fundamental aspects

*Continued, page 5*

## WINGS Continued

of both quantitative and qualitative research elements. Also from Yale University is Associate Professor of Psychology **Jeannie Annan**, PhD. Dr. Annan will focus on the psychosocial and health related components of the research. Finally, **Eric Green**, PhD at the NYU School of Medicine will contribute to the overall evaluation design and will lead the field research team.

The research will be conducted in tandem with the AVSI program and will utilize a randomized experimental approach. ■

IPA Website

<http://poverty-action.org>

### Possible Research Questions

#### *Economic Recovery:*

- What are the direct economic impacts of program participation?
- What are the determinants of economic success among the most disadvantaged women?
- What is the link between economic activity and women's empowerment and status?
- What are the indirect effects of earned income on child health and education?
- What are the community and market level impacts of the assistance, especially on other micro-enterprises in the community?

#### *Social Cohesion and Reconciliation:*

- How do economic activity and group participation contribute to the reintegration of former combatants?
- What is the impact of group participation on trust and social cohesion?

## AVSI touched by violence in DR Congo: Scholarship Fund for the children of AVSI employee

AVSI's team comprised of 8 foreign and over 200 local staff in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) suffered an unfortunate casualty on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 with the tragic loss of Boduin Ntamenya, 52 years old. Boduin was a senior member of AVSI's training team for students and teachers involved in education in post-conflict areas. While conducting a census of schools which had reopened in the area of Rutshuru, North Kivu, after recent violent clashes between the government of Congo and the rebel military, Boduin was shot and killed by four armed men. He died before reaching the local hospital. His driver, Ciza Deo Gratias, also sustained critical injuries as a result of the attack. Though Deo Gratias was shot in the hand and side, he continued to drive the jeep for over a kilometer, out of harm's way and eventually reached medical care.

AVSI has been active in DRC since 2002, in particular in the areas of North and South Kivu. Throughout much of that time, AVSI has worked with several UN agencies (see the AVSI-USA newsletter from February 2006 for more background), and most closely with UNICEF to renovate and equip hundreds of schools and provide thousands of children and their teachers with supplies, exciting courses, and recreational activities. Other partner agencies include the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Program (WFP) and the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) all of which seek to ensure food security and provide support for the displaced and returnees with non-food items.

The tragic loss of a colleague has touched the AVSI community deeply. Boduin has left behind a wife and six children. **In response, AVSI has established a scholarship fund for the Ntamenya children.**

*"They are part of us and our history. We will help them in every way, and by doing this the children can continue their studies,"* stated Edoardo Tagliani, the AVSI representative in Congo. He added, *"Despite the drama, it is crucial that forgiveness wins over violence."*

AVSI will continue its work improving the educational situation for children in the DRC despite the environment of instability and inspired by the dedication and courage that Boduin Ntamenya demonstrated in serving his people. Boduin, "was convinced that the war was a negation of justice and a triumph of violence. Like he taught in his formation, violence brings only violence. He responded to this violence by trying to bring peace through educational initiatives to thousands of children who lived in war."

#### **How to Contribute**

Donations to the Scholarship Fund for the Ntamenya Children can be made via AVSI-USA. Send checks payable to "AVSI-USA" to the DC office. For electronic payments, contact AVSI-USA for complete details: (202) 429-9009.

## An Education in Presence: An American Medical Student's Experience in northern Uganda

**Mandy Reimer**

University of Alabama  
School of Medicine

This past summer I was given the opportunity to spend six weeks in northern Uganda with Meeting Point-Kitgum. Meeting Point-Kitgum reaches out to those affected by AIDS/HIV by providing care and counseling, as well as food, non-food items and supplies. The purpose is to help convey the value and dignity in each person who comes to Meeting Point-Kitgum, accompanying them through their suffering and difficulties. It also provides education and training for AIDS workers and counselors.

Meeting Point-Kitgum has been a partner with AVSI for many years. Presently, Meeting Point-Kitgum is a key local partner in AVSI's program for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) funded by the U.S. government through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Ketty Opoka, the director of Meeting Point-Kitgum, came to Washington, DC in May, 2007, to participate in a public event organized by AVSI-USA. See AVSI-USA News August 2007 for more on the event.

As a rising second-year medical student, I went with hopes of learning more about the medical situation of

the region and to gain a bit more certainty in my decision to enter the medical profession. Following a very difficult first year of medical school, I also arrived at Meeting Point somewhat exhausted and with a great need – a need for friendship and for certainty in the task of life being offered to me. When asking AVSI to accept my application for the summer internship, I knew that I wanted



One of Mandy's photos from her experience at Meeting Point-Kitgum with several women of northern Uganda

to be open to whatever experiences were given to me, even those unexpected.

I cannot begin to say adequately what the experience with the women of Meeting Point has meant for me both while I was there, and especially upon returning home. The days spent with Ketty, Ruffina, Mariana, Winny, Florence, and the many others who made my time there remarkable is a life that continues to unfold for me in

the form of memory. There is one experience that I would like to share here: a trip that we took during my first week in Kitgum. I went with Ketty, Teresa (who was visiting from Italy), Veronica, and others to visit friends in Palebek village, just a few hours on a very bumpy road from Kitgum town. While there, we visited the simple hut of a local Meeting Point volunteer who prepared lunch for us.

Since I do not speak Acholi (the native tongue), there was a fair amount of silence on my part, and at one point I wondered why on earth I was there. Was it necessary that I be there? Couldn't I be doing something more useful elsewhere? Wasn't there more that I could be learning about medicine, drug regimens, nutritional supplements, endemic infectious diseases, etc, etc? I was used to being

very busy and "useful," so the idea of spending the greater part of the day sitting in a hut (when, I was thinking, there is so much work to be done) was confusing to the very structure of my very Western, very resourceful being.

These were the thoughts that I had as I sat there in the hut, reduced for the most part to silence. But then Ketty asked that we pray afternoon prayer from our green books and

*Continued, page 7*

### Experience, *continued*

share experiences from our recent lives. In listening to the recent struggle of Veronica regarding a disabled child she had brought into her home, I began to realize that there was something far more profound going on than I had been willing to see. When Ketty looked at me and asked if I had something to share, I realized that in fact, I did. I admitted that I was unsure why I had been brought there, but I knew that there must be a reason. For all of the medical facts that had been crammed into my brain in the previous year, I needed to see that the purpose of my being there was far beyond my own utility. I knew that I needed to slow down, to learn again how to simply be with people, especially those who are really suffering. In the next few weeks, I would slowly come to understand, with help from the women at Meeting Point, the importance of simple, human, presence. Those who we visited: the man with one leg, the recent college grad with HIV, TB, and Malaria in the hospital, the HIV+ women at home with young children – in each of their faces I saw a great need that I realize now is the same as my own. We all have a need for companionship, for the willing and generous presence of a friend who comes – not necessarily with a stethoscope and a drug regimen – but as one who listens.

I was reminded again and again that no treatment or medication can offer hope in the same way as a human presence. Hope is offered not so much as a prolongation of life, but as a deepening of the meaning of life. If I as a doctor cannot offer that, then everything else will ultimately seem futile. I am so grateful to Ketty and the other women at Meeting Point for the education they offered me in those weeks: an education in presence. ■

## AVSI face-to-face with the Crisis in Gaza: an emergency appeal

AVSI has opened an appeal for funds to support the 3,000 Christian families and their charitable works in Gaza. For many years, this Christian community and its schools and services have been points of reference for the most needy and concrete expressions of a solidarity greater than religious and ethnic differences.



Father Manuel Mussallam, pastor of the Sacred Heart parish in Gaza, has described this dramatic situation: *“It is a humanitarian disaster: the people lack water, electricity, food, and humanitarian aid. Thousands of children are suffering from the trauma of war. Thousands have been wounded and will spend the rest of their lives disabled. Every family in the Gaza Strip is suffering and weeping for the victims.”*

The funds collected by AVSI will be sent to the non-profit association of the Custodians of the Holy Land and to the Catholic Latin parishioners of Gaza City and the various missionary activities on Gaza Strip. AVSI-USA will support this effort by channeling any funds received from U.S. donors; donations to AVSI-USA are tax-deductible.

***“We should convert the heart, change the discourse, and change our mentality. First of all, this is the responsibility of each of us; violence demands our conversion. Pervasive distrust doesn’t help and is ultimately destructive.”***

S.B. Mons. Twal, Patriarch of Jerusalem

AVSI has been present in Palestine since 1993 with offices in Jerusalem and many activities. AVSI’s annual “Tende” campaign for 2008 included assistance to the schools of the Custodians of the Holy Land in Jerusalem as beneficiaries. These schools, among the oldest Christian schools in the region (dating back to 1645), provide educational opportunities to the poorest children including Muslims and Christians in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

### How to Contribute

Send checks payable to “AVSI-USA” to the DC office. For electronic payments, contact AVSI-USA for complete details: (202) 429-9009.

**Headquarters:** 125 Maiden Lane, 15th Floor  
New York, NY 10038

Tel/ Fax: 212-490-8043

**DC Office:** 529 14th Street, NW Suite 994  
Washington, DC 20045

Tel/ Fax: 202- 429-9009

E-mail: [infoavsi-usa@avsi.org](mailto:infoavsi-usa@avsi.org)

### INTERNSHIPS for COLLEGE STUDENTS

AVSI-USA Summer Internships for 2009 will be posted soon on [www.avsi-usa.org](http://www.avsi-usa.org).

The deadline for submission of internship applications is March 16, 2009.

**We're on the Web!**  
[www.avsi-usa.org](http://www.avsi-usa.org)

## First and Foremost, Education: Initiatives in Bangkok and Kampala

### Presentation of *The Risk of Education*

On January 23, 2009 AVSI sponsored a conference entitled, "The First Emergency is Education" with the presentation of Luigi Giussani's book *The Risk of Education*, on the campus of Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand. The conference was the official starting point of AVSI's continuing education initiative in Southeast Asia, specifically in Thailand and Myanmar.

The initiative includes courses on the method and approach of AVSI in education garnered over many years in different settings around the world. AVSI intends to open these opportunities for professional growth in education to AVSI professionals and social workers active in carrying-out the AVSI Distance Support Program (DSP) in the region, and for educators at large. Since the emergency response following the 2006 tsunami, AVSI's DSP has expanded to reach over 700 children in Thailand, Myanmar and the Philippines. ■

### Opening of the Permanent Center for Education

AVSI **Uganda** celebrated the inauguration of the **Permanent Center for Education (PCE)** January 28-30, 2009, in Kampala, Uganda. During the three day event, members of the community showed their support for AVSI, the Center and its mission.

The guest of honor was to be Janet Museveni, the first lady of Uganda. Though she ultimately couldn't attend, she shared her thoughts through a prepared speech given by Geraldine Namirembe Bitamazire, Minister of Education. She stated, "The existence of such a center of education gives me hope that sanity will prevail if we do not give up. It is important to have such educative places in Uganda, where we can continually reflect on what it means to be true human beings, created in the image of God and therefore worthy of honor, respect and dignity."

The PCE was built in light of the poor educational conditions in and around Kampala. The idea was born from a group of teachers who wanted to better address the challenges presented by their students.

Education represents a definitive point for development in Uganda, especially in light of the fact that the youth constitute 60% of the population. Marco Giacomazzi, Program Manager for AVSI, commented that the problem of educa-



Dr. Filippo Ciantia of AVSI Uganda and AVSI President Arturo Alberti speak with Minister Bitamazire at the PCE opening

tion is profound because it "ignites a need more fundamental and widely felt in the person, the necessity of rediscovering the proper value and dignity to be able to become the protagonist of one's actual destiny in relation to reality." ■