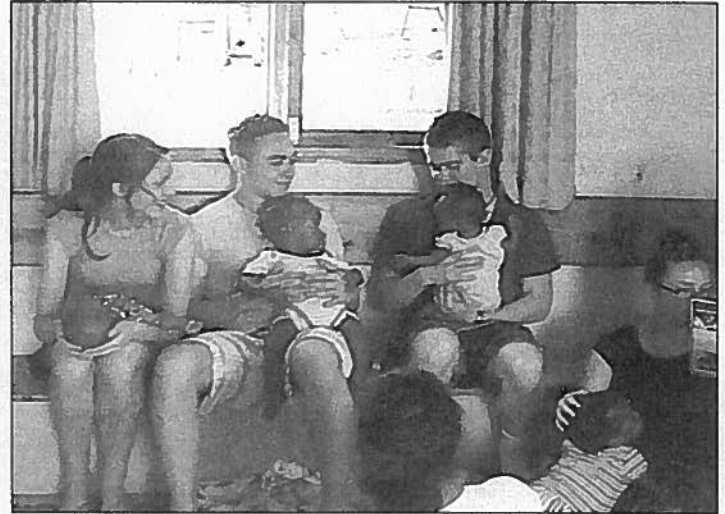
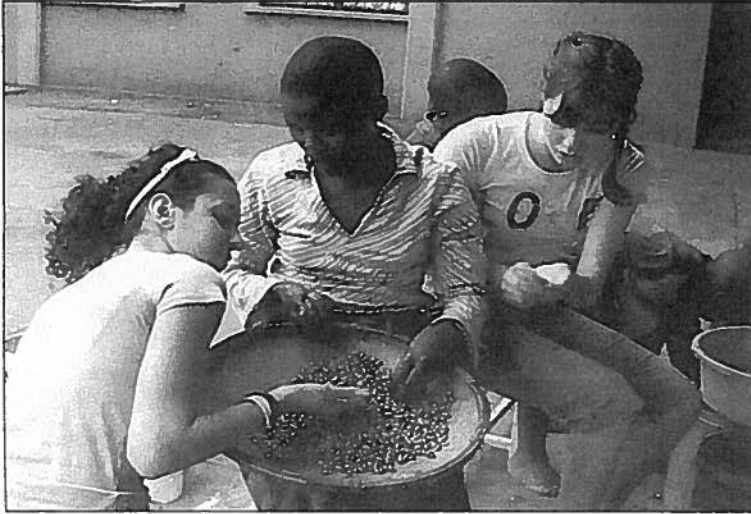


# Community

editorial@thenownews.com



Submitted photos

Tamana Aurom and Kelsey Stuckert (left) help with chores in Tanzania. At right, Katya Gaisky, Giovanni Scoppetta and Riley Roukema with babies in the orphanage.

## Helping three for the price of one

*Riverside Secondary students volunteer at a trio of African orphanages*

Lena Ross

editorial@thenownews.com

Riverside Secondary students have been to Africa and back, and the best thing they brought home was a smile.

Every year, French and social studies teacher Jeanne-Marie Mannavarayan takes a select group of students to an orphanage in a developing country for her annual social justice and responsibility trip.

In the past, her students have helped children in Guatemala, Southern India, Sri Lanka and Brazil.

This year, however, the students were able to help three orphanages instead of just one during their trip to Kenya and Tanzania.

The group left Canada on April 16 and came home April 28. There were 14 students (three boys and 11 girls) as well as seven adult chaperones.

They spent a bit of time in Kenya, although that time was cut short by political uprisings in the country, so changes were made to spend the majority of their time in Tanzania.

For many of the students, this trip was the first time they had visited both a developing nation and an orphanage.

Each Riverside student collected goods for the impoverished children, including school and medical supplies, clothes, sheets, bottles, diapers, powdered milk and toiletries like

shampoo, soap and toothpaste. All luggage allowance available was used for donated supplies, and each student brought just one carry-on bag for personal items.

The first orphanage they visited housed older children. But at the second, the children were just babies.

ESL teacher Karen Peplow, who travelled to Africa with the students, said when they arrived at the second orphanage they saw 37 tiny bodies piled on a blanket.

The students all chimed in at once, saying they were so overwhelmed they started picking the children up, as many as they could.

"They spent five hours holding the babies and they never let them go. Even the boys," Peplow said with a smile.

Fifteen-year-old Kelsey Stuckert said the babies were all wearing reusable diapers and had large rashes because the diapers were so big.

"It was so great to see all the kids there because they're so happy," she said. "They're not living in the best of conditions and a lot of them are sick but they're all laughing and playing songs. They are amazing."

They didn't make it to the orphanage for children whose parents died of AIDS because of the political problems in Kenya. But they were able to give them generous donations for food and education.

The students raised money through individual donors, barbecues, bake sales and pub nights. They even raised \$4,000 through recycling. All the fundraising went towards charitable donations.

They paid \$3,000 for their own travel expenses (including air fare, transportation, accommodation, meals and activities), and as a group raised more than \$28,000 to help the orphans.

"I can see from all of their faces that they are impressed by the lifestyles of others so different from ours here," said Mannavarayan. "What

we think are the bare necessities are out of reach for a lot of people on the planet."

The students all agree they want to return to Africa some day soon.

"I go online and check airfares. I wanna go back," said Tamana Aurom, 15. "No matter how much we talk about it, we can't get across how good it was. We just keep saying, 'It was

“You’ve had a country free of trouble, you’ve never felt hunger, you have a roof over your head. What about giving back?”

Jeanne-Marie Mannavarayan  
Riverside Secondary Teacher

so good, it was so good.”

Her travel mate, 16-year-old Natasha Rafael, is now planning to become a teacher in Africa.

The students know that a trip like this is not only about providing aid; it's about making connections with people they all share similarities with.

"There was a lot of diversity there," said Fatima Aziz, 17. "We saw quite a few Muslim and Christian people. Because I'm Muslim, it was so neat to see that so far away in a different country there are people that are Muslim, too. It felt good."

Mannavarayan said originally, she offered this trip to graduating students because graduation as it exists in Canada does not exist in many other parts of the world.

"I've always been shocked by the splashing of money," Mannavarayan said. "I tell them, 'You've had an education, you've had a country free of trouble, you've never felt hunger, you have a roof above your head. What about giving back?'"

This is the last year Mannavarayan will teach at Riverside. She is retiring at the end of June, but wants to see social justice education continue among young people.

"I want to make them conscious enough to recycle for their own environment and also to raise money for those in need," she said.

"It's like a chain reaction. You raise the money for orphans and you are encouraged to continue to do good."