

Helping communities to help themselves

By Kristin White

THOUSANDS PASS by everyday, going about their own lives. If someone was to look through the windows and see the exposed rafters, the huge

Belgian Shepherd bounding around, and the beautiful framed photography of children, they might wonder what sort of place it was.

Well, the pictures are not taken by a photojournalist, seeking to capture a prize-

winning photo while trekking through Uganda. The smiles on these children's faces are placed there by the very people taking the photo — The ISIS Foundation

Partners

Sharon Beesley and her best friend Audette Exel have dedicated their lives to improving the standard of life for women and children in developing countries — specifically Uganda and Nepal. They founded the ISIS Foundation, with the belief that the ability of a charity to sustain its projects over the long term depends on the ability of the charity to sustain itself. Thus, they decided that the financial support of the ISIS Foundation would come from a profit making business.

Lawyers by trade, they launched ISIS Limited, a corporate consulting firm. In the beginning, they put in over a million dollars of their own money, and worked tirelessly to get both the company and the charity, located on Crow Lane, off the ground.

Today, their initiatives range from providing villages in Nepal with solar lighting to training midwives in Uganda. They build schools, hospitals, and even communities.

What made Sharon, who was once the head of banking for a local law firm, take a chance on doing something so wonderful? Simply, in her heart she wanted to do more... and pledged to make a difference in the lives of children.

To decide one day that you will abandon the money-mak-



Sharon and Jean-Jacques Beesley, Audette Exel

ing life of corporate law, and dedicate yourself to this goal is inspiring. Yet as Sharon speaks about it, she does so matter-of-factly, as if she doesn't feel there was any other way.

This organization is unlike many others in that they are personally involved in every project — they do not simply donate money. Sharon knows the doctors she funds in Nepal. She takes clothes and toys to the children in Ugan-

da. In the picture above she is pictured at the Kiwoko Hospital in Uganda, outside the Community Based Health Care Hall that ISIS built.

The little boy is her son, Jean-Jacques. Sharon is a single parent, as Jean-Jacques' father was born and lives in South Africa.

Like many single parents, Sharon feels guilty sometimes. She works a lot, and thus has her son with her often. Right beside her office is her son's 'office', a small cubby where he comes to share his mother's life. On the ISIS website, Jean-Jacques is listed as the Chief Provider of Hugs.

Also, she deals with questions about a father who is thousands of miles away, of whom her son has no recollection.

And then of course, her fellow lawyers, who do not work for charities and are able to provide their children with much more than she can. When Bees asked her son how he feels about perhaps not having the latest this and that, he said that he understood because she has to help the children.

I wonder aloud how she can deal with so much. Hearing about so much pain and suffering on a daily basis, knowing that there is only so much that ISIS can do, struggling with this, and at the same time, raising a man without the help of one. And besides for ISIS, she has no family on the island.

She smiles, in a way that indicates contentment with her life. And says that she will do what she can, while she can.

Sharon is not unlike ISIS — many may pass her by without a glance, without ever knowing 'what's going on inside.' With her best friend and her son by her side, she goes about her duties, without fanfare and accolades. Just because she cares enough to do so.

Isis is the Egyptian goddess of fertility, living with one foot on land and the other in the sea. In our world, ISIS represents something similar, straddling the worlds of business and charities to give life and hope to thousands of children.

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