

Bothell Reporter

# ISIS lends a hand to Ugandan citizens

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**Bothell Reporter Reporter**

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One hospital's trash can be another's treasure.

That was the idea behind a local effort to sort and pack thousands of discarded medical supplies destined for Uganda.

The work took place Oct. 1 at Courtyard Hall in Bothell's Country Village Shopping Center.

Health professionals from 10 Washington hospitals were there to organize and box supplies ranging from surgical tape to oxygen masks.

The goods are now headed to Uganda's Kiwoko Hospital — located north of the country's capital — as part of an initiative by the ISIS Foundation, a nonprofit group that provides health and education programs in developing countries.

Uganda has the world's third highest birth rate, yet the country ranks around 23rd in terms of infant mortality.

The ISIS Foundation has been working with Kiwoko to improve health care in Uganda for 10 years. The group helped establish a neonatal intensive care (NICU) unit at the hospital in 2000 that now assists around 500 babies a year.

Kenmore resident Debbie Lester has been with ISIS from the start, serving as its dedicated clinical manager. She's seen Kiwoko transform from a bush clinic into one of Uganda's leading hospitals for neonatal care.

“We couldn't be as successful as we are there if it wasn't for the support we have here,” Lester said.

The ISIS Foundation gets virtually all of its medical supplies from hospitals in the Puget Sound area.

It collects things like partially opened syringes and expired medications, items that, although they're still effective, normally end up in landfills due to hospital protocol or sheer wastefulness.

The ISIS Foundation also receives donations of larger equipment such as second-hand maternity beds and incubators that hospitals would typically sell for thousands of dollars.

Finance lawyers Audette Exel and Sharon Beesley created the ISIS Foundation in 1997, at the same time establishing a corporate-consulting company called ISIS Group to support the nonprofit.

ISIS Group currently has more than 150 staff members and contractors, as well as four businesses located at opposite ends of world in Australia and Bermuda.

The company pays for all of ISIS Foundation's administrative and management costs to ensure that any donated funds go directly toward projects in developing countries.

One of those programs involves training Kiwoko's NICU nurses with help from American medical workers.

Patti Rossie of Seattle traveled to Uganda with the ISIS Foundation in November of 2007.

"The people we work with there are like sponges," she said. "They're so excited to learn."

Rossie claims the facilities at Kiwoko are comparable to those of a hospital in the early 1900s.

"Because of the lack of technology, it's a place where you feel like you're doing the job you were trained for as a nurse," she said. "The essence of nursing really show up there. It brings you back to the basic skills, and how you can make a difference for a mother and a little baby."

Kiwoko is generally starving for even the most simple medical supplies, like band aids, alcohol swabs and IV lines, according to Lester.

"When these boxes arrive, they just have a huge celebration," she said. "Everything is put to use immediately."

ISIS pays for all of the expenses involved with bringing volunteers to Uganda.

"The foundation takes good care of us," said Heidi Nakamura, who traveled to Uganda with the organization in October 2005. "If you're willing to use your vacation time, they take care of the rest."

Aspen Re Insurance is ISIS' corporate sponsor. The company this year donated over \$310,000 to assist with the foundation's efforts in Uganda.

Part of the money will go toward renovating Kiwoko's labor and delivery suites, as well as creating a tracking program that follows up with children after the hospital has discharged them.

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