

The Dut Jok Youth Foundation

South Sudan

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<http://www.dutjokyouthfoundation.org/>

Introduction

The Dut Jok Youth Foundation works to harness the potential of Southern Sudanese youth by channeling resources both locally and internationally through the vehicles of education and sports that provide opportunities that challenge the post-war, generational disenfranchisement prevalent throughout the country. We believe that by engaging the youth through these initiatives we can empower them with the most fundamental instruments of success, break gender barriers in a male dominated society, fight the proliferation of HIV/AIDs, as well as provide a refuge where youth feel safe to discover their true progressive potential.

Fundraising

Since receiving the Kathryn Davis 100 Projects for Peace award, which allowed the DJYF vision to begin moving from ideal to application, the foundation has received 1,000 soccer balls, a donation worth \$12,000, as well as individual gifts through the Dut Jok Youth Foundation Fund handled by the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, a 501(c)3 with more than \$700 in assets. The foundation logo was designed and donated by Jason Hunter Design, LLC (estimated total value of several hundred dollars). The former Minister of Youth, Sports, and Recreation in South Sudan donated \$1,400 to relieve a DJYF delivery to South Sudan from Ugandan customs and we recently received 20 basketballs from an anonymous donor.

A Step Back With A Leap Forward

Due to security constraints over the summer, I was not able to visit South Sudan as originally planned. Because of this step back only 200 soccer balls were sent for distribution. Along with them, whistles, basketball nets, pumps, and 15 basketballs for both men and women were delivered. This equipment was distributed in August to community centers in Juba, Rumbek, and Cueibet that service the local youth and to help familiarize our pilot schools with the DJYF name.

As for our leap forward DJYF designed and launched the Dut Jok Youth Foundation website with volunteer work and donated logo. Our mission inspired national media attention such as ESPN.com, the Philadelphia Daily News, and the Pennsylvania Gazette. I was able to meet with the former Minister of Youth, Sports, and Recreation of South Sudan in Washington D.C to discuss the possibility of an operational partnership. We have additionally designed our sports initiative curriculum named, "We are the Future".

The Dut Jok Youth Foundation was able to make significant strides organizationally but the set back of not visiting our pilot schools has slowed us down. The original cost estimates were premature and we will have not accomplished much of what we had initially set out to do this summer with the award as a consequence of not being on the ground. I feel however that this set back will serve as a

blessing in disguise as it has allowed DJYF to attain a high degree of organization and focus on targeted initiatives that will allow us to apply the award in a more efficient manner. It will, in a sense, serve as the nest egg that will allow us to mature in a sustainably and produce long lasting benefits over a lifetime.

Social and academic acuity are the traits DJYF aims to develop in Sudanese youth. The steps forward to achieve this goal are numerous and are based on a vision for the foundation that is both immediate, modest and pragmatic, as well as, long term and ambitious. The first step has been graduating from an idea to action. Sustainability depends on planning, fundraising, and connecting with like-minded individuals. Those that we have had the fortune to work with have spent sleepless nights researching and refining the DJYF vision. The organizations sustainable nature will be evidenced in the deep foundations it builds during the upcoming summer.

DJYF and Peace

This year South Sudan became a sovereign nation, putting meaning to the 55 years of tears shed in misery, blood spilt wastefully and the thousands of graves dug prematurely. Carrying the price of 2.5 million deaths, the people of South Sudan did not, and still do not, comprehend the idea of the true meaning of peace. The hierarchy of government is busy hoarding whatever they can lay their hands on while tribes murder one another endlessly for cattle. Cattle raiding has sky rocketed in large part to the practice of marriage by dowry, which, more often than not, involves an underage girl. Six hundred people were killed in a matter of four days mid August in South Sudan, much of which was for this very reason.

According to a 2011 UNESO report on education in South Sudan, 80% of the population lacks the ability to read and write. The 2008 South Sudan census found that 40% of married women were married under the legal age of 18, coupled by the fact that a young girl in South Sudan is three times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than reaching the 8th grade. By lacking the most essential tools for advancement such as primary education, clean water, medical care, and a stable, secure environment in which to thrive, many youth have turn violence and crime into a way of life.

I do not believe the people of South Sudan are the poorest in the world simply because they lack means monetarily, I believe they are the poorest in the world because they lack the ability to unite under the banner of peace. But I believe that it is through education that they will begin to follow peace's procession. The DJYF will help build stronger community-youth relations, better education on peaceful resolutions, empower young women to become more than commodities, while educating young men to accept them as equals. We believe peace will only last through the empowerment of inclusion, education, and support.

This project will consume the rest of my life. The research I have engaged in for the foundation has expanded my horizons to believe that there is good in humanity. I have learned that HOPE is the torch that lights the way to peace and is lit by showing others that there is care in the world for them. It is my job to be the voice of those children who starve for education, be the ears of those kids who can't escape the darkness of violence, and be the vision for those who can't afford to dream.