

# U.S. woman answers call in war-torn Uganda

SAN DIEGO - Uganda seems to emit a siren call to visitors, prompting them to stay or to return home and become activists for the people of that war-torn nation.

Katie Bradel heard the call on a visit to Uganda in March 2005, during a planned three-month trip. Today, almost two years later, she remains in Uganda, helping train volunteers with an organization called Invisible Children.

"People there have so little, but they have so much joy," she told *The Southern Cross*, newspaper of the San Diego Diocese. "They are the most welcoming people I've ever met. They live each day relying on God to provide."

In March 2005, Ms. Bradel took a semester off during her senior year at San Diego State University, where she was pursuing a bachelor's degree in English and teaching in secondary education.

Three of her good friends had been in Uganda the year before to film a documentary. They invited Ms. Bradel to return with them to shoot more footage for the film.

Filmmakers Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey and Laren Poole uncovered a story that had touched them and everyone who saw their film, "Invisible Children." It tells the story of the thousands of Ugandan children who, during the past 25 years, have been kidnapped by the rebel army, brainwashed and pressed into service in the rebels' war against the Ugandan government.

Upon returning to Uganda, the filmmakers and Ms. Bradel spent two months shooting additional footage and launching a campaign to aid Ugandan children.

When the filming was completed, Ms. Bradel stayed, unable to walk away from the people of Uganda, including two AIDS orphans whose struggle tugged at her heart.

Dennis, now 7, and Sharon, now 15, were the only survivors of a family of seven

children. They lived with their uncle, who struggled to support them. Dennis, who suffered from cerebral palsy and seizures, received no medical attention and slept on the floor of his uncle's closet. Both he and Sharon were suffering from malnutrition.

Ms. Bradel took the children under her wings and sought medical attention for Dennis. Ultimately, the doctor who cared for Dennis in the capital of Kampala adopted Dennis and Sharon. The doctor and his wife also now have a new baby girl. Dennis is free of seizures and laughs and smiles now, said Ms. Bradel.

In September 2005 Ms. Bradel returned to San Diego State University to finish her degree.

Since the film was completed, some 2 million people have attended screenings, the majority of them youths and young adults.

"We've had an immediate and huge response in advocacy," said Ms. Bradel, who now works full-time with the Invisible Children program in Gulu, Uganda, as director of its nascent internship program. The program was set up in response to the hundreds of volunteers from across the United States who have seen the film and want to help.

Interns volunteer at schools, after-school programs and rehabilitation centers and lend their hand in construction projects.

Invisible Children works closely with the U.S. government on its programs, particularly with the Department of Education.

One of the newest programs is "Schools for Schools," through which U.S. schools are paired with schools in Uganda to help students in both nations learn about each other and to help build good schools into great schools, the greatest hope for the future of a nation struggling to thrive amid war and hardship.

Invisible Children also has launched what it calls the Tri-Campaign and the "Displace Me" event. The campaign asks donors to pledge \$3 a week - or what they would spend on a cup of a fancy blend of coffee - to help fund change in culture, policy and lives in Uganda.

The “Displace Me” event will take place in 10 to 15 cities April 28-29. Participants will walk miles to a central gathering point and will sleep outside, without food or shelter, in solidarity with the children of Uganda.

Invisible Children has organized World Tour 2007, during which 10 vans will fan out across the U.S., visiting every major region of the country to show the film and make presentations. Some 1,000 screenings have been booked, 500 of them in high schools.

More information on the film and on the nonprofit Invisible Children organization and its programs is available online at: [www.invisiblechildren.com](http://www.invisiblechildren.com).