

## FROM THE FIELD: A REPORT ON SWEET SLEEP'S WORK IN UGANDA

Earlier this year I took our vice president of operations, Stuart, and traveled to central east Africa to better understand the needs of the orphanages where Sweet Sleep would soon begin working. As we worked with our friends at Samaritan's Purse to identify orphanages in the most dire need of beds, we encountered an orphanage named Caring Heart. The orphanage was run by a man named Paul who had grown up as an orphan. As a child, Paul had no place to sleep except on the street or in sewage areas and other unthinkable places. He tells a story of one particular night of heartbreak.

*... because Sweet Sleep had provided beds for the children to sleep in, the government reopened the orphanage. The children's prayers were answered.*

He was beaten down and trying unsuccessfully to find a place to rest. He told God that if He would protect him, give him a place to sleep, he would devote the rest of his life to caring for children who shared his plight. God did. Paul is a pastor now and cares for 305 children who call Caring Heart their home. 305 children who had to share 8 beds.

We learned about a new law making it illegal for children in orphanages to sleep on the floor. With no resources to give beds to their children who were sleeping on the cold hard floor, the government closed Caring Heart orphanage. The children were forced to find places to spend each night—just like Paul had been when he was a child. Their prayers were the same as his, "God, give me a safe place to sleep..." So, when Sweet Sleep's first ever team of volunteers arrived this summer with new bunk beds for the orphanage, there was a celebration



There are no words to accurately describe my emotions when a grateful widow gave me a pawpaw. For months she had been sacrificing what little she had to care for some of the children after their orphanage was shut down. At this moment she chose to sacrifice again to thank me with this avocado-like fruit eaten by the very poor. I have no words to describe the scene of all the villagers who followed suit with gifts of fruits, sugar cane and flowers to show their thanksgiving. And I might never find the way to share about one of the most touching moments of my life in ministry as an elderly widow, in her best but worn dress, hobbled her way to me, took me by the hand, kissed my cheek and pressed a 100 shilling coin – her entire day's wages – into my palm of my hand.

Our team worked at two orphanages where the directors told us to expect no more than 450 children. Instead, more than 800 children were there when we arrived. Our team had only packed supplies for the 450 we were expecting, but miraculously supplies seemed to multiply! On the last day our team held a giant surprise birthday party to celebrate each child as part of God's creation. When our team arrived we discovered the surprise was on us: the entire village had returned to celebrate and rejoice over their answered prayers. Suddenly we had nearly 1,200 people to give gifts to. Our faces said it all. We had no idea how a few hundred gifts would be enough for 1,200 people.

As we celebrated with these precious Ugandans, our team shared an inspiring message and then gave every orphan, widow and villager gift bags. I believe each team member has a new picture of the word "amazing" because our supplies seemed to multiply. As the last widow came through the line to receive a "birthday gift" there was still one left for her. We had witnessed a modern day version of the Biblical story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with a little boy's lunch.



like nothing we had ever seen. The president of Uganda sent an official to welcome us. And, because Sweet Sleep had provided beds for the children to sleep in, the government reopened the orphanage. The children's prayers were answered.

All week our team was repeatedly left speechless by the impact Sweet Sleep was making in the lives of these people. As the beds came, so did the entire local village where the children had been seeking refuge night after night. They wanted to celebrate that God had answered their prayers to provide beds to this place so the children would be able to return safely to their "home".





## OUR CURRENT PROJECT: SWEET SLEEP FOR GULU

The other story I want to share starts more grim, but ends with the opportunity for hope. It begins 22 years ago—in Uganda—as a failed fight for political power left one man full of hate and the need to seek revenge. For more than 2 decades this man, Joseph Kony, has led the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) in attacks on the northern region of Uganda. Kony's LRA is made largely of children— as young as six years old— abducted during the night into lives of great atrocity as they are abused, raped and forced to kill or be killed.

I can't sum up 22 years of loss of life and heartache, but I can tell you the time of peace has finally come to this broken area... but the wounds of this war are fresh. The northern area of Gulu is perhaps Uganda's most desperate region.

Soon after returning home from my first trip to Uganda, Sweet Sleep was contacted about an immediate need for beds for children in the Gulu area. I shared this need with you and because of your response through giving, we were able to respond.

While with the team this July, I traveled to Gulu to see what Sweet Sleep had provided there and to learn more about what our ministry could continue to do. I was blessed to spend the day with 5 teenagers who had either been child soldiers or whose parents had died. As they took us around to different camps showing us their beds, I walked into one hut and saw a single bed. These huts are pretty much the same, but here I just happened to ask "who lives in this hut?" The answer left me dumbfounded. The young teens told me a 14 year old girl lived there with her five younger brothers and sisters. Then I found out more than 1 million people are still living displaced in this region. More than three-quarters of those displaced are children living in child-headed households because their parents have been killed by rebels or have died from AIDS.

I have struggled with this knowledge. The question I have asked myself is "How does our ministry respond to something like this?" As I sought direction on this question I came across a verse from Proverbs: "Once our eyes are opened, we can't pretend we don't know what to do. God who weighs our hearts and keeps our souls knows that we know, and holds us responsible to act ..."

The answer God gave me is that we respond just as we always have: we work together with everyone we can in order to find resources that will bring beds to as many children as possible. This is good news. It's such good news that hope is coming to these children. Hope is coming in the form of a bed, through which Sweet Sleep communicates to a child things about God's promises, about His hope, love, redemption, forgiveness, protection and provision. This way peace slowly begins to come to their hearts.

There are 750,000 children in this broken region of Uganda. People ask me all the time if I get overwhelmed. The answer is no. No, because the ministry of Sweet Sleep focuses on one specific need and, with your support, we meet that need to the fullest, most excellent extent possible.

Sweet Sleep began ministering in Uganda earlier this year with a few dozen beds. Now, through your gifts which follow, we are going to continue to bring the Hope we have to children who are desperate to know they have something to hold on to.

We want to bring 450 beds to this region before the end of the year. It's a small goal that I know you will be able to help us reach. But, if each of us could pledge \$88 to provide one child in Gulu with hope and a bed, we could impact the lives of thousands of children by Christmas.

I hope you've been blessed by these stories. I want them to give you a small glimpse into the work you support through this ministry. I invite you to consider joining us on a team so you can see for yourself the extreme joy on a child's face when you tell them that each time they pull their new covers up around them, it is God giving them a hug. I invite you to be humbled as you give Bibles to an orphans and caregivers and watch them hug their new treasure and smell its new pages.

Regardless of whether you can go, I'd like to ask you to consider committing to pray for this work or to provide for the work which will be done in the months to come.

You are a vital gift to so many children around the world and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving your love to them in the form of their beds.

Sweet Sleep to you,  
Jen  
President and Founder

PS. You'll want to see our new Uganda video and moving pictures by photographer, Hannah Westphall at [www.sweetsleep.org](http://www.sweetsleep.org)

