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Students to spend summer in Zambian refugee camps

By Mary Purdey
Daily Free Press Staff

This year, nine students from the Boston area, including some from Boston University, will be spending their summer in African refugee camps determined to improve living conditions and educate refugees through the BU-sponsored FORGE program.

Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment aids refugee camps through two programs: an Ambassador Program that puts students in refugee camps to educate and "empower" the refugees and an Advocacy Program that raises

public awareness in the United States of the conditions that create poverty, war and disease.

FORGE

member

Jacquelyn

Woods said

the group's

main goal

is to hold

true to the

national

FORGE

program by

using the potential of young peo-

ple for good.

"FORGE's message needs to

be spread," she said. "As college

students, we hold more power

than we think. This influence can, and should, be used to reach a common goal of positive social change.

As a

club

and

program,

we

focus

our

efforts

on

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much

other

places

do not

need

as

much

help."

Woods

will

be

spending

her

summer

in

Zambia

to

work

Meheba refugee camp.

"We will be working on pro-

jects from creative writing work-

shops to business initiative class-

es, to health and AIDS/HIV semi-

nars, etc.," she said. "Our goal

there is to empower the refugees

so that they can strongly lead their

country when they go back

home."

BU FORGE president Vanessa

Porter said the club was created to

bring up refugee issues, provide

support for those traveling to

Africa to work in the Meheba

Refugee Settlement and collect

used textbooks for Books for

Books

for

Books

for

Books

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Participants work for African refugees

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Africa, which donates them to African libraries.

Porter said FORGE has already created the largest refugee library in the world.

"This club allows for people to be directly involved in African issues and be connected to people directly," the College of Arts and Sciences sophomore said. "It's the only club that I know of that directly works with people in Africa."

"[We meet] every two weeks or so," she continued. "We hope to join up with the other Africa groups [on campus], though that's been hard so far since we're so new ... [There are] about eight solid members [in the club so far]. Anyone who wants to help in Africa should join, and everyone should donate a used textbook this spring."

FORGE ambassador Pete D'Aleo said the group focuses its attention on providing people with information about refugees and the importance of facilitating refugee communities.

D'Aleo said FORGE is unique from other BU clubs because of its true and definite purpose.

"We are here to reach as many people as possible and expand their knowledge of the issues effecting African refugee camps," he said. "Currently, our projects are strictly for fundraising purposes. We ran a book drive last semester, and we'll be running another this semester."

D'Aleo will also be assisting with refugee camps this summer in Africa.

"I'm very excited to say that I'll be spending my summer in the Meheba Refugee Camp located in Zambia," he said. "Students should get involved, quite simply because it's a very valuable and meaningful cause. Unlike some other students, we're not here for an addition to our resumes."

FORGE member Natalie Greene said a group of nine students from the Boston area was chosen to go to the Meheba Refugee Settlement in Zambia.

"Before we go, we must each ... design a project to empower the refugees for the betterment of the community as a whole," the CAS sophomore said. "When we arrive in the settlement, we will work on these projects six days a week."

"The projects can range anywhere from building or teaching how to use solar ovens, building a women's center, creating a photography class for kids, HIV education programs, etc.," she said

Greene said the club not only gives students with aspirations of doing humanitarian work in Africa a chance to do so, but also helps to increase awareness of refugee issues in the country.

"Our number one priority when we come back home is advocacy," she said.