

The Stanford Daily

Forging ahead

FORGE provides unique opportunity for passionate volunteers in Zambia

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While most Stanford students are preparing for their summer internships and finalizing their vacation plans, eight students are bracing themselves for the reality of living in one of the least developed countries in the world: Zambia. Once there, they will only be allowed to shower once a week, brave the constant threat of malaria and leave every amenity they have grown accustomed to.



Becky Wright

Their motivation for putting up tolerating these circumstances? The direct impact they will have helping the people who have been devastated by years of war. These students are all part of Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment (FORGE), an organization founded at Stanford in 2003 that is dedicated to helping the million of refugees in Africa.

"It is the first organization I have seen that really aims to work through partnership, be responsive to refugee community needs and promote leadership amongst all involved," said FORGE Hub Coordinator Julie Veroff '07.

The Stanford team will depart on June 24 to Zambia's capital city, Lusaka. Upon arrival, they will travel 40 hours on mostly dirt roads to the Mwanze Refugee Camp, meeting up with other Stanford students who have been in there since June 2006. During the two-month stay, they will work on community development projects such as establishing a health outreach and education center, training teachers, teaching skills to empower women and repatriating refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

They will work intimately with the refugee staff and ultimately turn the projects over entirely to them. This unique approach is what differentiates FORGE: Its members believe that immense positive change is best accomplished working hand in hand with the people directly impacted.

FORGE prides itself in being different from other international student volunteer organizations in two other ways.

First, FORGE views refugees as a catalyst of development in Africa, rather than an economic burden on their host countries. Secondly, they use a volunteer work force of almost all college students to create a group of energetic, qualified people approaching African community development in a unique, collaborative manner with a focus on exiled peoples.

A summer 2005 experience with FORGE in Zambia inspired Katie Bollbach '07, Jonny Dorsey '07 and Lauren Young '07 to found the organization FACE AIDS, a student awareness and fundraising campaign that has mobilized students across the country.

Yet even participants who do not return to the States and create nonprofit organizations continue to be affected by their experiences in Zambia and speak passionately in support of the organization and its work.

"Since FORGE, these [refugees] have become central issues in my life, and I see their ramifications all around me," said Abby Speight '08, who participated in FORGE in 2006.