

Who are Americans?



## **FORGE helps African refugees towards self-sufficiency**

By David on Feb 8, 2008 in Africa

FORGE is an American nonprofit (Santa Rosa, California) that works with **African people who are displaced by war to pursue education, economic self-sufficiency and local development solutions** in order lay the foundation for peace, stability and prosperity in African communities.

FORGE Founder and Executive Director Kjerstin Erickson, while a student at Stanford in 2003, brought together a group of concerned college students participating in a Semester at Sea program to create FORGE. **FORGE has now implemented over 60 community development projects in Africa.** FORGE is also an official partner of the UN refugee agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

The refugees that are assisted by FORGE come from the countries of **Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Sudan - Darfur, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi.** FORGE has 4 Camps in operation in the countries of Zambia and Botswana.

Some of FORGE's projects in the past 4 years include:

**LIBRARIES** - Libraries have been built in FORGE Camps and serve more than 50,000 people. Several hundred people a day can find reading materials in French, Swahili and English. The Meheba Friendly Library is considered the largest library in any refugee camp around the world.

**COMPUTER TRAINING CENTERS** - Using solar power, computer labs with laptops offer classes from basic computer skills to advanced programming. Refugees produce community newsletters using computer technology. Over 1,500 people have been trained in less than 3 years. All FORGE camps have computer labs.

**MICROFINANCE** - The FORGE Microfinance Institute provides small loans to entrepreneurial individuals who wish to create social and economic change through self-reliance and self-employment. Since 2006, more than 200 loans have been provided totalling \$40,000 to men and women in the 13,000 member Meheba Settlement.

**PRESCHOOL FACILITIES** - FORGE has built, opened and/or restored six preschools since 2006.

**HEALTH EDUCATION AND SERVICES** - Educational services provide information on topics such as HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, family planning, first aid, nutrition, sanitation and other health issues. Other medical testing and care services are offered in conjunction with medical care organizations.

**WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY** - Health education workshops, domestic violence counseling and education, job skills training programs and lending resources are specifically offered to women.

**REPATRIATION CENTERS** - In anticipation of refugees returning to the D.R. Congo, FORGE built two Repatriation Information Centers in 2007 to provide information, logistical details and skills training for about 40,000 Congolese refugees.

**ART, MUSIC AND CULTURE** - Guitar lessons, piano lessons, dancing programs, painting, drawing and crafts-making activities are available to the people residing in FORGE's camps.

**SPORTS & RECREATION** - FORGE has constructed and/or renewed twelve soccer fields and three basketball courts and has established community sports leagues.

**ADVOCACY** - FORGE's Refugee Advocacy Initiative provides information on refugee rights and human rights and assists refugees in connecting with existing supportive services.

**ADULT EDUCATION** - FORGE runs programs to provide adults with specific skills needed to become self-sufficient after repatriation. Language classes and writing classes in French, English and Portuguese open up job opportunities.

Donation opportunities, volunteer information and other support opportunities are available on their website.