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Friday March 19, 2010

## The Titusville Herald

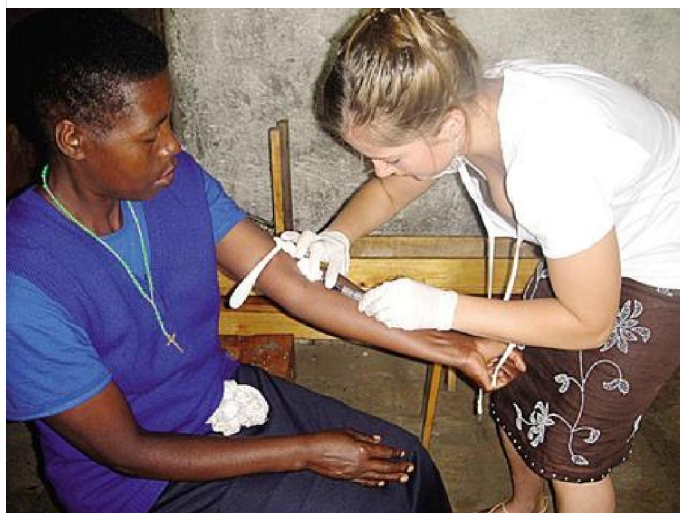
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### News



Pleasantville native Casey Brown shares her emotional story about a trip to Africa. During her trip, Brown helped out at a local health clinic. In this photo, Brown draws blood from a patient at an outreach center, where more than 250 people were tested for HIV.

### The trip of a lifetime

By Mary Hill  
Friday, March 12, 2010 8:57 PM CST

mhill@titusvilleherald.com

Casey Brown wants to spread the word about life in Africa and how different it is from life in the United States.

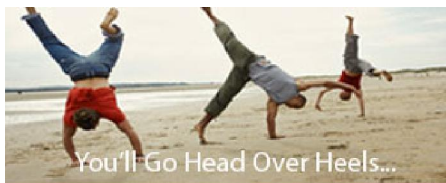
Brown, a daughter of Lane and Pamela Brown, of Pleasantville, recently spent a month in Africa so she could volunteer her time in a developing country and make a difference in people's lives.

Brown is a senior at Allegheny College in Meadville. She is double-majoring in neuroscience and psychology. She also graduated from Titusville High School.

Brown said she organized the trip to Africa herself. She contacted a professor at Bucknell University who had taken students to Uganda and he arranged the mid-December trip for Brown and another Allegheny student, Stephanie DeSantis.

"I have wanted to go for a few years, and I decided to try to go this year because I plan on going to medical school next year," she said.

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"When we first arrived in Uganda, we were in Entebbe and then drove for an hour to Kampala, the capital city, to stay the night," Brown said. "The next day we drove eight hours to Kabale, which is where the clinic was where we volunteered."

She said the private nonprofit clinic is called KIHEFO (Kigezi Healthcare Foundation), and Brown stayed with Dr. Geoffrey Anguyo and his family. Anguyo runs the foundation.

Brown added that as an aspiring physician, the work she did in Uganda was "very related to what I hope to do with my life."

She spent most of her time in the general clinic, which is similar to a hospital setting, helping nurses by doing "whatever I could - drawing blood, giving injections, assisting in surgery."

She said the clinic's services are inexpensive and of high quality compared to the government-run hospitals in Africa.

"Next door to the general clinic is the free HIV/AIDS clinic, where people can get tested for HIV/AIDS," Brown said. "KIHEFO is also provided with free HIV/AIDS drugs for 500 people; however, in just the town of Kabale, there are more than 5,000 registered HIV-positive people."

According to Brown, KIHEFO plans monthly meetings with different groups to teach people about HIV/AIDS prevention and how to deal with the disease if they test positive for HIV.

"KIHEFO also tries to 'help the helpless help themselves' in the words of the doctor," she said. "They try to get each member of the group to put in a certain amount of money in their group's fund for each month [the amount is agreed upon by the group members only]. The purpose is so they have a fund in case of an emergency."

Brown went on to say that if the medicine from the country's government is late, the people are able to get enough medicine to control their disease until they get it from the government.

"If someone needs to go to the hospital, if they have contributed to the fund, other members will carry them to the hospital," Brown explained. "Cars are rare to have, people are carried to the hospital. In many cases, people live many, many kilometers from a town so they will need to be carried a great distance."

KIHEFO also cares for more than 300 orphans.

"They send representatives to go visit the orphans and take them food [and] clothing," she said. "While I was there, I was able to go visit a child-headed family."

Brown went on to explain that the children's parents died and left their 12-year-old daughter to care for her seven younger siblings.

"This, as you can imagine, was very difficult," Brown said. "She got married when she was 15, hoping that her husband would be able to help provide for the children, but he was unable to. They had their own child, so they had even more children to care for."

"She is now 17 and they still struggle. He makes what is equivalent to 50 cents a day. When we went there, we saw their hut and all the children. The kids had not showered in months and only had one outfit."

"Before we left Uganda, we went back to this family and gave them a bunch of our clothes and food," Brown explained.

She said they visited another family - the father was HIV positive, but was not on any medication because he could not afford it. The man's first wife died of HIV and he remarried, but she also died of HIV. He has seven children, two of which are girls, and they all, including the father, sleep in one twin bed.

Brown went on to say that the family lives in a small, one-room hut with only one blanket and a pan for cooking. They do not have a bathroom, just a "wall" made out of sticks nearby their hut.

"This was a very eye-opening experience to see this family," she said. "It's very sad."

While in Uganda, Brown visited the local government-run Kabale Government Hospital. According to Brown, there is plenty of government fraud in Uganda, so hospitals run by the government have no supplies and very few doctors. There are also no drugs or supplies at the hospital, which frustrates the employees, and in turn, they do not treat their patients well, and patients don't get better.

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"When I went to visit it, it was packed," she said. "People sleep on the floor in hallways because there is not enough room for everyone, nor [are] there enough beds. Many people there are not given the care they need due to lack of drugs and non-caring physicians and nurses. It is a vicious cycle."

She added that people cannot afford to stay at the hospital for long periods of time, so there will often be cases such as this: "A young child is critically ill due to malnutrition. They go to the hospital, improve a little bit, and then go home because they cannot afford the whole rehabilitation process. The child goes home, and is critically ill again within a few days. It is really sad. This one small hospital is responsible for serving 10 million people."

Brown explained that she was able to visit a community hospital when she was on an outreach mission in a rural community. She said the community hospital charges people to stay there, but they receive better care.

"They still lack funding and physicians," Brown said. "We went to a rural town for an outreach and we were testing people for HIV free of charge. We tested [more than] 250 people for HIV, which is a huge success."

She said it is hard to get people mobilized and tested because they are afraid of the result.

"For the outreach, we had KIHEFO counselors talk to them before they got tested, about the services KIHEFO offers, and how the organization can test them if they test positive, and how to prevent HIV if they are negative," Brown said.

When asked if there was a language barrier, Brown replied, "Yes," but added that most younger people in Uganda know some English; the older generations generally do not.

"The local language was Luchiga, but every hundred or so kilometers there is a different language," she added. "Language is also a problem for people [who] work at the clinic because it is often hard to understand what the patient is saying."

Despite the many dire situations Brown experienced, she said the people were very friendly.

"They are very welcoming and were very interested in learning about life in America and teaching us about their lifestyle," she said. "Many younger kids there had never seen a light-colored person, so they were always really excited to talk to us or touch our light skin."

"Although the level of poverty is extremely high, everyone is still so happy, and I think this is what surprised me the most."

Brown said she tried to learn about Africa from reading textbooks, but said nothing compares to actually experiencing it personally.

"Although people in Africa work very hard, their lives are also very simple," Brown added. "They work and then at night they spend time with their family and friends and just try to be happy for what they have, because they never know when that will change, due to war, government, [and so on]."

Brown noted that there is great work going on at the clinic where she volunteered.

"I want to do everything in my power to support it," she said. "The doctor has the biggest heart of anyone I have ever known. He not only runs the clinic, but he also lets patients stay at his home if they have nowhere to stay while being treated."

Brown said Anguyo also gives people jobs so they have a source of income.

"While I was there, he [Anguyo] was fundraising for a local church so it could get a roof put on it," Brown added. "He is also trying to raise \$70,000 to finish a hospital so that he can allow more patients a place to stay and get better treatment."

The new hospital will also include a rehabilitation center for malnourished children, so that when they arrive at the doctor's clinic, they can stay there for free until they are truly well enough to go home, Brown explained.

"I know a lot of money is sent to Africa, however it doesn't get to the people [who] need it due to the government fraud," she said. "I feel like if people knew more about organizations like [KIHEFO], they could donate directly to the organization, and then the money would actually make it to the people [who] need it."

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