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# Healing hands for Africa

**African Touch is fundraising with the goal of founding a school of massage in Uganda**

By TARA MILLER  
Special to The Okanagan Saturday

“Foster hope through education. Create freedom through employment, improve lives through therapeutic massage.”

That's the value statement for African Touch, a project propelled by local massage therapist Curt Chambers to bring opportunity and self sufficiency to people in Uganda.

This project has given Chambers, the president of African Touch, a vehicle to exercise his passion for the people of Uganda through a massage therapy school.

The African Touch project was founded by fellow Registered Massage Therapist (RMT) Yvonne Poulin, who Chambers met during his own training in massage therapy. Her vision for African Touch resonated with Chambers, who realized this was an opportunity to combine his career with his ambition to effect change.

Chambers lived in Malawi when he was seven before moving back to Canada, returning to Africa for a brief time again when he was 19.

“When I left that time, I decided that I'd never go back until I could create employment.”

The division between the very rich and the very poor in Uganda is so profound that more than seven million people live in poverty without clean water, food, health care or educational amenities.

“Africa is no longer Africa the way we think of it. It's multicultural. There's a huge uneven distribution of funds. People living like miniature kings down to extreme poverty. There's enough wealth there that there's an abundance of money to support this industry. We know there are enough resources in this

world for everyone if you tip the scales to be more equalized.”

The feedback from Chambers' legwork has been that “this country is just waiting for something like this as it becomes more health focused.”

While there are people in Uganda doing massage, they are generally practising a more relaxation type massage in a spa environment, and the majority of therapists are trained in Western society first. This school would be the first of its kind there.

“The goal is to create a self sustained, self employed income for Ugandans and have it taken over and run by Ugandans, for Ugandans.”

The program itself would be a five-month, 480-hour training program that would qualify someone to work in a chiropractic office or acupuncture clinic. Chambers is in discussions with Dr. Martin Nkundeki to have the program based out of the Wentz Medical Clinic in Ggaba, Uganda, giving students the opportunity to work with patients for free, as part of their training.

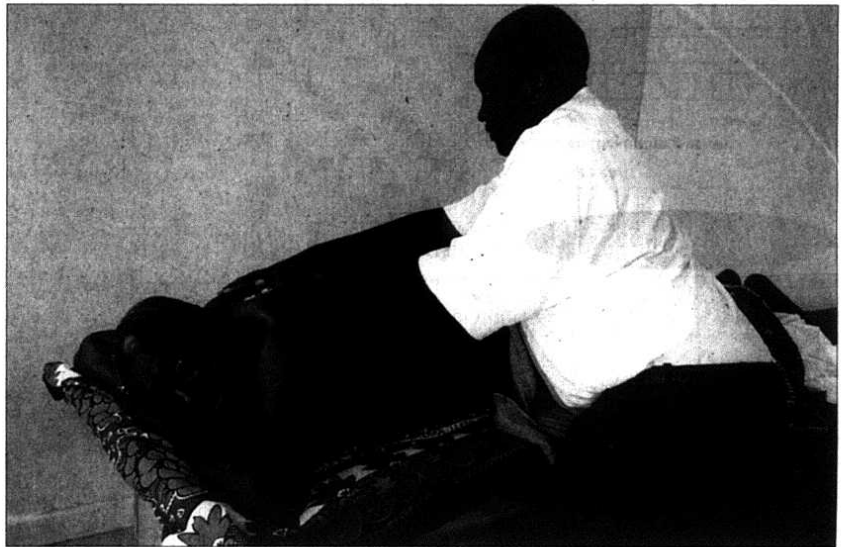
“We're taking 10 students to start with and fundraising to get set up to run one program. The focus is now on fundraising. African Touch is solely funded by donations.”

Travel, set-up and the costs to run one program make its fundraising goal \$20,000-\$25,000.

“If we can show that it is successful and students have jobs, then we can continue on.”

Once funds are raised, Chambers, wife Sandy, and their young son will move to Uganda to set up, hoping to offer their first program this fall.

Currently, the curriculum, as outlined by Poulin, written by and to be taught by Chambers, has been approved to offer graduates a Diploma of Massage Therapy under the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada. In the future, Chambers



Contributed

The massage program envisioned by African Touch would be a five-month, 480-hour training program that would qualify someone to work in a chiropractic office or acupuncture clinic.

hopes the Minister of Education in Uganda will issue their own diploma.

African Touch recently received approval from the Canadian government as a registered non-profit organization, with support for development through a Canadian Federal Grant, a first for this kind of program.

Chambers has been offering partner massage classes to raise funds, with its main fundraiser on Thursday at The Alternator Centre at the Rotary Centre for the Arts.

Said to “dazzle the senses and entertain the mind,” the festivities will include wine and appetizers, with performances by Ballet Kelowna's Tiffany Bilodeau, belly dancing from Loose Hip Sistas, acoustic live music and a richly-varied silent auction.

In his own profession as an RMT working at Okanagan Health and

## How you can help

- The African Touch Fundraiser is Thursday from 7 to 9:30 p.m. at the Alternator Centre in the Rotary Centre for the Arts.
- Tickets are \$25 and available at Leo's video on Pandosy, the Alternator Centre or by calling 250-575-2546.

Performance, Chambers finds his own personal satisfaction that he hopes to impart on Ugandans along with this opportunity.

“I like to have the ability to take someone in pain and take them to a place of no pain. There's huge personal satisfaction.”

That's particularly true for a place like Uganda, where there is a lot of physical labour and back and shoulder issues abound.

“We believe that for lasting change, you have to promote some-

thing for long-term change, rather than just short-term aid, and that everyone is equal and deserving of opportunity regardless of age, race, nationality or gender. There are some who say that this world is beyond hope, that there's no point — just keep your family safe and close. We believe that this world is worth fighting for. I think it's important to know you don't just exist or observe in a society. You can become involved to effect change.”

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Donations are accepted online at [africantouch.org](http://africantouch.org), or to The African Touch Education Fund Society, 2125 Shamrock Dr., West Kelowna, B.C. V4T 1T9.