



Media Kit

Opportunitas Aequa (OA), Latin for “Equal Opportunity”, is a non-profit, grassroots organization that uses soccer to build stronger communities for war-affected youth. OA partners with local organizations and uses soccer to rebuild communities after violent conflicts have left youth disconnected, and without opportunities to participate in community-building activities. OA’s projects involve reconstructing community soccer fields, training local coaches and leaders, running soccer camps for peace, and distributing soccer equipment to peacebuilding groups and schools. Founded by Canadian students in 2006, OA uses online video journals and a dynamic blog, oaprojects.org, to provide the public with a firsthand look at its projects.

Opportunitas Aequa Fast Facts

Who runs Opportunitas Aequa (OA)?

- OA is currently run entirely by volunteers
- Gavin Hollett (Executive Director and Founder) is joined by Duncan Penn, Erin Hunt, and Andrew Pike (and many other volunteers!)
- OA works directly with local organizations in Rwanda and Northern Uganda
- OA partners with the Vancouver Film School to create short video journals

OA’s Focus:

- OA works to create opportunities for war-affected children and youth to participate in soccer-based community building activities. These activities are related to peace, reconciliation, conflict management/resolution, gender equality, post-conflict healing, and health (e.g., HIV/AIDS awareness).
- OA has active projects in Kigali, Rwanda and Gulu, Uganda

OA's impact:

- Over 1,500 soccer balls and nearly 1,000 pairs of cleats have been donated to schools, local organizations, and community centres
- Over 7,000 youth have been given greater access to soccer based activities
- Four community soccer fields have been rehabilitated: one in Gulu, Uganda, one in Kigali, Rwanda and two in Chimborazo, Ecuador
- Three community-building soccer camps have been run for 200 children and youth, two in Northern Uganda, and one in Rwanda
- One coaching and leadership workshop for 16 youth leaders in Gulu, Uganda.

OA's upcoming activities

- The launch of the **Play Soccer So They Can** community, where people are invited to play soccer in their communities so that war-affected youth can too (September 25-27, 2009) – www.oaprojects.org/play-soccer_so_they_can
- A short video series from the pilot project in Gulu (September 2009)
- Rwanda phase II (October – November, 2009)
- Northern Uganda phase II (Spring 2010)

Opportunitas Aequa Q&A

When was Opportunitas Aequa established?

A group of Canadian students established Opportunitas Aequa, (OA) in June 2006.

What inspired the creation of OA?

Founder, Gavin Hollett was inspired by an image, from Romeo Dallaire's book "Shake Hands with the Devil," of children who in the mist of a brutal civil war and Genocide, found comfort in a game of soccer using a clump of twigs. This striking image, combined with their shared passion for soccer lead to the creation of Opportunitas Aequa (OA); an organization that uses the unifying power of soccer to help build community in war-affected regions

How is OA funded?

OA is funded by private donations and grassroots fundraising activities. The Charity Pot program of LUSH Cosmetics has been the biggest financial supporter of OA's projects.

Where does the money raised by OA go?

Funds raised go to implementing projects in war-affected communities in Rwanda and Northern Uganda. Projects focus on:

- Improving community building infrastructure by rehabilitating community soccer fields, in an eco-friendly manner;
- Developing the capacity of local leaders and soccer coaches to implement soccer based community-building activities (e.g., post conflict healing and gender equality) through coaching workshops;
- Running soccer camps for local children and youth, that combine high level soccer instruction with community building messages and activities; and,
- Providing resource support to local organizations that are using soccer-based activities in peacebuilding, reconciliation, post-conflict healing, and gender equality.

Where has OA made a difference?

In early 2007, OA began with a small support project for communities in Chimborazo, Ecuador but has since refined its mission to build community in war-affected regions. To date OA, has completed two pilot projects in Northern Uganda and in Rwanda and is expanding both projects' scope in order to reach more children and communities in these regions.

What is OA's current project?

OA recently completed a pilot project in war-affected Northern Uganda, and is now putting together the pieces for its second phase of the project in Rwanda and planning the second phase in Uganda. Together these projects will reach over 10,000 youths, through soccer camps, community soccer field rehabilitation and the support of local programs. The goals of these two projects are to rebuild at least four eco-friendly community soccer fields, train over 45 coaches, run community-building soccer camps for over 300 children, and provide resources to over 60 schools and peacebuilding groups.

What has OA accomplished so far?

- Provided improved access to soccer based community building activities to over 7,000 youth, in Uganda, Rwanda, and Ecuador;
- Improved community building infrastructure by helping to re-construct four community soccer fields, one in Northern Uganda, one in Rwanda, and two in Ecuador;
- Run three soccer camps for war-affected children, two for a total of 148 children and youth in Gulu, Uganda, and one for 88 orphans in Kigali, Rwanda; and,
- Developed the capacity of 16 local youth leaders and coaches, in Gulu, to implement soccer-based community building activities through a three-day workshop followed by ten days of practical experience

Why soccer as a vehicle for change?

Soccer is a global language. It has the power to unify people, yet at its core it is a simple sport. Conflict destroys community infrastructure and creates divides amongst the general population, leaving children and youth disconnected and without opportunities to participate in community-building activities. Soccer is one of the few authentic platforms that allows for many of these existing divides to be bridged.

Quotes

“There are very few authentic platforms that will bring people together like soccer. It is common ground for almost everyone here.”

Gavin Hollett, Executive Director of Opportunitas Aequa speaking in Gulu Uganda about how important soccer is as a platform in peacebuilding activities.

“Our grassroots initiative – Play Soccer So They Can – is the easiest way for soccer players, students, and youths to support soccer-based peacebuilding projects in East Africa.”

Gavin Hollett, Executive Director of Opportunitas Aequa speaking about the potential for people who enjoy playing soccer to make a significant difference in peacebuilding in Northern Uganda and Rwanda.

“This is not some small initiative -- this is really quite something with large potential... There is no more powerful an instrument for reconciliation, for youth, than the game of soccer.”

Lt. General Romeo Dallaire (Canadian Senator and Former UN General in Rwanda), upon receiving a brief presentation on OA.

"It is amazing to see young people having such a passion for those most in need... This is a great initiative... Soccer is an incredible tool, and I would like to help in any way I can."

Bob Lenarduzzi (President of the Vancouver Whitecaps FC, former Head Coach of the Canadian Men's soccer team, former Captain of Canada's men's soccer team.), after a meeting with OA co-Founder, Gavin Hollett

"Soccer is such an amazing tool for youth peacebuilders; children and youth who otherwise would never attend a peacebuilding activity will come for the soccer and stay for the discussion. Soccer gets the whole community interested and makes things fun."

Erin Hunt, Opportunitas Aequa, Projects Liaison

"Because Northern Uganda has been in conflict from the 1970s, people find talking about peace hard. But that events like this camp help because they allow people to talk about peace."

Otim Allan, age 15, Soccer Camp for Peace Participant. – Gulu, Uganda. May 2009. Talking after one of the camp days about how soccer helps to reduce barriers

"Soccer is really very important in peacebuilding. Soccer helps as a means of mobilizing youth, bringing them together and talking to them."

Odong Henry Africa, Team Leader of the Youth Coalition for Peace (YCFP) – Gulu, Uganda. The YCFP is OA's partner organization in Northern Uganda

Links

1. Sample past articles:

a. CBC Sports, May 23, 2008

<http://www.cbc.ca/sports/columns/molinaro/080523.html>

b. CBC TV, June 20, 2009

http://www.cbc.ca/sports/ondemand/?maven_playerId=ondemand&maven_referralObject=1159107676

2. Sample Press Release from VFS on video production partnership in Uganda:

http://www.vfs.com/thisisvfs.php?section=press_room&news_id=545

3. OA Website: www.oaprojects.org

4. OA Video Journals from Uganda:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MpmDk4HGg>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srXmzG7Yjhc>