

Teens Raise \$200K to Build Homes for African Orphans

✖ A Colorado youth ministry has raised thousands of dollars to build orphanages in Africa and is hoping to make the outreach a national movement.

In less than two years, Heartwork, an outreach of the Tag youth ministry at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, has raised more than \$200,000 to build seven orphanages in Uganda and Kenya. Leaders say teens took on odd jobs and second jobs to raise money for the project, which inspired a CD, *Light Up the World*, by the youth ministry's Desperation Band. The album debuted on Tuesday.

(Photo: Jon Egan during a visit to Uganda)

This is "a classic case of using the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," said Jon Egan, New Life worship pastor and leader of the Desperation Band. "And we are the foolish things. We're just a bunch of young people who are crazy enough to try something and to make a change."

Egan said about a year and a half ago he sensed God leading the youth ministry to build an orphanage in Uganda, where poverty, AIDS and war is expected to leave some millions of children orphaned in the next 10 years.

Egan discussed the idea with businessman Kirby Patterson, whose children are involved in the Tag youth ministry, and he told Egan that God had already spoken to him about the project and instead of one home, the youth were supposed to build four.

Each home costs \$30,000 to build, and Patterson offered to match what the teens raised up to \$60,000. In the first week of their fundraising efforts, the teens gave \$15,000. "That's when we were like, something's going on here," Egan said. "These kids are grabbing hold of something. They're getting it."

The teens took on odd jobs and second jobs to raise money for the project, and after eight weeks they had given \$68,000. Patterson's match allowed them to begin building four homes—three of which have been completed.

But Egan said the Heartwork has taken on a life of its own. When he told the story about the orphanage project at the Desperation Conference in 2008, about 3,000 teens raised enough money to build another home. At the next conference, when Egan gave the teens a couple hours to prepare, the youth raised enough money to build two more orphanages.

"That's seven orphan homes," Egan said, "all from the hearts of students, young people."

Egan believes the project can spark a movement. Next summer, the youth ministry plans to launch a campaign to get youth across the country reaching out to youth on the other side of the globe. "We want to launch a campaign to build 1,000 orphan homes, built by 1,000 youth groups in 1,000 days," Egan said.

He and other Heartwork leaders say the project is changing the lives of both the African and the American youth. "When you give a young person here in America an opportunity to change the life and destiny of a young person in Africa, that changes the American kid more than anything can because you're teaching them true Christ compassion," Egan said. "You're teaching them how to be Jesus Christ on the earth, which is our mission."

He calls the Heartwork project "destiny rescuing destiny."

“You reach a generation by helping them reach another generation,” Egan said. “The next thing you know you’re not reaching one person, you’re reaching two. ... You’re not just changing [the life of an orphan], you change the life of the person that changed that life.”