

Opportunitas Aequa

Opportunitas Aequa (OA) is a Canadian, grassroots, non-profit organization using the unifying power of soccer to build stronger and healthier communities for at-risk and war-affected children and youth. ("Opportunitas Aequa" is Latin for "Equal Opportunity").

In 2006 OA was created by university students who wanted to use soccer to help children robbed of their childhoods. The concept was inspired by a passage in a book by Canadian General Romeo Dallaire (serving the UN in Rwanda during the Genocide) that described a group of children who, amidst violent chaos, temporarily escaped the horror surrounding them by playing soccer with a clump of banana leaves.

He would later say: "There is no more powerful an instrument of reconciliation for youth, than the game of soccer."

This spurred a reaction from OA's founders and has since turned into an international effort for positive change under the name of OA. Soccer works for two main reasons, just a ball is needed to play and soccer's universal reach allows the game to touch every corner of the globe.

OA focuses on positively impacting at risk and war-affected children and youth by focusing on four core activities: (1) Improving infrastructure related to community building and inter-community activities; (2) Implementing camps for the children and youth of the community; (3) Providing resource and capacity support to local programs already using soccer to improve their communities; and new to OA, (4) Training local leaders and coaches.

OA has already made a large impact in the past with Project Ecuador and are currently involved in two major projects in East Africa -- Rwanda and Northern Uganda.

This has directly led to the development of the OA community and message. OA uses a dynamic blog, www.oaprojects.org an ever-growing Facebook page, a prominent YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/OAFilms>) and an up-and-coming online store to reach out to its members and keep them updated on OA's projects worldwide.

The past year was successful for OA. It saw the implementation of phase one of Project Rwanda in July and the distribution of over 100 soccer balls and other needed equipment to local organizations using soccer to engage and empower their youth. OA also helped to rehabilitate a local soccer pitch in the Masaka Sector of the capital city of Kigali, in Rwanda. The field was leveled and flattened, goal posts were constructed and cemented into place, drought resistant grass was planted, and some 40 young trees were planted around the field to help mitigate soil erosion and provide some shade for the athletes, while also creating a lasting impact.

OA is now looking forward to 2009 with a pilot project planned for April in Gulu, Uganda and phase two of its project in Kigali, Rwanda set for July. With these projects

on the horizon, OA is making an effort to expand its growing community in the Calgary and Alberta area through a massive “1 for 1” t-shirt campaign and with the appointment of their first ever Alberta ambassador.

OA has launched a new t-shirt campaign on their online shop called “1 for 1.” The campaign is simple: for every shirt sold OA donates a soccer ball to a local program in either Gulu or Kigali (all OA clothing is produced on 100 per cent organic cotton and is screened in North America). Thus, OA supporters who buy a t-shirt get the satisfaction of knowing that a soccer ball will go directly to at-risk and war-affected youth in Africa, while getting a cool and responsible shirt. The new "1-for-1" t-shirt campaign will be strongly pursued in the Calgary and Alberta markets, in hopes of developing a strong, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and lasting support community for OA, throughout Alberta.

If your closet is full, but still want to support OA, you can find more information about Project Rwanda and OA online at www.oarprojects.org or at their GiveMeaning page www.projectrwanda.givemeaning.com where you can donate directly to OA’s project. Tax receipts are available through GiveMeaning and 100 per cent of the donation goes directly to OA.

Ways you can help support OA:

- a) Buy a t-shirt that gives a soccer ball
- b) Donate to OA on their GiveMeaning page www.projectrwanda.givemeaning.com
- c) Contact OA about volunteering or organizing a fund-raising or awareness-building event
- d) Spread the word about OA on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/OAFilms>), Facebook and Twitter

Attached you’ll find more information about OA’s clothing line and photos from OA’s recent work in Rwanda.

For additional information or interview requests with OA’s Executive Director, please contact OA directly (opportunitas.aequa@gmail.com and/or devin.holterman@gmail.com) or visit our website at www.oarprojects.org.

