

Invaneo: Bulera Primary Teachers' College

As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Uganda, Jaime Bruner's daily one mile stroll to the Bulera Primary Teachers' College gave her time to reflect on the changing world around her. The rocky unpaved roads lead her past mud houses with thatched roofs and free wandering goats, chickens and cows.

On the same roads she was passed by cars and bicycles, technologies no longer new to developing cities in Africa. And she realized that using her background in computers, she could secure the grants and resources to design and build a fully functioning "off-the-grid" computer lab with cutting edge technology at the Bulera Primary Teachers' College computer lab. (Photo: students using the lab, June 2006)



The primary college, located in the town of Bulera (pop.12,000) in North Western Uganda, first developed their goal to have a full computer lab on campus in 2000. At the time they had two computers, but by 2005 they wanted to have at least ten. The administration at the school did not know where to begin working on their project. "In the community, most Ugandans are aware that technology will help



them advance in today's global society, but they are not always sure how" Jaime explained. The attitude in Bulera was always visionary about their need for computers. In 2004, Peace Corps assigned Jaime to work with the college. In 2005 the Educational Development Center (EDC) received a grant from USAID to build a low- power computer lab. Because of Bulera's dedication to

creating such a facility, the EDC selected Bulera as the site of the lab. (Photo: the site before the computer lab)

Just as it seemed that things would fall easily into place, the project became fraught with unforeseen difficulties. The principal who helped Jaime get the project off the ground became seriously ill, and the project was in danger of losing momentum if new leadership did not support the lab. At the same time Jaime's main funding contact left his position and she was unable to secure the computers that had been promised to the college.

Bushnet, a local Internet service provider in Uganda recommended that Jaime work with Inveneo to procure the necessary thin computers. Using the remaining EDC funding the computer lab was completed with five Inveneo Education Stations. "It was as though the product was made to order!" Jaime said. Easy to install, the thin computers run off of 12V deep-cycle batteries, so the lab can run off the batteries when the power in the rest of the building is out. As an added benefit, the computers connect directly to 12V wires running under the molding rather than plugging into traditional outlets. This feature also functions as a theft deterrent, because the computers cannot be used anywhere else.

At last, after nearly a year of hard work, the lab began to take shape. The college hired a new principal, Kabagambe Athuman. His continued support of the computer lab inspired Jaime, "Both principals were interested in accomplishing really great things. Without their leadership and support it would have been impossible to coordinate the set-up of the lab." A local man, Charles Olopat, was hired to run the lab and teach classes, since it was important to Jaime that the teachers at the college not see her as 'in-charge' of the lab. It was the first time many of the students had received access to computers, and they seem to learn much more when they try things out and teach each other. (Photo: Charles Olopat unpacking



computers for the lab)

Even as the power fails twice a week the students continue to come into the fully functional lab. “They check e-mail and enjoy anything interactive...learning, searching the Internet, chatting,” said Jaime. The Bulera Primary Teachers College is proud of the benefits that the lab provides for the next



generation of educators of the youth of Africa. The new computer lab and Inveneo machines allow them to do this. Jaime’s hope is that the College continues to raise the funding to grow the lab and the accessibility of computers. (Photo: Jaime in the computer lab)

Local rural colleges all over Africa, like Bulera Primary Teachers’ College, can now become a part of the global community through the use of computing and Internet access. By empowering the colleges to use these ICTs on their own they can become self-sustaining learning centers with access to information from all over the world. The technology also allows them to share their own culture and experience with others.

As reported by Anita Deshpande, Inveneo Volunteer, November 2006.

April 2007 Update: Jaime Bruner completed her Peace Corps service in September 2006. She was recently hired by Inveneo as a Systems Engineer and was last in Uganda installing a computing and communications broadband network for Caritas/Catholic Charities in 7 IDP camps in northern Uganda.