

Planting a Seed: From Trash to Treasure



In June 2013, Dr. Shonda Lawrence (R) traveled with Dean Mario Azevedo (2R), Dean Emeritus Gwendolyn S. Prater (C), Dr. Wesley F. Prater and Dr. Mohammed Shabazzi (3L) to Uganda to present a paper at the International Scientific Conference on Public Health in East Africa. There were many talks about collaborations between Jackson State University and the conference host

University, Mountains of the Moon. During her visit, she had the opportunity to visit several small villages. One of the villages was located in Kasese, home of Reverend Dr. Kiiza Sibayirwa Tom. According to Dr. Lawrence, while the country was beautiful in so many ways, poverty and the struggle of a people was apparent.

She also visited several marketplaces in the area. “What I noticed first about the markets was that most of the items for sale were used items.” Upon her return, Dr. Lawrence began work on a project to assist women in the small village of Kasese. “I



thought about what could be done right now for the women. It just came to me to gather old purses and send them to Uganda so that the women could sell them at the market. I figured if a few women had as many old purses that they were not using as I did, maybe we would have enough to send.” The Social Work Student Association, faculty, staff and Greater Mt. Sinai MB Church in Jackson, MS participated in a used purse drive. Purses were collected for one academic year. “We had boxes and boxes of purses to

be shipped. The cost was astronomical. Luckily, a volunteer (or angel) contacted me and said she would be willing to take the purses with her when she traveled back to Uganda.”

The purses arrived. The women kept some of the purses for themselves and took the



remaining purses to the market. The monies they made from the purses was used to purchase materials to make baskets to take to market.



Over the past two years, the proceeds have been used to help build a small school for orphans and lay a foundation for a community center. “It was just planting a small seed that has helped the women of Kasese become empowered. What we considered trash has helped a whole village.”



On November 7, 2015, Reverend Dr. Kiiza Sibayirwa Tom and Chaplain Reverend Dr. William K. Ndishabandi visited the School of Social Work and spoke with Dean Ricardo Brown and students in Dr. Wendy Thompson’s social policy class. It is Reverend Tom’s hope that a social services agency be built and students from Jackson State University would want to come to Uganda to assist and support the people there.

