The Sonrisas story begins back in 1984 when I first visited the Dominican Republic on vacation from my job as a dental assistant. I was touched by the poor children in the streets selling peanuts and cleaning shoes. Although they were working to earn a living, they were always smiling. I couldn’t help but notice that many of their smiles were already missing teeth and often showed signs of gum disease.

In talking with some of the locals, I learned that the town had only one dentist whose services were much too expensive for the average resident. Public dental care wasn’t available either, so when people had problems, they just pulled the tooth at home the old fashioned way: by tying a line from the tooth to the door handle and slamming the door!

Before my trip, I’d been in the midst of applying to study dental hygiene. When I returned home, I was more determined than ever to become a hygienist and return to the Dominican Republic. Competition to get into the program was intense, so I was ecstatic to learn I had been accepted. I completed the program, worked for a year to pay off my student loans and then began looking for a way to return to the Dominican Republic.

I was able to raise the necessary funds and spent one year working in the Dominican Republic with the help of two local nurses. At the end of the year my funds were exhausted and I had to return to Canada. I couldn’t imagine just going home and forgetting the need in the Dominican Republic, so when I arrived in Canada I began writing letters to Canadian dentists. I asked for donations of equipment to start a clinic in the Dominican Republic.

With the assistance of many different people, both in Canada and the Dominican Republic, we opened the first dental clinic called Sonrisas (Smiles) in the town of Herrera in 1990.

ADRA Canada became involved in 1996 with the opening of the Sonrisas-V clinic and their support has enabled us to continue expanding our services. Today we have eight clinics in the Dominican Republic and have treated over one million patients. None of this would have been possible without the support of organizations like ADRA Canada and donors like you.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
On Monday, February 6, I received a phone call asking if I would be interested in travelling to New Orleans for a few days to help rebuild homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina, so I arranged for a few days off from work and on Thursday we boarded our plane from Buffalo, New York to New Orleans.

After the hurricane, the town of Lacombe, Alberta set out to raise funds for relief efforts in their sister town Lacombe, Louisiana. To facilitate the efforts, they partnered with A Better World, a central Alberta humanitarian organization and ADRA Canada. Our rebuilding team included several students who had dedicated their vacation time and paid their own travel costs in order to help.

After landing, we headed for Lacombe, Louisiana on the north shore of Lake Pontchartraine. A fifteen-foot high surge had come up the river here taking out a section of the highway bridge and filling homes with water right up to their ceilings. As we travelled, it was obvious that the hurricane had been catastrophic; homes, buildings, trees, and garbage were strewn everywhere. The television reports I’d seen hadn’t captured the magnitude of this disaster.

The first person our group assisted was Adeline Perkins. I learned from her that the surge was neck deep within fifteen minutes. People Magazine ran a photo of Ms. Perkins swimming for her life with her family. With the help provided by Canadian volunteers, she is now back in her home with some degree of comfort.

The next morning, my task was to run for the supplies and materials as they were needed to keep the work crew busy. They worked hard all day and by evening the walls and floors were insulated with fresh, new insulation, the floor joists that had rotted were replaced and the home was ready for the flooring crew. It was wonderful to witness such an abundance of energy directed to such a good cause.

The images and memories of this trip will stay with me forever and have changed my outlook on life immeasurably. While flying home and reflecting on my past seven days, I determined that I would come back again soon and try and do my little bit to help these people resume their lives. The trip was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had and I found that it truly is better to give than to receive.

In Canada, an alarming 31% of elementary and 62% of secondary children do not start their day with a nutritious breakfast. ADRA Canada has been helping to address this challenge by providing breakfast for students at Mamawi Atosketan Native School in Alberta since 2002.

Jamie is a little boy who relies on the school meals for his nutrition. One day Jamie came into my office and said he was hungry. He had missed breakfast because he was late for school, so I gave him a cereal bar. He took it happily and went into the hall. A few minutes later I went down the hall and found Jamie, as hungry as he was, sharing the bar I had just given him with another student. I gave them more so they did not have to share.

It was wonderful to see how big this little boy’s heart is. Even though he was hungry, he didn’t hesitate to share what little he had.
Crystal Scott excitedly recalls the night she was hosted by a rural family in a place called Kawanga in Eastern Kenya; “Suddenly I was in the complete care of people I had just met, in a place I had never been. I needed to follow my new friends very closely in order to stay on the path and not fall into a tangle of thorns. That was easily one of the best nights of my life!”

Crystal, along with 12 other Canadians on a Canadian Foodgrains Bank food study tour to Kenya and Ethiopia, spent several nights in the homes of African people who are on the receiving end of Canadian food aid.

The path Crystal describes was a narrow foot path lined with thorn bushes leading to the homestead of her host family. The night was moonless and dark and the closest artificial lighting was 100 km away. Crystal did need to be untangled from the thorn bushes several times by her new friends during the 3 km walk.

On that footpath, and in the mud-brick homes of her hosts, Crystal’s world view changed. The people who used to be objects of her pity had become trusted and respected friends. “They may not have a lot, but they are incredibly resourceful with what they do have. Their generosity toward me as their guest is simply beyond description.”

The other 12 Canadian participants on the tour experienced similar transformations. So did the Africans who did the hosting. Never in the history of Kawanga had foreign visitors spent a night in local homes. Prior to this visit the people of Kawanga considered themselves too poor to host foreigners. They thought their mud and straw houses would not meet the standards of visiting guests. They no longer feel that way.

Mutinda Kinusto, a local leader, wrote a few days after the visit, “The village is still buzzing about the day Canadians actually stayed in their homes. They can’t wait for them to return, so they can again host. Their attitudes about themselves and about foreigners have changed forever.”

Kawanga is one of several villages in Eastern Kenya that receive Foodgrains Bank resources to build “sand dams”. The villagers do the construction work and the Foodgrains Bank supplies the building materials. Sand dams are a form of water storage technology that is used to provide communities with a year-round water supply where they would otherwise have water only during the rainy season. The villagers took great pride in showing their Canadian

Visit to Kawanga

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

My name is Dashdondog. I live in Zavkhan aimag Tudevtei soum, Mongolia. I appreciate ADRA because they have changed my life and my vision for the future.

At the beginning of the Food Security and Education project I really was not interested -- only my wife and children were planting vegetables. I had lost all the animals and was doing nothing, but now my whole family and our cooperative members are busy and really enjoying it because we have seen the results of our work. We learned if we work hard we can live better.

The business training in December 2005 was really useful. I made a jacket for my daughter and gloves for my wife. They were so happy. Now I am sharing the training with my wife and our cooperative members. Sheep wool is almost cost-free to me, so we will collect much wool and will start new activities. I have already sold products! ADRA gave me a bright hope for the future. Thank-you very much to ADRA.
guests how they had constructed the sand dams and how well they were working.

Tour organizer, Dan Wiens of the Foodgrains Bank, says that the village home-stays in communities like Kawanga were added to this year’s study tour to help breakdown what he calls the “donor/recipient mentality” that usually characterizes relationships between Canadians and people in recipient countries. “This style of relationship is ultimately unproductive and unsatisfying for everyone because it presumes and prescribes a one way flow of resources. What is needed to break the back of global poverty and hunger is mutual learning – ideas and respect flowing both ways,” says Wiens.

Back in Canada, Crystal says that not a day goes by that she doesn’t think about her new African friends. She is thankful for the personal fulfilment that comes with these new friendships. She also talks about how much she learned from her African friends and how this new knowledge will help her respond more effectively to the injustice of global hunger.

The Canadian Foodgrains Bank, a Christian response to hunger, is based in Winnipeg. It is a Christian-based food aid and development organization that collects donations of grain, cash and other agricultural commodities for distribution to the world’s hungry. It is owned by 13 Canadian church organizations, including ADRA Canada, who work with international partners to ensure food gets to where it is intended to go. The Foodgrains Bank manages a centralized food/grain collection system on behalf of its member churches, negotiates master agreements with CIDA, the Canadian Wheat Board and other organizations, manages procurement and shipping for members, provides expert advice and services to members on food programming, and engages in policy and development education activities related to hunger and food security.

Global Impact

Global Impact is a publication of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Canada. ADRA Canada welcomes comments, suggestions, and contributions for ADRA news publications.

Tell us about:
• the ways in which your church or community supports ADRA Canada
• experiences people have had with ADRA Canada projects
• how ADRA Canada has impacted your life

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have a story to share. ADRA Canada reserves the right to edit all material as needed for space and clarity.

Editor
James Astleford
jrla@adra.ca

Copy Editor
Tanya Huether
tanya@advanced-systems.net

Design
Renaissance Design
renaissanced@gmail.com

ADRA Canada
1148 King Street East
Oshawa ON L1H 1H8

Tel: (905) 433-8004
Toll Free: (888) 274-2372
Fax: (905) 723-1903

Executive Director
Oliver Lofton-Brook
kolb@adra.ca

National Programs
Nick Trent
ntrent@adra.ca

International Programs
Lisa Mercer
lmercer@adra.ca

Director of Finance
Nola Pal
npal@adra.ca