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NILE DREAMS

Women's trip to Uganda includes paddling and malaria education.

What do whitewater kayaking and malaria prevention have in common? Not much, unless you were part of the first all-women's team to kayak the Nile River and set up a malaria-education/prevention program in Uganda in January 2004. The team of paddlers, including Dr. Jessie Stone, *Girls at Play* video creator Anna

Levesque, and former Futa Friends executive director Kristen Read, worked with a Ugandan nonprofit, Soft Power, to launch the program. Last year, Stone kayaked on the Nile, and two of her paddling partners, Eric Jackson and Steve Fisher, came down with malaria. "Treating Steve and EJ forced me to look deeper at the malaria problem here, and it was shocking!" Stone recalled. Malaria infects 300 million to 500 million people each year, and kills up to 3 million children, most in Africa. Malaria is easily preventable. The mosquitoes infected with the malaria parasite bite at night, so sleeping under a net can mean the difference between life and death.

In between running sections of the Nile, the team went hut to hut in the rural village of Kybwira, next to Bujagali Falls. They interviewed families to find out what they knew about malaria and what they were doing to protect themselves from the disease.



"We were amazed to discover that despite everyone in the village having had malaria multiple times and watching family members die from malaria, no one knew much about the disease or how to protect themselves," Read noted. Stone trained Levesque, Read, and local villager Jessica Mugurewa, who works with Soft Power, to be malaria healthcare educators. Over the next two weeks, the team held educational meetings for all members of the community, from village elders to children.

"None of this would have been possible without Jessica," Stone said. "Since she speaks the local language of Lusoga and English perfectly, we could communicate with everyone. Additionally, we were given access to people's home life that we would never have otherwise had. And she cares so much about what happens to her community, it helps us create a sustainable program, because she will use

her knowledge and continue to educate people long after we leave."

A final, critical component was the availability of affordable mosquito netting for every family in the village. In addition to continuing health education for locals, Mugurewa will sell the discounted mosquito nets. Eventually, the program hopes to have a mosquito net in every home in the village. It's an ambitious but doable plan. Read, Levesque, and Stone say they will all return to continue the program help construct a clinic for the village.