

## Murray resident finds way to use education while making a difference

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by Aimee Cook O'Brien  
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Sarah Berry has been on quite a whirlwind for the past two years. This Murray resident married her husband Nathan, graduated from college last December and then recently traveled to Kenya for three weeks as part of a volunteer internship with the organization Opportunity Fund for Developing Countries.

Although Berry has a paying job with the Unified Fire Authority, she was looking for a way to use her International Studies degree, but wanted it to be a meaningful experience. She began researching some non-profit organizations in the state that worked particularly with women and children and starting cold calling, hoping to find some opportunity to get some non-profit experience. She came across OFDC and although the organization is primarily volunteer ran, the director, Nia Sherar was looking for an intern, and a new director.

“I began my internship with Nia in March,” Berry stated. “Now Nia will retire and I will take over as executive director in December. This is a big step for me but I feel like I am prepared. Although I have never been in a position like this before and I am nervous, I feel I am capable of doing it.”

Berry and Sherar visited Kenya from Sept.17 to Oct.6 to check on the progress of projects funded by OFDC. The focus of the organization is woman, children and health. The organization gives funds to build clean latrines for school children, mosquito nets, water wells, water catchments and for uniforms for children to attend school. Berry says that 95 percent of money donated to OFDC goes directly into these projects. OFDC also hires local builders to construct the latrines and wells, thus fueling the local economy.

“The organization is focused on sustainability,” said Berry. “We really feel that is the most important thing. We work with the local people--we trust that they know how best to build a well to meet their needs so we just give them the means to do it.”

Berry says that OFDC is not interested in changing any of the culture in Kenya, but instead wants to educate and provide the women with microcredit loans so that they may learn a skill, manage their money and give back to their communities while also repaying the loans. They also will continue to provide uniforms for children, primarily girls who would otherwise be married off at 13.

“It is so hard to decide who gets to go to school and who doesn't, but we are a small organization and we can only do so much,” said Berry. “You see the need--no food, no shoes and parents who send their children to school in hopes that they will get at least one meal that day. With us the money goes directly to the Kenyan people and to the programs. We don't want to just hand out money and make them dependent on foreign aid. Our help will enable them to have bright futures, skills and knowledge of their own rights according to the laws of Kenya.”

