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Office of University
Communications

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Sarah Hales ('99) Established Ekissa Mercy Ministries to Meet Significant Needs in Remote Ugandan Community

By: Chelsea Sydnor, GWU Communications Intern



Photo: Ekissa Mercy Ministries

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner-Webb alumna Sarah Hales of Clemmons, N.C., has always felt curiosity and respect for cultural diversity. Since earning her degree at GWU in 1999, she has pursued mission work for African children that has helped her express her love for Christ and passion for justice.

After traveling to Uganda in 2009 and seeing the disturbing conditions in a particular orphanage in Bweya Village, Hales founded Ekissa Mercy Ministries—Ekissa is an African word meaning “mercy.” She first visited the country with plans to learn about and volunteer with orphan-care ministries. Yet, she was unprepared for what she would witness on that first visit.

“Despite the heat of Uganda, [the orphanage] was cold, eerie and deathly quiet,” she said. “There were half-dressed, distended bellies laying on springs of broken bunk beds with emaciated, gaunt young faces, eyes void of any signs of life, foreheads hot to the touch due to the lethal bite of a mosquito.”

Although Hales had previously been exposed to harsh environments due to her experience as a social worker, as well as trips to China to adopt her two youngest daughters, she was changed forever.

“I returned home with a deep sense of conviction and a weighty question God spoke into my heart: ‘Your eyes have now seen...so what will your response be?’” Hales recalled.

(Ekissa from [MD3 Media Marketing](#) on [Vimeo](#).)

Hales had earned her degree in human services from Gardner-Webb in 1999. It was there that international professor Dr. Alexandre Strokanov had an impact on her life journey, ultimately inspiring her to international adoption in her own family, as well as creating

Ekissa. “He intrigued me and opened my eyes to the world,” she shared. “He had an amazing passion for helping others see our responsibility in relation to the rest of the world.”



Photo: Ekissa Mercy Ministries

A decade after earning her degree, Hales successfully registered the ministry as a 501(c)3 nonprofit serving Bweya Village. The organization has since made more than 20 trips to Uganda, resulting in work with locals to shut down the orphanage that was in poor shape and to establish local ministries—including a children’s home—that serve the community. The ministry has also purchased three acres of property that now holds a church, a school and a clean water source. Along with the development, the people receive vocational training in tailoring, crop rotation and pig farming. Education about community health and finances is also available.

According to Hales, economic development is a key focus of their efforts. The organization emphasizes sustainability versus dependency. Ministry projects are constructed and maintained by local people of Bweya Village. In the future, Hales hopes to house the children’s home on Ekissa’s property in order to save rental expenses, which are especially high in and around Bweya Village. Meanwhile, the organization would also like to establish a medical clinic for the people.

“We seek to have a positive impact in Uganda sharing the love of Christ in tangible ways,” Hales reflected. “The experience is best stated in our tag line: ‘Serve to bless; Blessed to serve.’ While individuals serve through the ministry of Ekissa to be a blessing, in turn, the Ugandans bless us far more than we could ever bless them.”

Ekissa dedicates 97 percent of its funds directly to efforts overseas, and additional donations are always useful, especially for projects like the Ekissa Model School. Full scholarships are offered to 20 students, as determined by poverty levels. To learn more about the ministry, visit Ekissa.com.

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.