

Young leader doing good in Kenya

Raised in a family of Rotarians, Victoria Porter was destined to “do good”. Through the Kenyan-based NO MEANS NO program, she is doing a whole lot of good in helping them on their quest for a rape-free world.

*By Jan Johnson
Rotary Club of Mundingburra, Qld*

VICTORIA was brought up with the belief that we should always be thankful for the blessings we have and not take the things we have for granted; that nothing becomes reality through dreaming, but through determination and hard work. It is through this founding principle that she finds ways to make a difference; hardly surprising given she is the daughter of PDG Brendan Porter.

While completing her Youth Work studies, Victoria volunteered with the Salvation Army and Don Bosco Youth Centres in Melbourne, Vic, then, with a new challenge in mind, travelled to Africa with International Volunteer HQ (IVHQ) to volunteer with women with HIV.

While working with the women they confided in her and expressed their concern about telling their children they

had the virus. Victoria originally didn't want to work with the young people, due to volunteer tourism and the ways in which this leads to inappropriate advantage being taken of the children, but to assist the mothers she decided to run a mentorship for the children explaining the cause and effects of HIV. This prompted one of the children to come forward and tell her story of sexual abuse by a relative.

At her own expense, Victoria organised a boarding school sponsorship for the child, but also became overwhelming aware that she was just one of many affected by sexual abuse within the community. So, she reached out to the NO MEANS NO program, originally founded in Kenya, and asked the team to have their staff travel to Kitengela, Kenya. She crowd funded the initial overheads for the program – in which more than 550 children from Noonkopir Primary, Grades 5 to 8, were to take part in the educational classes – and funded the transportation of first-aid kits from Donations in Kind and 286 Day's for Girls kits to distribute. Victoria firmly believes that the power of partnerships can make a difference to the lives of many.

NO MEANS NO is a six-week program (12 hours of class) on puberty, sexual health, violence and self-defence. The program is gender-based; focusing on self-empowerment, understanding of rights and defence skills for the girls, and coping mechanisms and successful intervention for the boys.

Victoria now intends to implement the program in GK Prison School and additionally fund the Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous (SASA) group counselling program, which includes 24 follow-up councillor sessions, as well as the Champion Program, a six-month and yearly follow-up for the established “Champions”. The



Victoria Porter with some of the NO MEANS NO staff.

“THE PROGRAM IS GENDER-BASED; FOCUSING ON SELF-EMPOWERMENT, UNDERSTANDING OF RIGHTS AND DEFENCE SKILLS FOR THE GIRLS, AND COPING MECHANISMS AND SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION FOR THE BOYS.”



Victoria with one of the girls from the initial mentorship program for children with HIV positive mothers.

Champions will be teachers and senior class students who have successfully completed the course and will assist in training the junior students to ensure the continued education of the NO MEANS NO values and lessons within the school and wider community.

Victoria’s work is supported by the Rotary clubs of Mundingburra, Townsville Central and others. She is hoping that, with additional support from other clubs combined with her own fundraising efforts, she will be able to expand the reach of the project. There are many other schools in the district, and she hopes they can all benefit from the training, with the aim to reduce the rate of sexual abuse and create a safer community environment for all. •

An inspiring role model

With both parents in Rotary, Victoria was no stranger to sharing her life with exchange students; her family hosting more than five students in her primary and high school years. In the latter part of high school, Victoria was one of the founding members of the Interact club at Saint Margaret Mary’s High School and shortly after welcomed Hung Van Nong into the family after his Rotary Overseas Medical Aid for Children (ROMAC) surgery.

Following this, she took some substantial trips overseas and entered university life. At this time, Victoria spent some time outside of the Rotary family, volunteering at the Salvation Army and Don Bosco Youth Centre. These experiences spurred on the idea of entering the international volunteer field.

Since returning from her first trip to Kenya, Victoria has been working with Jenny Foster from the Rotary Club of Essendon, Vic, and her team to start a new generation Rotary club in the Moonee Ponds area. Jenny and Victoria met at Rotary’s Donations in Kind in Melbourne, where she now volunteers. She also works with the Camberwell and Fern Tree Gully Day’s for Girls program – an organisation proudly supported by Rotary globally – and distributes their kits to the children taking part in the NO MEANS NO Program and many others.