

Carey continues charity project after return from abroad

By Kacie Goode

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Over the summer, Bardstown resident Casey Carey had the chance to spend five weeks in the African country of Tanzania studying abroad, representing Western Kentucky University and exploring non-profit organizations. It's an experience she has brought back with her to the United States as she continues to help those in need even from home with a fundraising project.



Carey, who is working on her master's degree in social work, had never studied abroad but was interested in doing so.

"I think everyone should try to take the opportunity to study abroad if they can," she said, and so she took her opportunity in June of last year. "I've always wanted to go to Africa."

Joining several other students from Kentucky, Carey visited a few different areas in Tanzania, stopping at orphanages and hospitals as they went.

"It was a culture shock for sure," Carey described of arriving. "Everything was different from home — the way people live their lives there is different," and even coming home, she realizes the small things people take for granted. Despite living in poverty, however, Carey said those she encountered on her experience were "the friendliest people" who made her feel welcome.

The students spent most of their time at a center called WAMATA, which is where Carey's social work experience fully developed with a service project.

WAMATA is a community-based HIV/AIDS center in Tanzania aimed at enhancing the quality of life and support of those affected through advocacy, education and communication.

"We met with the members there and talked with them," she said of visiting the center, adding members include men, women, children and whole families. "They come in for support and they aim to prevent the spread of AIDS and reduce the stigma."

Carey said a lot of those helped by the WAMATA center have been disowned or abandoned by their families or are unable to find jobs because they are discriminated against by others in the community. Part of the reason Carey and other students were there was to ensure those in need received the food they needed, as nutrition is a major concern.

To help address this issue, Carey said, a group of social workers and social work students started working on Project Rafiki, a food bank to help provide the nutrition the WAMATA members needed.

While Carey has since returned home, she and others have teamed up to keep Project Rafiki for WAMATA going. Carey said collaboration between the center, Western Kentucky University and The Department of Social Work at Hubert Kairuki Memorial University will help distribute food to members on a monthly basis.

"We divide up months of who is going to provide the money needed that month to restock the food bank," Carey said of individual efforts. "They have different sororities, businesses and churches donate money so we can provide the food."

One way Carey has worked to help is by starting a GoFundMe account to gather donations for the project. She said it takes only about \$150 to feed six different families for a whole month.

Continuing the work she was a part of in Tanzania has been rewarding for Carey, who said she decided to study social work because she enjoys helping people.

"I am all about social justice and giving back," she said.

The GoFundMe account can be found at www.gofundme.com/projectrafiki.