

Hackers Help Rebuild Ugandan Village



On February 17th there was a fire in a village that was basically in the back yard of Hackers of Charity here in Jinja, Uganda. The village was a total loss, approximately 120 people from 26 families lost everything. After posting about the fire on Facebook, the hacker community opened up their heart and wallets and donations started flowing in. The community wanted to help.

Hackers for Charity has traditionally been about the bigger picture type projects - Providing tech support for other charities here in Uganda; Empowering people with tech skills so that they can support themselves; Providing farm startup kits to enable people to setup farms and feed themselves. But, here we were faced with 130 homeless, hungry, frightened people at our back door. We needed to act and act fast.

We joined forces with our friends at Calvary Chapel. Situated even closer to the village than we were, they were already in action, reaching out to this community in need. By the 20th we had a plan and had begun the process of feeding people, many of whom had not eaten since the fire. Donations started coming in and by the 22nd Calvary had a base camp tent in place and using the donation money that was trickling in, we had the meal service organized. The local missionary community jumped in as well, serving in any way they could. We still had a long way to go, but we were starting to make a difference, we were changing things.

However, our funds were already starting to dry up. Even in one of the poorest places on the planet, feeding 120 people is no small endeavor. Despair started to set in. The residents of the village had lost *everything*. They needed more than a meal. They needed homes, basic necessities, and "hand up" instead of a handout.

Jesse Rich (the pastor of Calvary Church and the key leader of just about every aspect of this project) and I investigated the prospect of rebuilding. The estimate for the eucalyptus poles (which represented the very beginning phase of the construction) was around \$1,000.

Less than a week into this project I was already in over my head and discouraged. The blessing of the food program already seemed inconsequential because it wasn't sustainable. I should have had more faith. In the span of twelve hours, the hacker community responded and we *tripled* our financial need for the poles!

I had to check and recheck my math because I couldn't believe it. Alongside a generous donation of timber from Nile Ply, the money you donated was enough to fund the *entire building project* with money to spare! Just like that I witnessed a miracle, delivered through your generosity.

The labor that followed was intense. Staff and volunteers of Calvary, missionaries, residents in the community, myself and my family and (most importantly) victims of the fire spent a solid month of full-time days planning, fighting political battles, digging dirt, chopping wood, hammering, painting, shopping for home supplies and more to pull this all together.

Not for fame or glory, politics or notoriety, after nearly fifty donations ranging from \$5 to \$1,000, the hacker community had selflessly and faithfully stepped up and stood in the gap once again for the people of Uganda. In the process, I was reminded once again that this is *your* charity, this is your vehicle to give back and to help those in need, and that is why we do this.

We're not finished yet. Their homes restored to better-than-before condition and restocked with supplies, we found that many residents did not have jobs, and some did not have skills required to even land a job. We're looking to change that by partnering with organizations in the community who specialize in this type of recovery. Our goal is lasting change for the victims.

Please accept this little newsletter as an unworthy token of my appreciation. Pass it around with pride. This is proof that we made a difference. We provided hope to the hopeless. In a seemingly odd partnership, Hackers, working alongside churches and missionaries in the community, *changed lives*.

Thank you for allowing me to serve *your* charity.

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P.S. - One page can not summarize the tears, sweat, joy, sorrow and challenges of this project. For more information, photos and writings, please visit our website: <http://www.hackersforcharity.org>.





After the fire, 20+ rooms were burned to the ground, leaving 120 people destitute.



The fire left nothing standing.



Jen Long and Kelli O'hea work on the frames.



Jessie Rich and residents work on framing.



Children helping with the foundations. Notice the building in the background, typical of the buildings that were destroyed. little more than clapboard lean-to's. Compare this to the building you built, below!



Plywood walls and tin sheet roofing.



A few of the 120 residents stand before one of the finished buildings.