

# Global Relief Outreach: Stanley Students Take on the World

By Lee Borrowman

Four years ago, Stanley Spanish and History teacher Jack Walton responded to an inquiry from some students, wondering how to help a couple of international charities, by organizing a student-led club called Global Relief Outreach (GRO). A natural step for Walton, who has been actively involved in social justice and charity relief programs for most of his life, GRO offers an opportunity for Stanley students to make a big difference in the lives of children who live under conditions that most Lamorinda middle-school students have never experienced.

"GRO responds to both global and local issues," explains Walton. "In the past we've supported organizations that were engaged in tsunami relief efforts, aiding Katrina victims or caring for displaced children in Darfur. We have sent funds to the Peace Corp for a library in Honduras, and made donations to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and the Nature Conservancy."

GRO disburses funds to several charitable and relief organizations each year. This year's biggest beneficiary, receiving \$7300, was Contra Costa County's Shelter, Inc., which offers support services to homeless individuals and families. The impressive list of organizations to which GRO made contributions this school year includes UNICEF, the Kerewan Nursery School in Gambia, ACE Africa (Action in the Community Environment, which works with orphaned and vulnerable children) in Kenya, the J.F. Kapnek Trust in Zimbabwe, Amigos Anonymous and an orphanage in Mexico, a school in Columbia, Heifer International (working to alleviate world hunger) and the Contra Costa County Food Bank.

The group receives guidance from Walton and several other teachers who often bring ideas to the table, as well as information on various relief organizations

with which they are familiar. For example, science teacher Dianne Chandler's daughter Cassie introduced the students to ACE Africa, and Walton has had a long involvement with Amigos Anonymous. These personal contacts help insure that only reputable organizations are supported. The students decide as a group what fund-raising activities to pursue and to which organizations they wish to give.

This year's list of fundraising activities included the sale of hot soup at lunch, a school-wide dance, a walk-a-thon, a canned food drive and a coin drive. Through their combined activities, Global Relief Outreach raised an astonishing \$23,000 this year.

The 20-25 members of GRO meet weekly at lunch time during the school year to plan fund-raising activities and discuss the many possible recipients of the proceeds. Meetings are conducted under a loose interpretation of the rules of Parliamentary procedure, and Matt Zelin, the current Club President, waits more or less patiently for members to "move" and "second" a motion before proceeding to a vote.

When first asked why they spend so many of their lunch hours engaged in these activities, the students gave the standard middle-school reply, "Because it's fun!" But there's more to these kids than hanging out with friends and planning activities. Erin Grant first joined GRO because she was on the Student Council and that illustrious body asked her to do so; two years later, she's still in GRO because she enjoys "working with friends and classmates to help others."

GRO has received well-deserved recognition for its efforts by the Peace Corp and the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors.



GRO members Hanna Borosky, Erin Grant and Katie Waal



GRO President Matt Zelin

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