

# To Africa with love: Mission for aids relief

By RICK WOOD  
Staff Reporter

Standing amidst the red dirt of a roadside in Tanzania, Christine Harris, of Camano Island, may look a bit out of place.

The truth is there is nowhere else she would rather be.

"I've always wanted to go to Africa," said Harris. "Ever since I was little, I've wanted to go and help the poor people there."

Helping the poor is why she is there now.

Harris recently embarked on a six-month trip to Africa with the international assistance organization Working to Empower.

Working to Empower currently has 30 volunteers involved in various HIV/AIDS education projects in several countries in Africa.

For Harris, health education and stemming the tide of infectious diseases has become her life's ambition.

Due to begin studies at University of Washington School of



Working to Empower volunteer Christine Harris stands along a roadside in Tanzania.

Medicine this fall, she hopes to specialize in infectious diseases as a physician.

Now, into her second week on the ground in Africa, she is at the frontline of the battle against AIDS. According to the World Health Organization, sub-Saharan Africa remains the most affected region in the world.

At the end of 2005, there were 24.5 million there living with HIV.

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## Mission for aids relief

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"It's a very big issue that influences just about everything," said Harris. "In the region one in three adults are infected with HIV."

Educating those who live in the hardest hit areas is part of a worldwide response to ending the virus, said Harris.

She will eventually help to evaluate the health education

information being presented and refine it to be more effective.

Volunteering to go to countries like Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi comes with a certain level of peril.

On Wednesday, Carol Briggs, who volunteers with orphans of HIV/AIDS victims in Kenya, was shot in the face during an attack by a roving gang.

Although the region is rife

with violence and conflict, Harris has little reservation about being there.

"I'm not really that scared about that," she said of the dangers. "When you're going to help and do good, you are generally received very well."

For the moment, she is taking language lessons to learn to speak Swahili and planning for trips out to refugee camps.

Her first impressions are upbeat and hopeful.

"Africa is amazing," she said. "It was quite the journey getting here, but I loved every minute of it."

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## Camano's barefoot bandit caught