

Submitted photo

While travelling through sub-Saharan Africa, Logan Cochrane met hundreds of children living in orphanages, most of whom had lost their parents to AIDS.

# Making a difference

By **KRISTYL CLARK**

klclark@chilliwacktimes.com

**F**or the past 11 months Logan Cochrane has been living in some of Africa's most impoverished nations where the food is scarce, education is a luxury and the death rates are sky high.

Despite only having just returned home this Christmas, the 22-year-old Chilliwack senior secondary graduate is eager to return to sub-Saharan Africa and continue fighting the battle against HIV/AIDS by spreading awareness about the deadly, preventable disease.

Before he heads back, Cochrane will be speaking at the Chilliwack Public Library as well as at various local elementary and high schools this week, where he'll share slides, and memories from his trip and perhaps even inspire

others to take action.

Cochrane hopes others will see that it doesn't take much to make a difference.

"It just started off as one big crazy idea that really took off," Cochrane said in a telephone interview from Victoria, his current home.

Just last year, Cochrane was a regular student

working towards finishing his degree in anthropology at the University of Victoria (UVIC). During his studies he had been corresponding with various pen pals through a non profit organization called RESPECT (Refugee Education Sponsorship Program Enhancing Communities Together).

## QUOTE:

"Most would be surprised by how little they know about the disease. Most seem to think that it comes from the West and have various misconceptions about how they can catch it. Some are even afraid of using condoms as they think they cause it. The information just isn't there."

Logan Cochrane

The letters made him aware of the lack of basic knowledge that those living in Africa have of

See **AFRICA**, Page 3

# Cochrane developed basic AIDS/HIV manual

AFRICA, from page 1

AIDS, a disease that was claiming millions of lives.

"Most would be surprised by how little they know about the disease," said Cochrane. "Most seem to think that it comes from the West and have various misconceptions about how they can catch it. Some are even afraid of using condoms as they think they cause it. The information just isn't there."

Although he had never studied the disease, Cochrane felt he could help.

His contribution—the creation of a basic AIDS/HIV manual geared towards ESL (English as a Second Language) students.

It wasn't long before his manual was picked up by RESPECT and distributed to partner schools around the world.

With the success of his manual Cochrane thought why not go to Africa himself where he could teach and distribute them in person.

But first, he'd needed a game plan.

His solution—start up a youth led program called Working to Empower (WTE), an HIV/AIDS refugee education program designed to empow-

er sustainable community-based change.

The focus of WTE is the promotion of HIV/AIDS education through seminars and community-wide outreach sensitization work, led by youth.

Cochrane and a team of educators train individuals living in refugee camps and provide them with reliable information about protection from contracting the disease.

For their work, the participants from the camps are paid a small incentive.

Although Cochrane had known of the poverty and devastation beforehand, nothing could have fully prepared him for what he was about to encounter.

Cochrane had never thought twice before about throwing away a banana peel.

That was until he watched a little boy at one of the camps pick one off the ground and devour it.

"He was so hungry. Watching him it was just one of those things that really hits you hard," Cochrane said.

Cochrane's most rewarding experience occurred while teaching at a seminar in Northern Uganda.



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**In a camp in Tanzania, Logan Cochrane trains a group of refugees to become peer educators on AIDS/HIV.**

A refugee in his mid 50s expressed his disapproval with the seminar and

WTE goals, fearing that their presence would lead to increased sexual activity.

By the end of the meeting, he had changed his mind.

"He listened to what we had to say and told us he wanted to be an educator and help educate others about AIDS. It's responses like that which really make it all worthwhile."

With the success of his last trip, Cochrane is already planning to return in February.

On Jan. 17 at 7 p.m., Cochrane will be speaking at the Chilliwack Public Library to share his plan of setting up a new home for children living with AIDS/HIV as well as to build several AIDS/HIV resource centres.

An estimated 2 million adults and children died as a result of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa last year. Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 15 million Africans have died from AIDS.

Working to Empower is a community-based project which relies on small-scale, community-centred financial support. For more information about Working to Empower or to donate visit [www.workingtoempower.org](http://www.workingtoempower.org).

# Students learn impact of HIV-AIDS in Africa

**Katie Robinson**  
*The Progress*

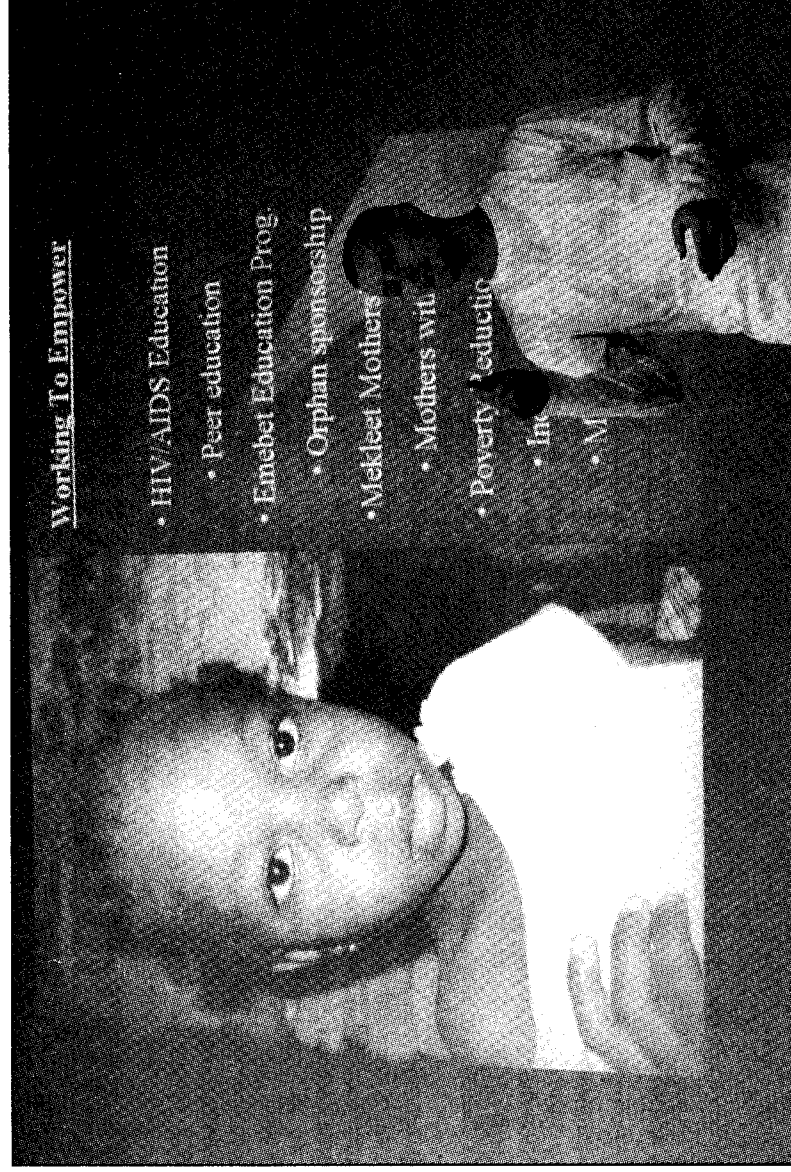
Logan Cochrane is bringing HIV-AIDS awareness to Africa, and Africa awareness to Chilliwack.

Cochrane — a former student of Chilliwack Senior secondary — spent the week educating Chilliwack's students about what it's like to live in Africa. He presented a slide show to eight schools — elementary, middle and secondary — that showed the sad faces of orphaned children who have lost parents to HIV-AIDS and who, themselves, are infected with the virus.

"I think it's important, because it gets kids thinking," said 22-year-old Cochrane, founder and director of Working To Empower, an organization raising awareness about HIV-AIDS in Africa.

"When I was in high school I had no clue about any of this stuff and I think that's typical — [students are] not being taught about it."

Since its inception in 2005, Working To Empower has become a vibrant, youth-led organization that has connected with over 100,000 people in the African region. It mainly focuses its education on the youth realm of things, providing fun seminars so that



**Logan Cochrane, with Working to Empower, shows a slide show to Chilliwack Senior students about HIV/AIDS education for people in Africa.** JENNA HAUCK/PROGRESS.

educators get together for a game for education and then finish the of soccer. They play the first half of the game. It's done drama education, acting out short plays to draw a

crowd. And it's shown hours of music videos — totally unrelated to HIV-AIDS — cutting in half way through for an hour or two of HIV-AIDS education.

"There are 14,000 people a day who are newly infected," said Cochrane. "And just about 50 per cent of that are youths aged 15 to 24."

"The hardest thing is to start a conversation about HIV-AIDS — there is such a stigma attached to it. These seminars are just a fun way of getting the message out."

And the message that Cochrane brought with him to the Chilliwack schools is that these people are so unfortunate, they don't have the opportunities people in Canada do, they need help.

Six of the schools Cochrane visited participated in Working To Empower's Canadian Schools \$1 Drive. Each student brought a \$1 donation, which will be pooled with other schools efforts and later be used to buy a house for orphaned children in Ethiopia living with HIV-AIDS.

For more information or to donate visit the Working To Empower website at [www.workingtoempower.org](http://www.workingtoempower.org). [krobinson@theprogress.com](mailto:krobinson@theprogress.com)