



TRAVIS GRAVETTE

GLOBAL SUPPORT MISSION

☛ MOST PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF MALARIA—enough so to be prepared with plenty doxycycline before embarking on tropical adventures. But few realize that every year malaria causes 1 to 3 million deaths in sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of which are children younger than 5 years old. For Travis Gravette, one Christmas spent in Uganda during his senior year of college in 2004 was enough to decide his career path and lead him to start Global Support Mission two years later.

In the three years since GSM was founded, Gravette, 26, has divided his time between two homes: Kyenjojo District in western Uganda and downtown Nashville, Tenn., where the offices are located. After spending a month with a grassroots Ugandan community-based organization called Bringing Hope to the Family, led by a woman named Faith, he experienced some of the challenges faced by the local community—even eating the same meals, which sometimes meant only tea and bread. Yet the local community's efforts struck him the most on that first trip and still inspire GSM. "Seeing what the locals were already doing to change their community inspired me to think, how can we better support them?" Gravette says.

GSM answers that question: They support local organizations in East Africa by helping them stabilize and become more self-sufficient through their leadership training and finances for projects, such as digging the

wells that locals will build and maintain. On U.S. soil, people are encouraged to take part through Know.Think.Act., an online community that connects people to the needs of the world. Through it, they creatively raise money, and all of it goes directly to the needs that were chosen, allowing locals to enact the change.

But the road hasn't been an easy one. Gravette's voice becomes quieter as he recalls the friends he's lost to HIV/AIDS and malaria. It's believed that one person dies of malaria every 30 seconds—an astonishing figure considering that the disease is preventable with an insecticide-treated mosquito net. Sadly, only one in 20 Africans own a net. "Our mosquito net initiative is what we're going to push next," he says.

After returning from a recent trip to Uganda and launching straight into fundraising benefit dinners and talks—while still jetlagged—it's clear what motivates him. "On this last trip I got to spend some time with John, one of my favorite kids," he says. "He was one of the first orphans Faith took in. He is now the number-one student in the district and is on his way to becoming a doctor.

"Long-term community development that's going to last has to happen from the inside out. They're the heroes." **4**

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