

The Great Water Race

Nancy Weber, Teacher, Sedgewick Seventh-day Adventist School, Sedgewick, AB

According to a Foster Parents Plan brochure "more than one billion people around the world don't have access to safe water close to their homes." And more staggering than that is the reality that 9,500 children die each day from a lack of safe water, or from diseases caused by contaminated water.

As I read these sobering thoughts from a Foster Parents Plan brochure, it touched my heart, and I began wondering what I could do to help. And then I read a story in the January, 2001 issue of Reader's Digest called Ryan's Well. In the story, 6-year-old Ryan helped raise money to build a well for children in Africa who did not have clean water. I knew then that I wanted to do something with my students to make a difference in the lives of other children in Benin, West Africa.

I researched more thoroughly, put up a bulletin board in the church, and dramatically presented my idea during children's story time. I told them the story in brief about Ryan and explained about the project in Benin. I asked the children if they would like to take part. I had an overwhelming response. For every ten dollars raised they would get to put one 'brick' on our 'well'. That next week my students picked up pledge forms and began seeking sponsors. The money started coming in and the 'well' started growing. I was getting more excited as the days went by. The local newspaper office was notified and they said they would send out a reporter on the day of the event. The date was set for June 10.

With ideas from Foster Parents Plan and the assistance of my husband, we planned a relay obstacle course that was to resemble the rough terrain that many people have to cross to get water. The day arrived--sunny and warm. Twelve children



and a few adults arrived to help fill a 'well'. Water had to be carried in a pail on their heads from the 'well' bucket, through rubber tires and across a 'bridge'. The ages of participants ranged from a three-year-old to twelve-year-olds. The excitement intensified as one team raced to fill their 'well' before the other team. There were shouts of laughter and encouragement as the race neared its end. It was almost a tie as the last participant emptied his bucket into the 'well'. We had a few wet bodies and lots of smiling faces. In total we had raised over \$900.

Thousands of elementary students across Canada learned first-hand how hard it is to carry a bucket of water while climbing over rocks, jumping through tires or even walking a straight line. They also learned how precious clean water is, particularly for children in developing countries. Canadian students raised

more than \$35,000 through the Great Water Race. With the money raised, Foster Parents Plan helped to build a water tower in Gnizoume, Benin. Dieudonné Adoh, secretary of the village development committee of Gnizoume says, "The water tower project is something everybody is grateful about because the problem with the water was one of the most serious problems in our village." Today, more than 550 families in the village can get clean water from the tower, a short walk from their homes. How thankful we were that we could help in some small way!

References

- Carol Wilding, *National Direct, Foster Parents Plan*, November 5, 2001.
- Kathy Cook, *Reader's Digest*, "Ryan's Well", Vol. 158, January 2001.