

Alum Spotlight

KAITLYN MALONEY, '06

Kaitlyn Maloney (2006) has always been one to give back. "My four years at Incarnate Word Academy nurtured my passion for service and a commitment to doing my part to make the world a better place," she recounts. Kaitlyn completed an undergraduate degree in Public Health at Truman State University and then did an internship in rural South Africa, where "I knew a career in global public health was the way I would make my impact," she said.

After graduating, she continued her education by getting a Master's degree in Public Health with a focus in monitoring and evaluation from George Washington University. While there, she had the opportunity to study in Bangladesh and work on a large research study in Malawi. "Now, seven years after graduating from Incarnate, I've landed in a great organization where my passion for service and public health has combined. I am the Managing Director for an amazing nonprofit organization," she reports. She's working in her fourth country in four years, this time in Uganda, where she leads the in-country staff and health programs for Uganda Village Project. Uganda Village Project works in Iganga District, a rural area in Eastern Uganda with high poverty rates and poor health outcomes.

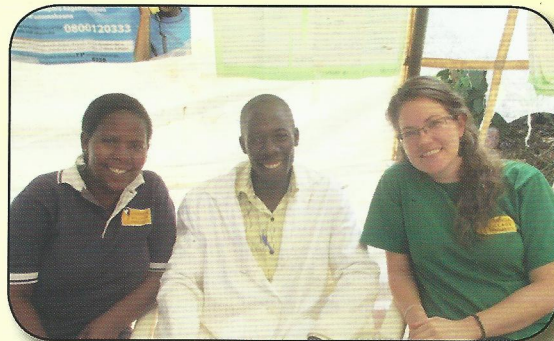
"Latrine coverage and access to safe water in the villages we work in are some of the lowest in the country, which has many health implications," Kaitlyn says. Communities in Iganga struggle with health issues we don't think about in the US—including protecting their children from malaria and severe diarrheal disease and worrying about how to safely give birth in an area without quality health facilities. Uganda Village Project addresses these problems and more by working with five new villages each year to provide an

assortment of health interventions, including HIV testing and counseling, education about hygiene and sanitation, mosquito net distribution, and

reproductive health education and services. They conduct these interventions through the hard work of Village Health Team (VHT) members, who are elected by the community and have basic knowledge to encourage their neighbors to make healthier choices for themselves and their families. "Without VHTs, our work would be impossible. They are

the critical link connecting villagers to health education and services." Kaitlyn explains. Uganda Village Project also works in partnership with communities and the District Water Office to build shallow wells so villages can have safe water to drink, and they facilitate repair surgeries for women who have obstetric fistula, a childbirth injury caused by obstructed labor that results in constant and uncontrollable leakage of urine—a devastating and stigmatizing condition.

It's a long way from St. Louis to Iganga, but Uganda Village Project has benefitted by partnerships with many people in the US. "We have a summer internship program where university students live and work in the village partnering with the Village Health Team and UVP staff to collect baseline data for our programs, lead health education sessions, and mobilize the community to participate in UVP



programs" says Kaitlyn. "I would highly encourage young alumni interested in public health to read more and apply on our website. It was an intern-

ship very similar to this one that jump started my career in public health." Additionally, Uganda Village Project is almost entirely funded by donations from individuals and runs a special holiday gift campaign each December. "The gift donation of mosquito nets for a family or a fistula repair surgery is a unique one with lasting impacts. Last year, we even had a former intern whose family pooled the money they would usually spend on gifts to donate a shallow well that now provides over eighty households with safe, clean water." Kaitlyn reports.

When asked whether she ever thought she would be managing a nonprofit just seven years after high school graduation, Kaitlyn says, "I've talked about and imagined my life doing grassroots fieldwork in public health and now my thoughts and words are reality. I'm so grateful that I have found a field I am so passionate about and an organization that aligns with my personal goals and values. It's incredibly fulfilling to know I am making a difference." It's not always easy, but Kaitlyn says it's rewarding to be part of an organization where you can see the immediate impact of building a well or facilitating surgery for a woman who suffered from fistula. Protecting communities against disease, providing safe water for families, and healing women without hope is all in a day's work for Kaitlyn and her colleagues at Uganda Village Project.

Uganda Village Project facilitates community health and well-being in rural Uganda through improved access, education, and prevention. You can learn more or support their work at www.ugandavillageproject.org.