

Dear Mr. Vanderzalm:

I would like to thank you for the experience of the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit. Not only did the exhibit alarm me to the challenges facing today's world, but it compelled me to do something to help. Beyond the bubble of Lake Oswego, the outside world is not a picturesque place. An abundance of suffering plagues our world, and we *must* do everything in our power to bring relief to those in need. My classmates and I viewed the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit because we are working on a unit about developing empathy for others. As I walked through the rooms in the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit I went through a series of combating emotions: first pity, then deep, flooding sadness, horror, anger, even guilt. The anger came when I entered Northern Uganda. *How could human beings commit these merciless crimes to one another? Could this really be happening?* For a moment or two, I felt completely powerless and alone. My feet moved on impulse towards the wall where rescued children had drawn pictures of their experiences in the LRA. Tears welled in my eyes as I read about the boy who was forced to beat his own father to death. I tasted salt, and felt as if someone had punched me in the stomach. Right then, I knew that I wanted to give to these children. Physically, emotionally, and mentally shattered, these innocent boys and girls needed my help.

If I was given \$100,000 in funds, I would stop the use of children as pawns of war, and protect children in Uganda from the horrifying warfare. Reading the stories of former African child soldiers gripped my heart and reeled me into their disturbed worlds. When I read about a 16-year-old girl who was forced to work as a sex slave to militia leaders, and a 13-year-old boy whose two brothers were beaten to death in front of him, my perspective on life changed. I realized how over-privileged I am, and how I must reach out to those in need. Sending relief to these nations is urgent. We must begin now before a thousand more lives are corrupted, and a thousand more children are robbed of a decent chance at life. Because we can not directly interfere with the LRA, we must instead work around them to help those in need. The horror is not over after these young people are able to escape or return "home". My plan is to help with the aftermath of these disasters. There are four main goals I hope to focus on:

- 1) To spread the word about child soldiers to other teens and to alert the U.S. government about this growing issue.
- 2) To send medical supplies to victims of the Lord's Resistance Army.
- 3) To send school supplies to children who have been rescued from the LRA.
- 4) To provide counselors and psychotherapists for former child soldiers.

I would divide the money systematically, spending \$40,000 on health care relief, \$30,000 on school supplies, and \$30,000 to provide counselors. The health care relief money would be spent on supplies, and airfare for volunteers who cannot fund themselves. A medical kit containing antiseptic, burn treatment, sanitary

equipment, saline drip sets, thermometers, and other important medicine costs approximately \$1,000 to put together and send. Water purification indicators cost only \$1-3 to be built, and we should invest in shipping them to Ugandan villages. The educational fund of \$30,000 would go towards putting together supply packages, and sending them to African schools that are in desperate need. It is imperative that children in poorer nations (especially those returning from "serving" in armies) receive an education. I would use the remaining \$30,000 to employ and send trained professionals into African nations where they are most needed. These psychologists would work with escaped child soldiers to patch together what's left of their torn lives. By writing letters to my congressmen, and talking with the student council at my school, I plan to locally make a difference by spreading the word to other teens in my community. The more aware of these global issues, the more compelled teens will be to help.

In conclusion, the \$100,000 in funds, *must* go towards protecting children from horrifying warfare where they don't belong. This global issue has begun to chip away at my heart, and I will not rest until I have done something to stop it. I know it will not be easy, and relief will not happen overnight, but I am ready to help. I dream of a day where seven year-olds are not forced to carry guns, and are not corrupted into mindless killing machines. I dream of a world where children can *a/ways* find refuge and safety, and can escape from lives of suffering. I dream of a tomorrow where I have made a difference.

Thank you for considering my thoughts and taking the time to read my letter,

Sincerely,

Celeste Nahas
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