

Aspen sees 'Invisible Children'

Local high schoolers host film, day of silence for Ugandan children

By John Colson
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ASPEN — They are called "Invisible Children," and they are the kids in Uganda who are dragooned into serving as soldiers in a war they don't understand, much less support.

Aspen High senior Andy MacCracken and junior Macy Margolin sell tickets to "Invisible Children" at the Gondola Plaza in Aspen on Sunday. (Paul Conrad/The Aspen Times)



Their plight has spawned an international movement of aid and comfort, as well as a documentary film by the same name. In fact, it was the three San Diego men who made the film that founded the movement.

Now, the movement has come to Aspen, for three screenings of "Invisible Children: The Loss of Innocence," this week at the District Theater at Aspen Elementary School - at 7 p.m. Tuesday, and 5 and 7 p.m. Wednesday. Tickets are \$10 per person.

Local businesses donated items for a silent auction, and a troupe of high school dancers will perform at the district theater just before the screenings. And in a separate bid to raise money to help the children, an unknown number of students and teachers will be unnaturally quiet for an entire day next month.

The group engaged in all this activity is the Action in Africa club, which is in its first year. Haley Kaufman, a junior who recently took a trip to Kenya with the Free the Children organization and became aware of the horrific circumstances children in the region face, founded the club.

Caught in the vice of a civil war between the Ugandan government and a warlord's militia, the Lord's Resistance Army, as many as 50,000 children are abducted each year and forced to become soldiers.

Some, as the documentary titled "Invisible Children" depicts, try to avoid capture by the LRA, which has refined the kidnappings into one of its main recruiting tools. It is these resisters whom the Action in Africa club hopes to help.

The money the club raises goes to Free the Children for use, in part, to expand a school that many see as a critical resource in keeping kids out of the hands of the militia.

In an excerpt from the movie, on the club's website (actioninafrica.tripod.com), social studies teacher and club sponsor Lance Finkbeiner has written, "Children have no place in war. The prevention of children soldiers involves raising standards of living, promoting world harmony, and pursuing laws which protect the innocent. ... This arduous task involves lessening world poverty, promoting education and employment opportunities, securing food and water supplies, and signing and accepting international laws which protect children."

It was after Kaufman and classmate Sarah Nininger saw a news item about the plight of children in Uganda last summer that they decided to start the club, Nininger said. Finkbeiner agreed to be the club's sponsor, and before too long it had taken on a life of its own.

It is now 130 students strong, which Finkbeiner said is the largest club in the district's history, and it has raised so much money it is independent of the school district.

"We're too big and passionate about this for it to be part of the school district," quipped Nininger, who will be part of the dance team performing Tuesday and Wednesday.

In addition to the film showings and silent auction, from midnight on March 1 to midnight on March 2, a number of students and teachers will be observing a vow of silence, also to raise money for the children of Uganda.

"It allows us to give a voice to those who are normally unheard," declared freshman club member Lyndsey Jackson.

Jackson, Nininger and Finkbeiner all spoke movingly about the kids they hope to benefit through their work, by they also joked about the upcoming vow.

"I'm probably gonna wear duct tape," Finkbeiner remarked after the two girls expressed disbelief that he could be silent for 24 hours.

"I'll probably turn my phone and my computer over to my parents," Nininger admitted with a grimace.

They said that reading assignments will probably take up the classes where

teachers and students are observing silence.

"The whole school's pretty fired up," Finkbeiner said.

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