

## No tourists in 'real Africa,' Sussex woman says

### **HAMPTON - Donna Spalding does most of her best work outside of luxury**

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Submitted Photo

Donna Spalding, second from left, spent three weeks in Africa setting up a literacy program. With her are some of the people she trained to implement the program.

The Hampton woman recently returned from a three-week stay in Africa, where she used her skills as a retired UNBSJ teacher to set up a literacy program.

She developed the curriculum for the underprivileged women there based on a model provided by the Hampton Alliance for Lifelong Learning.

The program material for her project was donated by the Hampton alliance and Jean Peters, executive director of Read Saint John's adult literacy tutoring organization, provided the half dozen books she left behind in Africa for a successful program to flourish.

Spalding said she trained instructors who will use her program to educate African children.

"Many of the young girls and women there can't read, write or count, yet they are very proud and dignified people," she said.

Spalding travelled overseas on an international assignment with the Canadian Executive Services Organization, a non-profit group that posts professionals in a variety of fields to impoverished regions to help build independent communities. The organization bases its service on the volunteer efforts of people such as Spalding who serve as mentors, adviser and trainers to promote development, build economic capacity and support sustainable business.

Every year CESO completes about 1,500 assignments in collaboration with Canadian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients, as well as those with mandates internationally. As a volunteer adviser, Spalding's expenses were covered but she received no salary. This is the second posting she accepted as part of CESO, the first being in the winter of 2008 when she was posted to Russia.

Spalding is also an author of the 2006 book *Roots, Wings and Other Things*, reflecting her own family's experience with transracial adoptions. She also used to operate a research business and from that experience helped complete a strategic plan for non-profit organizations while in Africa and helped establish an early childhood education program there.

"On average, where I was the girls are pregnant by age 13," Spalding said.

While she was in the country, she stayed in a secure Baptist compound.

"I felt like I got to see the real Africa, where there are no classes. Everyone was poor. You would never see tourists there," she said, adding nearly all people lived in extreme poverty with little access to education.

"There was such a lack of access to health, education and employment, and there is such political unrest," the mother of eight children explained. "It costs \$80 a year to go to public school there, which most people just can't afford."

Spalding said she has travelled many parts of the globe helping with projects as they become available. For example, as a UNBSJ teacher, in the earlier 2000s, she spent three months teaching English in China for UNBSJ.

She said her passion is travel, but sitting on a cushy resort is not her preference. "These assignments certainly make your life interesting," she said. "I try to do something like this about once a year.

"I like being in different cultures. You learn a lot about different countries and the people in it," she said. "It can be very hard on your head because you realize how much you have and how little others have, but I feel I am making a small difference."