

## St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

# SUPPORTING HOMELESS YOUTH IN UGANDA

As a young child in Uganda, Geoffrey Kyeyune was an orphan living in a war-torn and politically and economically devastated country. From any perspective, his future looked decidedly bleak. However, life offered him an opportunity that neither he nor his peers could have ever imagined or hoped for. He was taken into care by a religious nun who saw to it that he was properly cared for and ensured that the way was opened to allow him to gain the best education available. With her strong support, Geoffrey completed a university education, graduating as a qualified social worker.

From an early age, the impact of the very special opportunity that had come his way led Geoffrey to develop a passion for a life of helping others – particularly homeless youth. He wanted others to experience the sort of help that had turned his life around. In the early 1990s Geoffrey began reaching out to needy young people. At that time, the civil strife and turmoil the country was going through saw many young people living on the streets and in desperate need. In 1992 the Rubaga Youth Development Association (RYDA) was established as a community-based organisation. From its small beginnings, RYDA has grown to where it is now a registered NGO (Non-Government Organisation) which operates three centres and assists over 500 children and youth. 154 of these youth are involved in a residential program; the balance are supported to attend formal primary and secondary education or participate in daily training programs at a "community house". Through these programs, RYDA assists marginalized young people to rise above their circumstances, reach toward their potential and find ways to build more 'complete' and successful lives.

The programs aim to empower young people to succeed by offering general education, worship & scripture - training, music and sports programs, agricultural experience and life-skill & vocational training. Sometimes it is also possible to find donors who will sponsor suitable students to go on to university. Whilst the focus is primarily on children and youth, the Community House Training Programs are also open to any members of the community, and are having a significant influence on the broader community.

RYDA's motto is "All people have the opportunity to develop within an enabling environment". St Margaret's involvement with RYDA stems from a chance meeting of two men in San Diego (USA) in 1996. Doug Williams was on a business trip and happened to meet Geoffrey at the breakfast table at the local YMCA. They got talking together. As Geoffrey talked about his charity work and the need to raise funds for the on-going work of RYDA, Doug felt moved to ask if there was any way that his local church in Mooroolbark could perhaps offer help. When he arrived home and spoke to his minister Rev. Lesley Shekleton, a small beginning was initiated – and a lasting association began. Geoffrey has visited St. Margaret's on several occasions over the years, and the local congregation has been able to provide considerable support.

In February 2010 RYDA received a grant to support a 22-month program relating to eliminating child labour. This offer came from ILO/IPEC, an arm of the United Nations, who will provide a total of US \$66,000 for a pilot program as long as certain conditions are met. One condition was that RYDA had to raise a total local contribution of \$9,000 over the life of the project and \$3000 of that had to be in the bank by February 14th of that year. At the time they only had access to about \$1500. When the congregation at St. Margaret's heard about this new need, they immediately gave Geoffrey a commitment that this amount would be met, and have since undertaken that the balance of the \$9000 will never be in doubt. At time of writing around \$6000 has been transferred, made up from many donations from in and outside St. Margaret's. The congregation is continuing to work towards completing the \$9000 promise.



Geoffrey Kyeyune & son, Solomon

With help from RYDA this project will ensure that 333 children are prevented from entering into child labour situations and a further 167 will be withdrawn from existing work placements. In addition to all of this, RYDA is implementing an "Integral Mission" (Community Development Program) which uses church leaders to bring both the spiritual and the physical aspects of life together in helping to develop an entire community. They work with a community helping to improve living conditions, to develop community leaders and to facilitate meaningful communication within the community. RYDA has the very clear goal of developing sustainable improvement through the ongoing, 'generational' training of community leaders.

The writer found it very encouraging to meet Geoffrey's son, Solomon, who has just completed his secondary schooling and is planning to study economics at tertiary level. Already, Solomon is talking about his desire and passion to follow in his father's footsteps – not working for his father, but finding an equally effective way himself to make a significant difference in the lives of needy people in his developing homeland of Uganda. With this generational commitment to serving the needy, it would seem assured that the people of Uganda can look forward to a brighter future.

Like to know more about RYDA and St Margaret's involvement? Please go to the website at [www.blackdouglas.com.au/ryda](http://www.blackdouglas.com.au/ryda) or call Doug Williams on 9726 6968.

## FREE FAMILY FILM NIGHT

### All WELCOME

Come along to Mooroolbark  
Community Centre

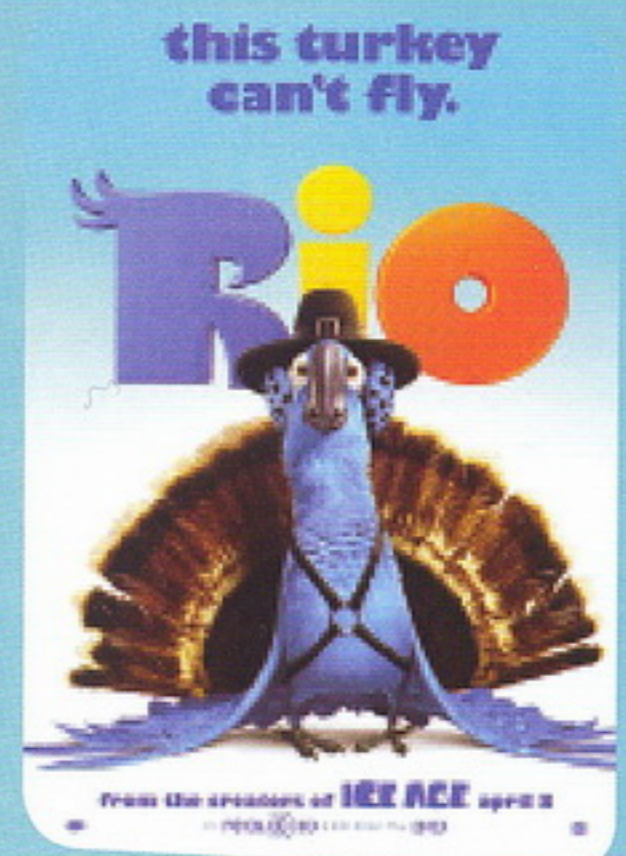
**Wednesday July 6<sup>th</sup>  
2011**

**"Rio"**

Commences at 7:30 p.m.  
Free ice-cream, tea & coffee  
will be available.

This school holidays program  
is a joint community service  
extended to young families in  
our neighbourhood by

**Mooroolbark Christian  
Fellowship & Mooroolbark  
Community Centre**



Please visit or contact Mooroolbark Community Centre to  
**reserve your seats phone 9726 5488**

Tickets may be reissued if not collected by 7:15, and if there is a wait list.