

## 2008 Harriet Tubman Award Winner

### Friends of Orphans | Uganda

#### A Child Born of Trouble

Anywar Ricky Richard calls himself a child born of trouble. He has survived his share. Ricky and his brother were just 2 of 25,000 Ugandan children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army and forced into slavery as child soldiers. The 22 year old war is all that most of these children have ever known. The boys are forced to kill or be killed. Most of the girls are sex slaves. All of the children see and do what no child should ever experience.



#### Harriet Tubman Award

is given to a community-based organization that is demonstrating how slavery can be dismantled and destroyed. Named

after an escaped American slave who guided dozens of other slaves to freedom on dangerous missions that utilized the network of safe houses known as the Underground Railroad.



Few manage to escape with their lives, but Ricky did. Improbably, despite his self-described “interrupted childhood”, Ricky earned a college degree and got a good job working for the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports.

#### An Organization Born of Hope in a War Zone

But something was missing for Ricky. He returned to the war zone. Survivors act in plays about abductions. He turned his freedom into a lifeline for other child slaves. In 1999, Ricky and his friends started Friends of Orphans (FRO), an organization dedicated to empower and reintegrate former child soldiers into a society torn apart by atrocities the children were forced to commit.

**FRO impacts thousands of children and entire communities each year:**

**Pays school fees to get former child soldiers an education and a path to rejoin society.**

**Runs vocational and income generating programs**

**Conducts peer counseling and individual therapy**

**Carries out peace building projects**

**Organizes music, cultural and sports programs that heal spirits and bring communities together**

**Administers HIV and AIDS support programs; the overwhelming majority of children returning from the bush are HIV positive**





## Why Friends of Orphans Works

Ricky never had any organized help rejoining society. He had to deal on his own with the memory of seeing his family burned to death by the rebels and by his own actions as a child soldier. He knows the nightmares that interrupt the sleep of children. Ricky believes FRO is successful at rehabilitating these children because so many of the staff were child soldiers. It makes it easier for the children to confide their past and begin to heal. That trust allows for the most targeted, effective help. FRO offers the children a way to find hope once again.

## Danger

The work is dangerous. FRO operates in the Pader District, the most vulnerable part of northern Uganda. Ricky Richards hospitalized after ambushed by rebels. Until just a few years ago the larger, better known international NGOs did not venture into the district. It was too dangerous. FRO is the locally based group that was in this region before the big NGOs arrived and the community understands that FRO is here to stay. It is understandable that villagers surround Ricky and his colleagues anywhere they go these days. The villagers are begging for help with schools, medicine, landmines – the list never ends.

The countryside looks so beautiful and peaceful now. But in one short drive Ricky pointed out at least seven places where massacres and ambushes had occurred in the recent past. Including an ambush that killed one of his colleagues and almost killed Ricky.

## A Servant of Child Soldiers

When asked how he would like his work with FRO to be viewed, Ricky replies, “I do not wish to be recognized as a hero or as a prophet, but as a committed servant and advocate to end [the calamity of] child soldiers.”