

Lutheran Youth Profile:

Kendra Rinas

By Grace Hanson, Youth Trainer

The first in a series, the Lutheran Youth Profile, seeks to encourage, recognize and inspire Lutheran youth who are working for social change in their communities. Do you know a phenomenal youth activist? If so contact Grace at lpfyouth@yahoo.com or 206-720-0313.

While only a junior at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN, Kendra Rinas is well on her way to contributing to the positive change she wishes to see in the world.

She came to Gustavus, interested in participating on the cross-country ski team, but all of that soon changed after her first semester.

"As a freshman I took a class on the politics of homelessness," she said. "As part of it we had to sleep outside for a week as a simulation that would give us a taste of homelessness. Although we could go back to our comfortable dorm rooms at the end of the week, it gave us an idea of how hard it was."

This taste of injustice catapulted Kendra into activism on homelessness, poverty and hunger issues. She changed her majors to political science and religion with a peace studies minor and got involved with a campus organization called ASAP - Action Supporting All People.

At Gustavus ASAP has organized clothing and food drives and does a lot of basic awareness on campus about issues left out of the mainstream media. Last year they organized weekly vigils before the war where they stood in the center of town to show support for peace.

"It was neat for us to see students, faculty, high schoolers and community members get together in support of peace," Kendra said.

Another turning point in her life was a study abroad trip to Uganda last fall. During her semester abroad Kendra found the most rewarding time was when she tried to fully understand the experiences of the people.

"While other students had internships I attempted to live like the people I was there to learn about," she said. "I found that this was key to understanding people's issues." So Kendra went to live in a rural village, built a mud hut and even got dysentery.

In the future Kendra might take a year off from school and go back to volunteer and work for justice issues like hunger in Uganda. After college she thinks she might like to work at an NGO that addresses the basic human needs of survival. Her experiences have led her to give other youth interested in peace activism the following advice:

"One of the things that has really driven me is trying to put yourself in other people's shoes. Trying to understand what it feels like to be homeless, even for only a week. Or try to live in the way that the majority of the world lives, than you get fired up. I think you have to focus on what needs to be done."

Contact Grace at lpfyouth@yahoo.com with your suggestions for the next Lutheran Youth Profile.

Kendra Rinas and one of the boys from the village in Uganda.

