

# PRESS RELEASE



CÉGEP  
VANIER COLLEGE

821 Ste-Croix, Montreal, QC H4L 3X9 Tel: 514.744.7500 Fax: 514.744.7505 info@vaniercollege.qc.ca www.vaniercollege.qc.ca

February 25, 2008

## **From Montreal to Malawi: Vanier teachers and students learn about AIDS**

For six students, one teacher and two staff members from Vanier College it was the trip of a lifetime: three weeks in Malawi living with the villagers of tiny Makupo and learning firsthand about the impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa. “I thought I was prepared for my trip to Malawi,” says Vanier Nursing teacher, Melodie Hicks. “However nothing prepares you for the warmth, love and giving spirit of these people or the level of poverty in which they are forced to live ... yet never once did I hear a raised voice or a complaint.”

Making a small rural community their home gave the students the basis for their understanding of the pandemic. While the villagers were welcoming and warm, their means were severely limited - Malawians are amongst the poorest citizens of the world - and HIV/AIDS had had devastating consequences. Highlights in the village stay included dances performed by groups of men and women, a birthday party organized by our students for one of Makupo’s children, and a final farewell party including songs in ChiChewa performed by several Vanier students with their Malawian resource people.

Almost immediately after their arrival the students started their research. Hospitals, orphanages, politicians, people living with AIDS, testing centres, traditional healers, the senior chief, teachers, students, and the people of Makupo all became resources for the students. The Malawians were open and forthcoming, even to the point of offering information about their own HIV status. Every evening the students shared their learning and planned the next day. The group also met two well-known Malawian politicians, Aleke Banda and Justin Malewezi, who inspired the students with their own work in combating HIV/AIDS.

Initiated by the Vanier International Education Service, this trip was the highlight of a Canadian International Development Agency’s (CIDA) funded project, *The Engagement of Youth in Canada’s combat against HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa* that Vanier obtained in March, 2007. As part of the continuing CIDA project, the students will share what they have learned about AIDS and about life in Africa with their Vanier fellow students and with high school students.

Prita Chabra, of Vanier’s Music Department shares her insights, “I went to Africa to follow the feeling in my heart, not really knowing where it would lead me. I was convinced that the reason I had to go was to make a difference in the world. By going to Africa, I expanded my awareness as an individual and that in turn has indeed made a difference - a difference in me, and for that, I am forever thankful.”

-30-