

Rainbow World Fund Announces Summer Relief Efforts

By Dennis McMillan

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From the halls of Congress to the mountains of Guatemala to the heart of the Castro, the Rainbow World Fund (RWF) has announced a busy summer schedule of relief and fundraising efforts, and they want queer people to participate. Their mission stresses the importance of LGBT people being a voice for other oppressed people around the world. The San Francisco-based nonprofit, a leading LGBT charity supporting relief efforts worldwide, returned from Washington, D.C. earlier this month, where ten RWF volunteers lobbied on Capitol Hill for increased funding for relief efforts in the developing world and met with senators and representatives from California, Florida, and Oregon.



RWF 2005 Guatemalan Humanitarian Aid Trip

"The trip to D.C. was an incredible opportunity for RWF's team of volunteers to learn how to advocate for important causes and make a difference at the local, national, and international levels," said RWF Executive Director Jeff Cotter. He said they focused on three key issues: opposing cuts to vital humanitarian and development programs; supporting elimination of the earmark that one-third of U.S. HIV prevention funding must be used for; altering the Bush administration's unrealistic abstinence-until-marriage programs for HIV prevention; and raising support for a Senate bill providing relief for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"Our work on Capitol Hill focused on helping those most in need. Sadly, 1.1 billion people around the world still live on less than a dollar a day," said Cotter. "Our community's experience with HIV has taught us that we cannot wait for others to lead. If we want to see positive change in the world we must act. The LGBT community can play an important role in advocating for other communities in need."

In July, RWF is organizing an aid mission to Guatemala. Last year, more than a dozen LGBT volunteers joined Cotter and the RWF on a Guatemalan trip that mixed humanitarian visits to health clinics, water projects, and orphanages with more traditional tourist destinations such as the colonial city of Antigua, the bustling highland market town of Chichicastenango, and the ancient Mayan pyramids at Tikal.

Cotter said that a few spots are still available for an upcoming trip. Interested people can contact RWF to learn more. Destinations for this year's trip, which runs from July 29 to Aug. 6, include the beautiful Lake Atitlan area as well as meetings with Guatemalan civil rights activists, educators, health-care providers, and humanitarian aid groups who are struggling for social justice in the wake of Guatemala's 36-year civil war, which ended in 1996.

One group Cotter plans to meet again is OASIS, an LGBT organization based in Guatemala City. "Despite great personal sacrifice, OASIS is doing extraordinary work in the areas of HIV education/disease prevention and civil rights," he said.

In Cotter's view, the Guatemala trip is much more than just an ordinary tourist experience. "RWF volunteers will meet amazing Guatemalans fighting for social justice, and go to parts of the country that few visitors ever see," he said. "It's truly a once-in-a-lifetime journey."

To make the trip as beneficial as possible, RWF is actively seeking donations, and has set a goal of exceeding the 1,000 pounds of medicine, medical supplies, and educational supplies that RWF delivered to Guatemalan health clinics and orphanages last year. "The need for these supplies is huge, and we're going to bring as much with us as we can. We are also collecting funds for aid projects we support in Guatemala," said Cotter.

An additional summer initiative will take place a bit closer to home. After six years of operating as a

virtual organization with a website and a post office box, RWF is opening an office above Harvey's in the Castro.

"We're an all-volunteer organization, and our level of activity has increased dramatically in the past 24 months," said Cotter. "With an actual physical space, we believe we can do much more." To that end, RWF is asking for donations of office furniture, supplies, and funds.

Lastly, Cotter is traveling to Chicago in July for a ceremony where he will present America's Second Harvest, the nation's food bank network, a check for \$350,000 in recognition of funds that RWF raised and donated during the Hurricane Katrina crisis.

To find out more about RWF's summer plans, or to support RWF's relief efforts worldwide, go to [www.rwf.org](#) or call (415) 431-1485.