

Leader in HIV/AIDS Work Visits Tulane

February 17, 2010 12:45 PM Joseph Halm
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When the Tulane School of Social Work sends an international social work student to Tanzania in September, a familiar face will be waiting on the other end. Theresa Kaijage, who helps people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, visited Tulane recently to talk about her work in Africa.



Theresa Kaijage, right, talks with So'Nia Gilkey, left, assistant professor in the Tulane School of Social Work. Kaijage spoke at Tulane about her work with HIV/AIDS patients and families in Tanzania. (Photo by Joseph Halm)

Kaijage, founder of WAMATA, a nongovernmental organization that assists HIV/AIDS patients and families in Tanzania, has been working globally as a social worker for more than 25 years.

"She has a wealth of experience internationally as it relates to social work and public health issues, so it was very important to learn more about social work internationally," says So'Nia Gilkey, assistant professor in the [School of Social Work](#).

Kaijage, who began as a high school teacher and later became a Fulbright Scholar,

says when she founded WAMATA in 1989, HIV/AIDS was a new topic and one that didn't garner early funding.

"Even when we didn't have a penny in the budget, we had a support meeting," she said during the Feb. 11 visit to the uptown campus. "In the beginning, we are working with anyone who might have been affected by HIV and AIDS."

From those humble beginnings, Kaijage was able to obtain funding from the Clinton Foundation and the Global Fund to offer more services, but even with additional resources, the goal remained the same.

"When you see a smile in everyone who is on their death bed, that is why I do it," she said. "It teaches me that all of us have something to give even if the smile is the last thing that you give someone."

Kaijage added that although U.S. social work is more specialized and far-reaching in many cases than in Tanzania, information sharing is key in both her work and what is being done locally.

"You give us encouragement when you come," she told social work students who are preparing for international assignments. "You can teach us the best practices, and you'll take away something as well."

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