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Speaker shares story of Ugandan children

By Norman Miller / News Staff Writer

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Ugandan Cultural Dance Troupe Matia Ntege performing during the Wayside Youth & Family Support Network's Black History Month celebration held at Plymouth Church. (Photo by Milton Amador)

FRAMINGHAM -- When Herbert Kibuuka speaks about his homeland and the charitable organization he co-founded, he said he's not speaking for himself.

"The voice you are hearing is not my voice, it's the voice of the children of Uganda," said Kibuuka of the Child Care Mission -- Omega Foundation of Uganda. "I am blessed."

Kibuuka was the keynote speaker last night at the Wayside Youth & Family Support Network's Black History Month celebration held at Plymouth Church. A Boston College graduate student and a counselor at Wayside's Prescott Street Residential Program, Kibuuka was among several speakers and performers.

Members of Wayside programs performed readings, and Wayside Academy students presented what were called diversity art projects. A peace mural was also displayed.

David Nyanzi and the Great Lakes (Africa) Cultural Ensemble, an African drum and dance troupe, performed twice.

Also last night, president and CEO of Wayside, Eric Masi, announced a new partnership between Wayside and Child Care Mission.

"I met with Herbert about a year ago with one of my sons. It was basically a courtesy meeting," said Masi. "I was so taken. It was just interesting and informative. It was very compelling. It's very important."

The Child Care Mission's primary focus is helping orphaned Ugandan children. Many parents of the orphaned children have died of AIDS, leaving Uganda with 1.7 million orphans in a country of 23 million people, Kibuuka said.

Kibuuka said his country is relatively new, gaining independence from Britain in 1962. Since then wars have ravaged the country, although now is a time of relative peace.

"We are trying to define ourselves," said Kibuuka. "When you fight wars, you don't make money. We borrowed a lot of money, and we're very poor. We're trying to dig ourselves out."

Uganda is making gains in becoming a more stable country, Kibuuka said. The government has made it a law that all children must attend school between the ages of 6 and 13.

Also, HIV has begun to take a "reverse trend," Kibuuka said. There are still more than 2 million people infected with the disease.

The Child Care Mission takes part in several initiatives to help those who are poor. One of those projects is the Heifer Project where a family is given a cow, Kibuuka said.

He said it gives people both a means to make money and meaning in their lives. "The cow gives them milk to drink and milk to sell so they have money to buy sugar," said Kibuuka.

"When they have somewhere to go, they get right up. If they have nowhere to go, they don't want to get up. We give them a purpose. That's what the Heifer Project does."

Currently, Kibuuka is collecting books and school supplies to send to Uganda to help children without families have things they can use in school.

The Wayside Youth & Family Support Network was selling cards last night with original drawings from Ugandan children to help pay for shipping.

"I've been collecting books and we want to send them to those kids to give them a chance," said Kibuuka. "It's been so, so good."