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NAMIBIA

SUCCESS STORY

Sewing Uniforms, Sowing Dignity

Through grant, tailors help provide orphans with school clothing



Photo: AED/DK Lazell

Thanks to uniforms sewn by volunteer tailors, orphans can now join their peers at the Sauyemwa Primary School for class.

“This small project is proving to be a big success and we are very proud of our accomplishment,” said Magdalena Shihako, a parent in Namibia who volunteers with others to sew uniforms for orphans.

Telling Our Story
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Namibia’s orphans and vulnerable children are often unable to attend school due to a combination of factors, such as an inability to pay the school fund contribution or a lack of food (especially in the morning), resulting in some orphans begging for money or food at gas stations or markets instead of going to school.

Yet another reason is because orphans and vulnerable children frequently don’t have the uniforms needed to attend school. In fact, before the tailoring project started at the Sauyemwa Primary School, almost none of the 688 children there whom the Ministry of Education identified as orphans had uniforms.

Through a USAID-supported small grants program to the school, this is no longer the case. Principal Joseph Shininge, a few teachers, and members of the school board wrote a successful proposal to the program, seeking funding for a tailoring project. They used the funds to purchase sewing machines and fabric to make school uniforms, and to hire a local tailor to train community members, who now volunteer their services.

The project’s first goal was to provide uniforms to children in need, and the second was to bring funds back into the school program by selling uniforms. Within only two months, the first goal was accomplished - all 688 orphans in the school received uniforms! The volunteers also achieved their second goal: five parents trained by the volunteer tailor are making uniforms for nearby schools at a price parents can afford. The funds from the uniform sales are used to buy necessary supplies for the orphans, as well as to offset their school fees. Earnings also go into a fund to pay for much-needed textbooks and substitute teachers.

Through the dedicated and creative efforts of the Sauyema community, the project has produced a cascade of positive results. “This uniform is helping me to keep warm. Before I was cold and shy, because my clothes are not good and I don’t have a uniform. Now, I am happy and I wash my uniform every Friday when I come home,” said Fina Johannes, a 6th grade female pupil.