

Friends of Don Bosco

Introduction

Friends of Don Bosco is a local non-profit, non-governmental charitable organisation founded on June 16th, 1998, by a past pupil of Don Bosco, Evans Tegete, at Mafinga, Iringa region (Tanzania). The organisation, which was officially registered in 2001, takes care of orphans, street children and marginalised children, aiming to provide them not only with good education, but also trying to meet their emotional, social and material needs.

Friends of Don Bosco's mission is to provide relief to orphans and vulnerable children of any age, race or religious belief. Our vision is to enable the individuals to take responsibility for the future into their own hands and to live independently.

“Child welfare, staff commitment and partnership” is *Friends of Don Boscos*'s motto. We believe that helping the children is only possible if the staff is entirely committed and working in partnership together with the children.

There are various aims pursued by *Friends of Don Bosco*, the main aim being to improve the situation of marginalised youths by raising public awareness to the issue (we are conducting workshops, seminars and campaigns) as well as supporting them in obtaining education. Other aims include:

- Raising awareness about children who are affected by HIV/Aids and helping them through counselling and legal support.
- Maintaining a centre where homeless children can live.
- Involving children in leisure programmes such as singing, dancing, drama and sports in order to broaden their mind and discover their talents.

The Children

Most of the children supported by *Friends of Don Bosco* came to us on their own or were brought to us by concerned neighbours or guardians who had heard of our services. Others were brought to us by the local government or the Ministry of Social Welfare. They are aged between four and 25 years. While all the older youths go to school already, the younger ones are cared for by the older girls and visit our nursery school.

Not only orphans are supported by *Friends of Don Bosco*, but also children having lost one of their parents with the other one unable to take care of the child any more, marginalised children struck by poverty or disabilities with their parents unable to care for them, children living in the streets or who are engaged in domestic child labour. Therefore, it is required for the remaining parent or guardian to bring the following documents: the death certificate of one or both of the parents; a confirmation letter from the local authorities; a letter from the remaining parent or guardian to justify their disability; a letter from the child itself (if he/she can write already) explaining the situation he/she is in.

The Problems of Orphans, Street Children and Most Vulnerable Children

From our experience, there are certain problems present with most of the children we care for. These include:

- *Frustration* as a result of suspension from school (due to lacking school fees), being rejected by their parents or the community they lived in or being mistreated by their relatives which were supposed to take care of them (but instead saw them as a “burden”).
- *Psychological* difficulties: Many of the orphans and vulnerable children remember their history pretty well, which is sometimes full of inhumane treatment by superiors, such as:
 - Working as a house boy/girl with minimal or no salaries, being deprived of their rights

- Being raped or badly treated otherwise, forced to cope with the situation without any counselling or judicial support
- Being arrested by the police because of dubious allegations including being locked up and punished (because many people think that children living in the streets generally are “naughty” and “dangerous” children)
- Growing up without knowing any of their relatives and without anybody to care for them, thus looking into a future which does not seem worthwhile to them.
- Sometimes, there arise questions such as: “I don’t see the importance of living. Was I born to suffer? I’d better die rather than live.” Often, these feelings occur right after being expelled from school or rejected from their parents or guardians.
- *Holding the wrong idea* that being an orphan entitles them to get whatever they demand. Some orphans even show really poor behaviour if the organisation caring for them is not meeting their needs because it contradicts their principles.
- Children not being able to return to leading a “normal life”. Living at the orphanage together with other children peacefully is sometimes not possible for them, because living in the street has taught them to resolve to violence wherever conflicts occur or just run away to avoid punishment or responsibility.
- *Wrong information* about where the child comes from, how it’s called etc. is being told in a few cases. In each case we try our best to find out the truth and, if possible, to re-unite the child with its family.

Activities conducted

Apart from enabling the children to go to school and provide them with a home, *Friends of Don Bosco* is very active in supporting non-formal education programmes. We are conducting courses with topics such as Child Rights, Life and Facilitation Skills, Reproductive Health and HIV/Aids. These programmes not only target the children cared for by us, but also the broader public, by using a system called Training of Trainers (TOT). By training the trainers (i.e., those people who hold responsible positions in a community), we achieve to spread awareness to the abovementioned issues in the communities.

At the orphanage, we are running a nursery school, tuition classes and a form one preparation course. In January, 2009, we successfully started a QT class (which enables youths, especially the older ones, to receive an O’ level degree after just two years instead of four at a normal secondary school). Also, we conduct computer classes, drawing classes and various leisure time programmes.

There are many volunteers with different backgrounds and experiences involved in helping the orphanage. Some of them come to the centre every day or even stay over night, others are not able to come every day. There are eight teachers for the pre-form one course, nursery and QT programme coming to the centre regularly. All these teachers have to work completely voluntary, because there is no money to pay salaries. This is especially hard for the director, Evans Tegete, because he has to manage the whole organisation while also teaching at a private secondary school and studying at university.

Achievements

Since its establishment in 1998, *Friends of Don Bosco* can look back to many great achievements:

We are proud of many children successfully studying in Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools (both O’ and A’ level). One beneficiary even graduated from Dar es Salaam University in 2008, studying Mass Communication and Journalism.

In March 2002, an actual orphanage was established in Kimara Suca, which currently is the home for more than 40 children. The house and plot were donated by Mama Theresa V. C. J. Rodrigue through the Salesian Fathers of Don Bosco. Many of the other children supported by *Friends of Don Bosco* stay at boarding schools throughout the year and only return during the holidays, sometimes also visiting their remaining parent or other relatives. At present, we are supporting more than 120 children in total.

Still, in 2009, this house is the centre for carrying out most activities and the orphanage is still able to provide children with food, shelter, basic needs and enable them to go to school—all without a continuing donor or any people employed at the project. All staffs work on a completely voluntary basis without getting

any money. The centre has also attracted European volunteers from Denmark and Germany to help. There is a strict no-beating policy and the staff is seen by the children as fellow brothers and sisters, not as superiors.

Friends of Don Bosco has been very active in connecting different street children projects across Dar es Salaam to improve the situation of impoverished and marginalised children. It has gained reputation as a NGO which is very experienced in working with orphans and vulnerable children and is involved in discussion forums and workshops conducted by the Tanzanian government.

Many programs and workshops were conducted over the years on the topics of Child Rights Advocacy, Life and Facilitation Skills and Gender & Development in Dar es Salaam, Iringa and other parts of Tanzania.

Funding

Funding has always been a big problem of *Friends of Don Bosco*. We try to compensate some of the costs of running the centre by providing service to other people, such as offering a nursery school, offering non-formal education programmes, producing batik cloth, printing T-shirts, and also by trying to live self-sufficient (with chicken kept at the orphanage, and fields for growing vegetables).

In the past years, there have been many generous people and organisations supporting us. Banks like NBC or STANBIC donated money for school fees or renovation of the house some years ago. Food donations are also common and often come from individuals. The continuation of this organisation depends not only largely on the efforts of its founder and director, but also on his big monetary support.

In the past two years, however, Resolute Tanzania Ltd. has put huge efforts into helping us, supporting dozens of children with school fees and bus fares, paying electricity bills and supporting the centre in many other ways—for this we are very thankful. A few months ago, Barry Charles from the U.K. supported the renovation of the toilets, provided many children with school fees and also plans to fund a new house, which is to be built in Bunju, Dar es Salaam.

What we still lack is a continuing donor whom we can rely on. *Friends of Don Bosco* has never had a continuing donor and is thus forced to struggle hard and ask for money at different places. For the first half of the year, we were able to obtain enough money for paying all school fees, but the orphanage based in Kimara Suca is in severe need of funding, because very often there is no money available for food other than Ugali, sending the children to the doctor or buying clothes or toys for the children.

Future Plans

We are working on improving the effectiveness of the management, because at the moment we still have a lot of problems coordinating our work. Because of this, the director is currently studying Human Resource Management at university. As soon as we receive sufficient funding, we will employ a coordinator whose responsibility will be to manage and direct the teachers and volunteers, communicate with sponsors and do the paperwork.

Miscellaneous plans include to intensify TOT activity again this year, to expand the poultry and continue various other activities already conducted.

The first issue of *Friends of Don Bosco*'s own magazine, *Jicho Langu* ("My Eye"), is due to be printed in February. It gives a voice to vulnerable children and raises awareness about the topics which we are concerned about. The magazine, which is to be released in both English and Swahili language every two months, should become an institution for information about impoverished children living in Tanzania.

Friends of Don Bosco has very ambitious plans to expand the centre further. Through the generous support of Barry Charles and Paul Dingsbums we will be able to renovate the centre based in Kimara Suca (repairing the roof, fencing the whole area) and start to expand to Bunju and build another centre there.

The long-term plan is to change the current orphanage into a drop-in centre and separate the boys and girls. The girls are to live at a house (which is still to be bought) not far from the current orphanage, and the boys will be moved to the centre which is to be built in Bunju. This way, there will be enough space for all the children living at the centre, who at the moment have to share their beds (because there are just 22 beds and more than 40 children living in the house).