

## Para-Social Worker Training Helps Improve OVC Care in Dar es Salaam's Temeke District



Edithrose Moyo and Mohamed Shurkuru display a tee-shirt and pillow case designed and printed by Mohamed and three other boys at Nira. Moyo has already received an order for 300 shirts from a local church and hopes the project will provide much-needed job skills to the center's children, as well as income to help with operating expenses.

Mohamed Shurkuru is 18 years old, but with his slight frame, shy gaze, and soft-spoken manner he could easily pass for 12 or 13.

"When I was little, I remember that my mother was very sick. She would send me to a clinic in another district to get her TB medicine," Mohamed says. That was before she died, leaving him and his baby sister orphaned. "We lived with our grandmother for a while, but she was sick and became blind. It was very hard to get her the medicine she needed," he explains quietly.

"If it weren't for this place, I would have joined a gang and likely been involved in drugs," Mohamed admits.

He's talking about Nira Children and Youth Orphans Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the needs of orphans and vulnerable children and families in Dar es Salaam's Temeke District. Home to more than 1 million people, Temeke District is one of the poorest in the city, with untold thousands of children in desperate need of assistance and support.

"It is actually quite dangerous here, with gangs of children people call 'wild dogs' roaming the streets. If they come upon you alone, they will rob you of everything," says Edithrose Moyo, who founded Nira in 2005.

"I have lived in this area for many years and I have two children myself, so when I noticed more and more kids were joining these gangs rather than going to school, I began to talk with them to learn more about their problems," Moyo explains. "I wanted to help them cope with the traumas they had been through and, little by little, I began to gain their trust" she continues, noting that many were orphaned by HIV/AIDS, living in abject poverty, or abusive situations.

Occupying a small compound leased to the organization free of charge by Moyo's sister, Nira is now home to 30 children—some orphans and others whose family situations are so desperate that the children are unable to live at home. Nira also provides home-based care and support to 25 other children and their families in a portion of the district known as "Mzasa A."

"The families we work with are in really terrible situations. Many have HIV or other illnesses that prevent them from working, so they are very poor. Most service providers do not come to remote areas of the city like this and it is a big challenge for them to access care," Moyo says, so it is up to her and her small staff of two volunteers.

They find orphans and vulnerable children through the local community development office, area churches, and by canvassing the neighborhoods themselves. "We help where we can, whether it is providing food, clothing, school uniforms, fees for books, or accommodations. We also try to link people with other organizations that can provide assistance that we cannot," Moyo says.

On site, they provide pre-school lessons to children between the ages of 3-7, teaching the youngest basic self-awareness and hygiene, as well as a lot of singing and drawing. For the 5-7 year olds, staff focus on preparing them to enter one of the six primary schools located in the district. They have also set up a fledgling silk screen printing shop to provide useful vocational skills to the older children, such as Mohamed. All this on a shoestring budget funded primarily by small donations of money or other necessities like maize, cooking oil, and firewood.



Thanks to the skills she gained through the Para-Social Worker Training Program, Moyo is better able to assess the needs of children and families in the community and link them to care and support services.



Children at Nira prepare maize for storage after several sacks of the staple were donated by a member of a local church. Thanks to the community mobilization skills she learned through the para-social worker training, Moyo has been able to increase support for the center, largely in the form of small donations of money, food, and other supplies.

Thanks to a para-social worker training course conducted by members of a Twinning Center partnership funded by the American people through PEPFAR and USAID, Moyo says she's better equipped to assess the needs of vulnerable children and help them get the care and support they need.

"The case management skills I learned have really helped me adopt a more organized approach," Moyo points out.

"I've also been using the community mobilization skills I learned to get additional support from individuals and church groups. What I learned about developing a support plan has been especially useful, and I've already been in contact with a few priests who have talked to people in their congregations about how they can support our work," she continues.

Through the Para-Social Worker Training Program, partners from the Tanzania Institute of Social Work and the University of Illinois-Chicago's Jane Addams College

of Social Work and Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center have trained 605 social welfare officers, NGO staff, and other community caregivers. The trainings arm participants with the knowledge and skills they need to better assess the needs of orphans and vulnerable children and families, and link them to critical support services.



Nira volunteers hand out buckets for the twice daily ritual of bringing water from the local well. Each trip costs the equivalent of US \$3, which is a drain on the center's meager budget. Moyo hopes to raise enough money in the coming months to have a well drilled on the compound.



For most children at the center, Nira is the only stable home they have ever known. Moyo and her small staff of volunteers ensure that these orphans and vulnerable children have a safe place to stay, food, and clothing, as well as necessary fees for school uniforms and books. More than that, they provide love, support, and a sense of family.

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