Africa School Assistance Project to break ground on a girls' dorm in East Africa

May 15, 2014

By Constanza Saldias

Africa School Assistance Project, a Denver non-profit that builds primary and secondary schools in underserved areas of East Africa in partnership with local communities, will break ground next month on the first phase of a dormitory for girls at a secondary school in rural northern Tanzania. "If you really want to support a girl to get into an education in rural Africa, it's imperative to build dormitories at a secondary-level school to give girls a safe place to live and all kinds of amenities that keep the girls wrapped in services that support them to stay in school," says Susan Bachar, executive director of ASAP.

In East Africa, as in many other African countries, only two-thirds of the children have access to secondary school. But the situation is far worse for girls; only 5
percent of them graduate, since they are often victimized or forced to drop out of
school.

ASAP started in 2008 with the goal of building and refurbishing community
schools in rural Tanzania, and the fervent belief that educating girls is
fundamental to a sustainable future for Africa. In recognition of its ongoing
efforts, ASAP joined the prestigious Clinton Global Initiative early this year."The
reason why we were invited to join the Clinton Global Initiative is because CGI
sees our model as unique," Bachar says. "They see it as uniquely set up for
success in terms of replicating and scaling the model around East Africa; because
our model builds community schools in partnership with the local community
and the local government and that partnership really suits the longterm
sustainability of our projects."

Since it started, ASAP has built primary and second schools serving more than a
thousand Tanzanian students. Denver volunteers make hands-on contributions
to school projects; ASAP runs trips to Tanzania where volunteers camp in the
villages and work at the schools for six days at a time. So far, 134 Front Range
volunteers have traveled to Tanzania to help build classrooms, water systems,
toilets and science labs.

And this year, in collaboration with the Nathan Yipp Foundation, a local non-
profit funding the first phase of the project, ASAP will build its first dormitory for
girls, the Nathan Yip Dormitory. When it’s completed, it will provide a safe and
supportive environment where 48 girls can live and study, enabling them to
complete a full four years of secondary school.

"If you really want to raise standards of living, change poverty outcomes, healthy
outcomes and reduce the spread of AIDS in the developing world, the single-most
effective sector of development is to educate a girl, and that’s why we are focusing
on girls’ education," Bachar says. "It is our goal to empower these young women
with an education, but also to instill in them the belief that they can achieve
anything.

"And with mentoring and leadership training," she continues, "it is our hope the
girls will go back into their communities and inspire other girls to pursue an
education."

For more information on how to volunteer or donate, visit the ASAP website.

Westword is a free alternative weekly newspaper and online blog based in Denver,
Colorado. Westword is a member of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies
and has received several awards for its investigative reporting. The newspaper’s
web site, westword.com, offers comprehensive listings of music, arts, and other
events.