

Westword

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

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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.

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