

“ILULA ORPHAN PROGRAM FLOURISHING “ (head line)

Hazel Rodimel, Washington Times Herald, Times Herald Jan 15. 2020

The old saying goes “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” This is the sentiment behind the Ilula Orphan Program, or IOP, that was started by local resident Berit Skaare in 1998.

In the east African country of Tanzania, where Ilula is located, there are approximately 4 million orphans, and many citizens are affected by HIV. Most people live in poverty, and women are often mistreated and uneducated.

That’s where the IOP comes in. IOP describes itself as a “Christian outreach non-government organization working to support the most vulnerable children in Tanzania.”

“[The children] need to grow up and be leaders of tomorrow,” said Skaare who has split most of the time in her life between Washington and Tanzania. “And if they don’t get help with education, they will not fill that position.”



Skaare said that the idea started small, with just supporting children in going to school.

Photo: Washington resident Berit Skaare with Ilula orphan Gloria. Gloria was unable to attend school because she had to care for a grandparent. With IOP’s help, Gloria’s grandparent received care and she was able to go back to school.

“But there were so many needs and so much that we could do,” she said. “In our developed world, we live like kings. We talk about poverty

in the United States and in Europe, and I know it’s there, but it is rich luxury poverty compared to what is in Africa.”

Skaare explained that seeing the conditions that Tanzanians face compelled her to reach out to others and ask for help. Because of the support of the United Methodist Church, the IOP idea has expanded greatly over the last 20 years.

Not only was it important to the IOP that children get educated but that they were able to use their education and earn an income.

“We have sent more than 2,400 children to school. We have placed 550 children in foster homes. We have built four schools and one orphanage. We have two shops, a restaurant and we have farming,” Skaare said.

And all of these businesses employ Tanzanian citizens, helping them learn various trades and giving them a source of income they might not have had otherwise. Seventy-five percent of the teachers who work at the IOP-sponsored schools also attended those schools.

“When we opened the orphanage, we had five people employed. Today we have 108,” she said. “It’s the second biggest business, after the government, in the district, and the district is about half the size of Indiana.”

The program is also responsible for helping with farming in Ilula. Skaare said that a recently purchased 651-acre farm has flourished. “It is an example, masterpiece farm that local farmers can learn from,” she said. “Last year we had a 750-ton harvest of maize.”

Maize is the primary source of agriculture in Ilula, but Skaare explained that the hope is to expand to other crops.

The IOP still has a few goals they want to reach, including implementing water irrigation systems, assisting young, single mothers continue their education and training more local farmers in efficient farming techniques in order to triple their annual harvests. “I think this has been so successful based on faith and transparency and lack of corruption and people’s funding and support,” Skaare said.

The support plays a big factor in the success of the program. Around 200 people from the United States and other countries volunteer in Ilula every year, and even more offer donations.

People in college volunteer for field work training in areas like teaching, medicine, care-giving for disabled and elderly citizens and more. “It is great experience to get,” Skaare said.

Anyone who is interested in learning about the Ilula Orphan Program and how to volunteer and donate can go to ioptanzania.org

Photo: A group of young students – and Jemaida - who live in the orphanage in Ilula attend their preschool graduation.

