Young Heroes committed to help OVC in Swaziland

YOUNG Heroes has assured that it will continue taking it upon itself to ensure that they find strategies to help orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) especially now as there is the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Young Heroes is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that caters for orphaned and vulnerable children.

On Wednesday the organisation celebrated 10 years of existence with the event staged at Mantenga Cultural Village.

Director Khulekani Magongo said since formation on February 3, 2006, the entity’s aim was to help orphaned families in Swaziland to stay together in their communities by providing them with funds for food and clothing.

He said this was a basic need OVC often lacked.

"Young Heroes launched with about 300 children from 150 homesteads. Today, we sponsor nearly 1 000 children in over 500 families," he said.

Magongo said in 2009, they realised that there was a need for children’s health to be taken care of as well. A health care programme was then developed so as to offer medical screening for all children and caretakers, voluntary HIV testing and counseling (HTC), treatment for sick children and caretakers, and follow-up support for HIV positive children.

UNITY IS POWER: Young Heroes staff members, beneficiaries and partners posing for a picture at an event where they were celebrating 10 years of the organisation's existence at Mantenga Cultural Village in Ewalwini. (Pics: Simon Shabangu)

"This was done in partnership with Baylor, EGPAF, PSI and Serious Fun Children's Network, whose camp made its debut in the same year," he said.

Magongo said to date, 90 percent of Young Heroes' children have been tested, with about 11 successful camp sessions hosted through a partnership with Good Shepherd Hospital.

Young Heroes supported teenage clubs at Tikhuba Clinic, Good Shepherd Hospital, and Sithobehweni Clinic.

Magongo said this year, the organisation planned to set up and operate five more teenage clubs.

In 2013, the organisation introduced a skills training empowerment programme (STEP), which offered youth aged 19 to 26 with vocational skills and business management training.

He said at the time, the entity had partnered with three vocational training institutions.

Magongo said currently, five institutions have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Young Heroes.

"This programme has seen more than 100 children graduate with skills such as plumbing, electrical house wiring, motor repair, carpentry, pre-school teaching and more. In 2015, the programme had 56 graduates, who are now either employed or self-employed,” he said.

He promised that this year, the programme would support more than 150 pupils.

He described the programme as a last piece of the puzzle as Young Heroes attempted to break the poverty cycle and enable children to become self-sustaining adults.

In 2015, Young Heroes secured funding for a project called Umlila Loya Embili (children are the future). It targets adolescents from 10 to 19 years of age in three constituencies; Mhlungu, Mtsheane and Ntfomani.

Through this, Young Heroes managed to raise its staff members from six to 17 and has promised to enrol 15 000 children.

The project was made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Government’s President’s Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
YOUNG Heroes Board of Directors Chairperson Tom Churchyard says he is looking forward to celebrating the organisation’s 20th anniversary.

He said the organisation had demonstrated the power it had within itself to help the needy children and make them heroes.

“As we move forward, we do not only want to help these children satisfy their needs, but also want to make them heroes. We are thankful to our partners as well as staff members and stakeholders for making sure that the organisation is supported,” he said.

Meanwhile, Young Heroes’ beneficiary Tandziile Simelane said she was thankful for being helped to achieve her goals in life.

Tandziile, 19, said Young Heroes discovered her when she was doing Form One at Ntjanini High School in the Shiselweni region. She completed her education in 2013 at the same school.

Tandziile, who hails from Engudzeni, said Young Heroes found her through her church, Engudzeni Free Evangelical Assemblies, in 2009.

She said though Young Heroes did not pay for her school fees, they gave her money to buy basic things like food, uniforms and other learning materials.

Her school fees were paid by the government.

Pursuing

She is now pursuing her degree in Consumer Science Education at University of Swaziland (UNISWA).

Another beneficiary, Bheki Sifundza (20), from Shewula in the Lubombo region said he was currently working as an electrical engineer at Montigny Investments in Bhuinya. He was employed there last year after having spent a year doing a course in electrical engineering in Nhlangano, where he grew up under the care of his aunt.

Sifundza said he was also discovered by Young Heroes when he was doing Form One in 2009 at Makhorozza High School in Nhlangano. He said they continued supporting him until he finished his high school education at Nhlangano Central High in 2013.

“I also wish to contribute something to the Young Heroes family so that they continue helping other OVC,” Sifundza said.

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### CERTIFICATE COURSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certificate</th>
<th>Course Topics</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate Finance for non-financial managers</td>
<td>1. Finance &amp; Accounting Concepts</td>
<td>TWO WEEKS 10 days [Start 7 March 2016 staggered]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate Emotional Intelligence and Leadership</td>
<td>1. Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>THREE DAYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate 3. Training &amp; Development</td>
<td>3. Training &amp; Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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