

Nairobi, 12 November 2010 — In the living lounge of St Andrew's PCEA Tumaini Children's Home, a group of children are watching a Christian movie on TV.

It is 4pm, and nine of them have just returned from the nearby Hekima Primary School, while another 15 have come down from their classroom on the second floor of the three-storey building.

What started off as a three-bedroom charity project on December 15, 2001 with just 10 children has become a sanctuary for the children, staffed by three housemothers and a manager.

Although the six-apartment home can accommodate as many as 50 children, at the moment it only has 24 because of the costs involved.

It takes big hearts and enormous goodwill on the part of the people who have built this home for orphaned children living with HIV. The Women's Guild at St Andrew's church in Nairobi know they have given 24 children a lifeline.

"We want to give them the love, care and support that will make a difference in their lives and put a smile on their faces. We want them to have an environment of warmth," says Grace Wanjiru Wanjaiya, the chairlady of the home.

She recalled how she and 60 other women pooled Sh700,000 eleven years ago and bought an eighth of an acre on which to build the home. That was in 1999, when HIV/Aids was declared a national disaster in Kenya.

When we called on them recently, the children were in high spirits. They sang and laughed with manager Martha Kariuki. There may be no father in this home, but in all other aspects it looks like any other.

There is a clock on the wall and sofa sets carefully arranged in the sitting room. Teddy bears dot every corner of the house.

Fourteen-year-old Margaret listened attentively to Mrs Kariuki. Despite her HIV-positive status, Margaret, a Standard Eight pupil who attends Hekima primary school with eight other pupils, exudes confidence.

Her parents died of HIV/Aids when she was three, and she came to the home in 2002 when she was six. Always at the top of her class, her dream is to become a cardiologist.

At 15, Teresia is the oldest child in the home; Stephen is the youngest at four. Five-year-old David is well known for talking the loudest while nine-year-old Mary is the most reserved, according to Teresia. Nevertheless, they act as one large family.

Helen Nga'ng'a, one of the housemothers, said the children are her inspiration. When studying for a diploma in home-based care at Africa Evangelistic Enterprise and working as a community Aids educator at the church, she never believed she would one day work with HIV-positive children.

"It is not their fault. They enjoy life, and they don't think of their health status," she said. "Some know their status, and some can't imagine going back to their relatives." Nevertheless, she said, one child was recently integrated back into her extended family.

Before they go to sleep around 8pm, the children take their antiretroviral drugs. According to Ms Kariuki, every child attends the comprehensive care unit at Kenyatta National Hospital. The home obtains most of the ARVs free of charge at the hospital.

Mrs Wanjaiya, the chairlady, said the home depends on the generosity of a few friends in the United States, a few local corporates and St Andrew's Church, whose members contribute to the project.

The Women's Guild also dedicates the proceeds of its shop towards the children's upkeep and recently bought a mechanised loom to help generate income.

"Some of our members have donated TVs, washing machines, cookers and other essential household goods. We plan to get a bigger piece of land and put a smile on the faces of more such children," Mrs Wanjaiya said, adding that the home will celebrate its 10th anniversary on December 17.

Source: [Daily Nation](#)