

Dormitory Project

The Dormitory Project is an initiative of Sancta Maria Parish and supported by the Oblate Community. In recent years the Parish undertook to construct a dormitory building which would accommodate a large number of girls studying at High School in Lukulu. As there are only two High Schools to support the entire Lukulu District (an area in the region of 180 kms by 250kms) with a dispersed rural population, girls attending these schools are often a long way from home. Such girls invariably come from impoverished village communities and struggle to find or pay for decent accommodation when they come into town. This leaves them very vulnerable and open to abuse, often having to live in grass huts surrounded by shebeens and expected to pay with their bodies when money is not available.



Dormitory building which provides safe accommodation for school girls

The Parish developed the dormitory as a direct response to such needs, thus enabling girls to stay in secure and relatively comfortable accommodation adjacent to their school, while studying. Low fees are charged for this accommodation and basic facilities such as water and showers, electricity and an outside kitchen are provided. As it was an initiative of the Parish community the Dormitory took several years to be constructed as the community was responsible for brick making and all of the construction. However, the Oblates stepped in to complete the building, get it up and running, and currently finance and manage the project.



Student studying in her dormitory bedroom

Although the accommodation is very cheap a fee has still to be paid and this is still beyond some of the more needy students who come from afar. Over the past three years the Loreto Sisters, with the help of donors, have supported 18 girls annually in the Dormitory. In order that we do indeed assist the most needy students we work through the respective principals of the two High Schools and one Basic School adjacent to the Mission. They help to identify the most needy who have potential for study and who may otherwise have to drop out of school because of family circumstances and lack of resources, or be forced to stay in inadequate and unsafe accommodation while trying to study. We also support needy students whom we know well and personally know of family hardship.

Loreto support pays the annual Dormitory fee for each sponsored child and provides mealie meal enabling the student to cook adequately for themselves each day. In addition we enrol and pay for them on a lunch programme offered by the Christian Brothers at St Columba's High School but which serves students from all three schools who pay a very small fee for a good meal in the middle of the day. Loreto also pays school and examination fees for the most needy who are unable to meet these expenses themselves. In a few cases we

also pay for school uniform or basic educational needs such as exercise books. Since there are no text books provided at school and most of the Loreto beneficiaries in the Dormitory are unable to buy books, we also lend some text books to be shared by a number of the supported students throughout the year.



Some of the girls supported by Loreto in 2011

The support provided by Loreto for the girl child in the dormitory has made a big difference in their lives and helped their chances at completing a High school education. We have heard many heart rendering stories from the girls themselves as to how it has changed their lives. For example, two sisters whose family home was 80 kms from Lukulu used to take it in turns to walk home to get enough mealie meal to support themselves for about a week. It meant that while one sister attended class for a week, the other took off to walk home and get maize meal, and walk back to Lukulu with the food, while the other went the following week. As a result each child only attended school every second week, lived in inferior accommodation in between times and so had little chance to study. Their lives certainly changed with Loreto support in the Dormitory, and we continue to make a big difference in the lives of all the girls whom we sponsor. The girls themselves are always very appreciative of the support received and hopefully will manage to get their school certificate as a result of enhanced living and study conditions.