

Orphan Care Program Proposal

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The state of orphans in Nigeria is a tragic and growing problem with millions of children left increasingly unattended and uncared for. In 2008 the Assessment and Analysis on orphans and vulnerable children in Nigeria found that there are 17.5 million orphans and vulnerable children and 7.3million were orphaned by HIV/AIDS[1]. Moreover, a recent UNICEF report found that the number of orphans has been increasing by hundreds of thousands every year. Some of the immediate causes of orphan-hood and vulnerability of children include among others, high maternal mortality, accidental deaths, communal conflicts/clashes, HIV/AIDS and other diseases and debilitating poverty. Today 41.7 percent of orphans are orphaned by HIV/AIDS. As HIV/ AIDS spreads throughout the region this number is due to increase.

The Nigerian state is marked by a volatile government, a potential security breakdown, and widespread corruption. For this reason many of these vulnerable children end up homeless, alone, and begging on the streets. The limited response of the government coupled with low public awareness has left families and communities to bare the brunt of the problem. Children are often left to raise themselves. In this way orphans receive double jeopardy because they suffer the emotional burden of losing their parents and suffer the economic instability that accompanies that loss.

In response to this societal problem, some business leaders in the Leadership Initiatives (LI) team took initiative in giving back to their communities and have taken in orphans as their apprentices to offer them the technical skills they otherwise would not have the opportunity to acquire. Leadership Initiatives working directly on the ground in the Bauchi state of Nigeria, gives entrepreneurs opportunities to start their own businesses. The NGO not only provides monetary backing but also empowers these entrepreneurs in their communities by allowing them independence to make their own business decisions.

In this capacity, some entrepreneurs in the program realized the gravity of the orphan problem and took leadership. The program is already in action and currently there are seven orphans who are receiving training in various skill acquisition programs.

The program has the potential to increase and to yield successful results, as it is sustainable for both the entrepreneur and the orphan. Firstly, local businesses choose which orphans they accept into the program. This way, they feel as though they are taking ownership of their community. Teaching an apprentice or intern is also practically beneficial for them because they have an extra hand to help in their business.

Secondly, the program provides hope and opportunity for the orphans involved. Working closely with an entrepreneur provides emotional support for orphans who now have a trustworthy mentor from their community. The program also provides them educational and technical opportunities they might not otherwise receive, thereby creating a more productive and progressive Nigerian society.

In monitoring this program, Leadership Initiatives provides the oversight to make sure that these orphans are taken in to a supportive and caring environment. If businesses decide to take in an orphan as their apprentice, Leadership Initiatives mandates certain stipulations to achieve a high quality of life for those in the program. Orphans who enter the program must be over twelve years old.

There is also a structured outline to the program. First, the basics of food, water, and shelter must be provided. Second, the business must be willing to teach the orphan their professional skill. Currently, orphans can choose from the tailoring, carpentry, or fishing program. Third, Leadership Initiatives hopes to set up an online educational program through OmniLearn, a program already used by Leadership Initiatives. By their final stages the orphans should have acquired an educational certificate through the online course. Fourth, the business leaders must have a structured timeline of apprenticeship and a graduation deadline after which the orphan should be able to find gainful employment.

In order to ensure the success of each of these criteria, Leadership Initiatives staff will monitor the progress of each orphan in the program and provide monetary support. In terms of support, LI will pay the entrepreneur for his or her time spent training the orphan. LI will also supply the orphan with necessary tools upon graduation from the program, i.e. a tool kit for the carpentry program. Staff from LI already visit the entrepreneurs twice a month and check on the status of the orphans. Because Leadership Initiatives goes through a rigorous process of selecting the business entrepreneur in the first place, there is already in-built accountability as these leaders are known to be trustworthy and dedicated individuals. At the same time, since entrepreneurs are selecting orphans from their own communities, they are already familiar with them and have a familial or friendly connection to them.

In summation, if the program expands to include more orphans and successfully meets LI criteria, these individuals will contribute and give back to society in a positive manner.

[1] http://womenincharity.com/index.php?p=1_6