



FOCUS | VOLUNTEERS



Amira Keita, 11, 6th grader at Sherwood Middle School, Erica Jones, 11, 6th grader at Colonial Middle School and Jasmine Armfield, MAM youth worker, work diligently to create African outfits for Dolls of Hope.

Pattern of behavior

16 learn diligence, charity in program

BY ANNE CHAMBERS
Special to My Life

Making handmade dolls as volunteers for the Dolls of Hope project is a new adventure for the middle school youth who attended Memphis Athletic Ministries Summer Academy program at the MAM Bethel Labelle Neighborhood Center. The purpose of doll-making is to teach the children to reach out and help AIDS-stricken children and their mothers on the other side of the world.

Changa Cooper, MAM center director, sees this project as a way to engage the youth in thinking beyond their own circumstances.

"One of our ministry goals is to teach our youth to love others," said Cooper. "Making dolls that will be shipped to children overseas gives our kids the chance to learn how big the world is and how even a child in Memphis can make a difference."

The Dolls of Hope project began in 1998 by Cynthia Davis, an assistant professor at Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles. Volunteers from all over the United States make handmade cloth dolls for distribution to agencies working with children, youth and women who have HIV/AIDS. To date, more than 6,000 dolls have been distributed in the art of doll-making.

Rosemary Austin, founder of Upward Steps Girls Ministry, who partners with MAM in providing faith-based programs at the MAM Bethel Labelle center, heard about the Dolls of Hope project from her aunt Carol Jordan. Carol had met Cynthia Davis more than a decade ago at a music festival in Los Angeles. As a vendor selling crafts from South Africa, Jordan sold Cynthia a batch of dolls for local mothers with AIDS and a friendship was born.

During the summer, twice a week, Jordan helped 13 girls and three boys learn the art of doll-making. Armed with scissors and a pattern, these children learn how to cut out the dolls and dresses -- a task that teaches the children patience and the importance of doing something right the first time.

"It is so rewarding to watch the kids beam with excitement as they learn to do something on their own. Even some of the younger children want to learn," says Jordan. "And they are all learning that diligence in every step of doll-making is necessary to have the doll come out right. There are no shortcuts in doing a job right."

"I want to make the dolls beautiful for the kids in Africa. The dolls will make the kids feel better because they are sick and they don't have parents," stated Quildarius Rayford, a rising 6th grader and one of the three young men in the class. "Now I want to go to Africa and meet the kids who are getting our dolls."

Plans to continue the Dolls of Hope project with these youth are in the works. This fall, doll-making will be part of the MAM and Upward Steps after school program. The boys and girls will continue developing their skills as they will be taught how to stuff the dolls, sew them up, add hair, and clothed the dolls in authentic African attire. Once these 40 to 50 dolls are finished, they will be shipped to children and their moms in South Africa, Uganda and Haiti.

To learn more about MAM and Upward Steps, visit mamsports.org or upwardsteps.org.

Anne Chambers is the communications director for Memphis Athletic Ministries, 2107 Ball.



Avianne Robinson, 11, 6th grader at St. John's Catholic School, and Mattison Patton, 8, Southern Avenue Charter School, listen attentively to Carol Jordan (center) as she shows the girls how to line up the dress pattern on the authentic African material.



Caneilius Nelson, 12, 7th grader at American Way Middle, and Quildarius Rayford, 11, 6th grader at Airways Middle School, have a "can do" attitude when it comes to helping others.