



Ugandan Choir Raises its Voices for African Orphans

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***Reprinted from The Stamford Advocate
April 25, 2008***

STAMFORD - Twenty Ugandan children who lost parents to AIDS were welcomed to the University of Connecticut Stamford campus yesterday as part of a choir tour to raise money for an African housing development for orphaned children.

The 6- to 17-year-olds are part of SIFA Africa Children's Choir, which embarked on its first trip to the United States early this month, a tour that will end in September.

In the performance at the UConn branch yesterday, the choir presented songs in English, Swahili and Luganda, a Ugandan language. "Together we can change the world," the children sang in one song.

Between songs, children told the audience about how they have been helped by sponsors and Glory Children's City International, a group that formed in 2005 to make a better life for the orphan group in Masaka, Uganda.

"On behalf of all of my friends, I thank all of our sponsors. Now we can read and write and have a bright future," Dina Namanya, 13, said.

"I wasn't going to school, and my life was very difficult," said Daniel Akizimana, also 13. "Three years ago, a team from GCCI offered to pay for my education.

"Since then, my life has completely changed. When I grow up, I want to be an engineer."

The choir tour is to support the Glory Children City Project in Masaka, which will be home to many choir members and other orphans as it develops into a fully operational orphan care project and school, said Carrie Harless, GCCI's choir coordinator and board member.

The housing project will be "homes that house 10 kids each with a mom and dad so they grow up with a semblance of a normal childhood," Harless said.

Yesterday's performance lasted an hour. While singing, the children danced, smiled and, during one song, played the drums.

Kathleen Dechant, a UConn professor of management and organizational behavior, watched the performance because she has been to South Africa and "appreciates the struggle these kids have to face," she said.

"I'm here to support them and show my appreciation of their willingness to come and share their story. I think its quite amazing - the joy that they show in their music is just palpable," Dechant said.