

St Joseph's Primary School Malvern Make a World of Difference to Children In Tanzania

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By Bianca Villarosa

Five years ago, St Joseph's Primary School teacher Marta Cummings launched a fundraising effort with an eager group of grade 1 children, aiming to make a difference to the lives of children in Tanzania.

Since then, the Prahran resident has expanded the program to include the whole school.

The school community – including staff, students and parents – has been sponsoring Elifuraha Petro (nicknamed Ellie), who attends the School of St Jude in Tanzania.

"The reason I got involved with St Jude's, in particular, is because the girl who started it is a young Australian – Gemma Sisia. I was really interested in her story and the school looked amazing," Ms Cummings said.

"I originally started the sponsorship with my little class of grade 1s. We started growing and selling herbs. From there, the sponsorship effort grew and more classes started coming on board."

Each year, St Joseph's collects donations that are put towards Ellie's sponsorship fees. Anything extra is donated to the School of St Jude.

On June 16, the Malvern school will host Felix Mollel, the visitor coordinator from St Jude's.

Mr Mollel, who is from the Maasai tribe, a semi-nomadic group of people from across northern Tanzania and Kenya will address staff and students at St Joseph's about the School of St Jude.

"We are very excited to be hosting Felix," Ms Cummings said. "We will be showing videos of St Jude's, and plenty of pictures of Ellie enjoying her day at school."

"Felix will also talk a bit about his own background and talk about the lives of the children who attend the school."

After the first year of sponsorship, Ms Cummings visited Ellie in Tanzania and helped the school teach sport.

"When I got home, it was great to show the students at St Joseph's lots of photos of Ellie's house and where she lived, photos of her family and what Ellie's school bus looks like. To show the kids at my school how different Ellie's life is is incredibly important," she said.

"St Jude's only educates one child per family and all the teachers are Tanzanian. The idea is that child can go back and educate the rest of their family."

Each year, St Joseph's runs a Friendship Fair Day, which is one of the main ways funds are raised for Ellie.

"It's like a school fete just for kids, where every class comes up with things they will make and sell, or come up with games for people to enter."

Other ways the students have raised money include designing, making and selling T-shirts and bookmarks.

Ms Cummings is thinking about taking students over to Tanzania next year.

"My grade 1s started the program when Ellie was in grade 1, too. They will be in grade 6 next year – the same as Ellie, so it would be great to visit her before they all start high school," she said.

"The preps talk about Ellie like she is one of classmates and say things like, 'Don't throw that out or don't waste that, Ellie doesn't even have pencils."

"It feels very rewarding when we see what Ellie is doing and how happy she is in the photos. She's like one of our own students. "It would be great if other schools could get involved in these sorts of programs. Anyone can participate and it's all for a great cause."