



Diocese of Nashville

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May 25, 2012

St. Cecilia alum helps children dress for school, success

Ned Andrew Solomon, Tennessee Register

Megan Kelly graduated from St. Cecilia in 2002, attended and graduated from Boston University, and began working at a private investment firm in Boston in the spring of 2008.



Photos courtesy of Tailored for Education

She and a co-worker, Jessica Roy – also a product of Catholic education in northern Massachusetts – became fast friends, and decided to both get their masters degrees in finance at Boston College in the evenings.

Megan Kelly, an alumnae of St. Cecilia Academy, is the co-founder of the nonprofit organization Tailored for Education, which helps supply uniforms to school children in developing countries like Tanzania and Haiti.

That turned out to be the beginning of a partnership that would create educational opportunities for thousands of children in developing countries.

"After we graduated in May 2010 we realized that we had a lot more time on our hands," said Kelly. "We knew we needed a new project; we just weren't sure what it was going to be. We did know we wanted to do something that involved children."

About a year ago, Kelly had a group of friends over for dinner, and a discussion ensued about the different ways they might make a positive impact on the world.

"One of my friends casually mentioned that children in Tanzania were required to wear school uniforms in order to attend school, and that usually those uniforms only cost around \$17," said Kelly. "Having worn uniforms my whole life, all through Overbrook and St. Cecilia, it was a shock to discover that \$17 could keep a child from attending school."



Kelly

She told Roy about the uniform need the very next day, and even thought she had a viable next step. Kelly sews as a hobby, and had made pillows for her apartment and curtains for friends. She thought she could make uniforms at home and send them overseas.

While doing Internet research to determine which countries require school uniforms, they discovered that, for the most part, all African, Latin American and Southeast Asian countries do. Kelly and Roy soon realized that the need was far too great for their simple solution, and that making uniforms stateside would also take business away from the local economies in the countries they were hoping to support.

Unlike in the United States, the uniform requirement in these countries is not just for Catholic or other parochial institutions; it's for any schools. "You're dealing with children who have little to no clothes of their own," said Kelly. "So, they want to make sure that children show up in



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clothes to begin with, and that no child feels like the poorest child in the school.”

Since both women wore uniforms in their own educational experiences, Kelly and Roy understood the positive effects of proper school attire. Dressing up for school contributes to feelings of self-worth and encourages children to value education, and hopefully further instill those values in their own children. It has been well documented that receiving an education helps interrupt the poverty cycle systemic in many developing countries today.



Toward that end, Tailored for Education, a 501 C3, was born in May 2011. In a year's time, the non-profit has established partnerships with seven agencies, also committed to improving the lives of people in developing countries. Although they have dealt directly with uniform suppliers and school administrations, more typically Kelly and Roy work with other non-profits that are already involved with some aspect of the schools they're working in.



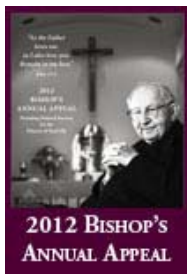
“Jess and I can't be on the ground in these counties, so partnering with existing organizations that have staff in these places works as a better model,” explained Kelly. “There are a lot of barriers to education. Uniforms are just one of them. Other groups provide lunches for the children, or rebuild schools. While they're already eliminating one barrier, we 'go in' and eliminate another.”



Since December, Tailored for Education has raised just over \$250,000. By this fall, the non-profit venture will have provided funding for 5,400 uniforms.

Kelly and Roy have been fairly successful fundraising through their website and social media, and by giving presentations that promote awareness of the problem. Recently, a private school in Boston did a charity choir concert to benefit the initiative. Still it hasn't been an easy sell. “We've found that uniforms have been a really hard need to convey in the U.S., because most people associate it with private or parochial schools, people that don't necessarily need money or help,” Kelly said. “It's the total opposite in the countries that we're working with.”

Stewardship & Development



Additionally, there's the basic undervaluing of education in this country. “A lot of children here, by their own choice, drop out of high school and don't finish,” said Roy. “In the U.S. there almost has to be an incentivization program for children to finish school and get good grades. In the countries we're working in, the top priority is to get kids a good education and get them out of poverty.”

But one of the greatest things about

Tailored for Education is that a donation of \$20 really can make a significant difference. “Right now, the average cost of a uniform is only \$23, which most people spend going out for ice cream, or two movie tickets and popcorn,” said Kelly. “The life of a child can be changed with a really small donation.”

For those interested in contributing or finding out more about Tailored for Education, visit www.tailoredforeducation.org, or e-mail info@tailoredforeducation.org.

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