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Never Too Young to Learn

Madrasa students share what they learned with their community



Photo: Margaret Ngau, MKEZA

“Young children can be the best teachers of all,” said Riziki, who is proud of the things her daughter Munawya has learned at her madrasa. “They grasp ideas quickly and immediately want to pass what they have learned on to others.”

Munawya Abubakar Abdhakim is four years old and proudly attends the Tuwa Mtoni Kigomeni Madrasa Preschool in Zanzibar, an island off the coast of Tanzania. Opened in 2004 with support from USAID, her school is a madrasa — a learning institution that respects Muslim culture while promoting reading, writing, math and analytical learning skills. Munawya’s mother, Riziki, recently visited the school to meet with her daughter’s teacher and, like mothers all over the world, the visit filled her with praise and admiration for how much her little girl had learned in a very short time and despite her tender age. Riziki explained that her daughter is becoming surprisingly adept at applying what she learned in school to real life situations.

One day Munawya came home from school and found her mother cutting her fingernails with a razor blade. Munawya asked if the razor was new. “Teacher Maryam has told us that we must never collect used items like razor blades, needles, nails, syringes and other similar sharp objects and use them because we can get HIV/AIDS.” After finishing with her nails, Riziki suggested she cut her daughter’s nails, but the little girl refused unless her mother bought a new blade. Blushing slightly as she relayed her story, Riziki admitted with a grin that she had no recourse but to buy a new razor blade.

Riziki recalls many times that she heard her daughter tell other children what she learned that day in school. “Wash your hands before and after eating.” “Greet your parents warmly in the morning.” “Don’t play in dirty water.”

Although Munawya cannot yet read or write, she can recite stories, rhymes and poems and is learning to count. Riziki says her only regret is that the preschool was not built in time for her older son to attend it.

As a mother, Riziki insists that children who attend preschool not only benefit from what they learn but are also encouraged to share what they have learned with other children, parents and members of the community.

Looking proudly at her daughter, Riziki said, “Do not think these children are too young to learn and make a difference.”

Telling Our Story

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