Umoja Primary School
AN EXAMPLE OF HOW DIGNITAS PARTNERS WITH LOW-COST PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NAIROBI, KENYA
Welcome to Umoja Primary School!

Umoja is located in Kangemi, an informal settlement in Nairobi’s west and home to an estimated 120,000 people. Founded in 2008, the primary school provides education to over 400 students from Baby Class (3-4 year olds) through to Class Six.

Like most schools in marginalized communities, Umoja is a low-cost private primary school; it receives zero funding from the government. Parents pay school fees and also sponsor the breakfast and lunch program.

There are twelve teachers on staff. Some of the teachers have no formal teaching qualifications, but they all hold a strong belief in the power of education.

Umoja is a Swahili word that means ‘togetherness’.
A partnership with Dignitas begins

In 2014 Dignitas was expanding into new communities, including Kangemi. Umoja Primary met our core criteria for partnership and the school was accepted into the Dignitas Leadership Institute. Here’s how our relationship unfolded:

April 2014

Dignitas staff meet with the Umoja team to complete the School Assessment Rubric, a tool developed by Dignitas to assess a school at the beginning of the partnership and then annually to track progress.

April 2014

The first cohort of Umoja staff attended the April Leadership Training Institute, a three week intensive program that introduces ideas and concepts to empower educators to be inspiring leaders and excellent teachers.

May 2014

Umoja teachers are matched with a Dignitas coach and one-on-one teacher mentoring commences. Coaching builds on the concepts covered at LTI and focuses on the practical application of new skills and ideas.
During school holidays, Umoja teachers attend the August Professional Development Workshops. PD workshops are designed to cover issues best addressed in a group setting and to build on the foundation laid at the LTI.

In partnership with Tailored For Education, Dignitas distributes over 300 uniforms to Umoja students. Parents contribute 50 shillings per uniform into a pooled fund and the school uses the money to renovate leaky classrooms.

The second cohort of Umoja staff attend the November LTI. Dignitas uses the multiple cohort approach to ensure a critical mass of school staff are motivated and equipped to support school transformation.

Umoja teachers join Dignitas Fellows from other schools on a school exchange visit to learn with Makini Primary School, one of the highest performing schools in Kenya.

Umoja teachers participate in two more rounds of Professional Development Workshops in the April and August school holidays. Read a full run down of the August workshops here.

Umoja receives new learning resources through the Dignitas Wezesha program, a small grants project for infrastructure and resource projects. The textbooks are sponsored by Women Leaders in Action.

Umoja will continue to receive coaching and training over the next two to three years to ensure Umoja staff are well-equipped to independently drive school improvements and development beyond the partnership with Dignitas. Read more about our gradual release approach and partnership progression here.
“The difference between Dignitas and other training is that at Dignitas they listen to you.”

Sally Adhiambo
Class Two Teacher

Sally was inspired to teach by her parents who were both teachers themselves. Before her involvement in Dignitas, Sally says she would get frustrated when her students couldn’t grasp a lesson. Now, she has the skills to know how to handle it and a toolkit of techniques to try a different approach.

“Dignitas has improved and changed the face of Umoja!”

Willis Onditi
Head Teacher + Swahili, Mathematics and Social Studies Teacher

Onditi has benefitted from PD workshops on school leadership and has been working with Dignitas Coach Richard. As Head Teacher, Onditi is responsible for school management as well as teaching three subjects. His favorite? Mathematics!

Meet a few of the Umoja Dignitas Fellows

Seven of Umoja’s twelve teachers are currently Dignitas Fellows. Dignitas aims to engage 70% of educators at a school to ensure a critical mass of staff are empowered to lead school transformation.
“My personal motto is ‘I don’t believe in impossibilities!’ Everything is possible!”

Alex Mugaisi
*English, Mathematics and Science Teacher*

Alex is passionate about education because he has seen it transform his own life. He used to walk into the classroom and just start teaching, but at the LTI he learnt about lesson planning and has found it incredibly useful. Alex also really appreciates working with Coach Richard, who he says ‘has been so resourceful to us!’

Collins Obiero
*Mathematics, Swahili and Christian Religious Education Teacher*

Collins believes his students are the future doctors, teachers and leaders of Kenya and encourages them to start acting like it now. He regularly reminds his class: ‘The sky is the limit!’ Collins credits Dignitas in introducing him to individualized education plans and empowering him to teach like a leader.

“Through Dignitas, I’ve improved my teaching methodologies. I teach like a champion!”
Meet the Dignitas Coach who mentors Umoja Teachers

Coaching is core to the Dignitas approach. Richard has been working with Umoja Dignitas Fellows in the classroom setting, providing mentoring personalized to each teacher’s unique skills and needs.

“I enjoy coaching because at the end of every term I see improvements in our teachers.”

Richard Mwangi
Dignitas Coach

Richard has been coaching Umoja teachers on classroom management, teaching methodologies and techniques. Coaching sessions usually occur at least twice a term and continue for a minimum of a year. By building an ongoing relationship, Richard is able to track teachers’ progress and ensure the concepts and skills covered at the LTI and PD workshops are successfully implemented in Umoja classrooms.
Because every Umoja student deserves an excellent education

Ultimately the reason we partner with Umoja is because, like the Umoja team, we believe every child deserves an excellent education. To wrap up this school profile, let’s meet some of the Umoja students!

Clinton
“I want to be a doctor!”

Sheila
“When I grow up, I want to be a teacher so I can teach the pupils the way my teachers are teaching me now.”

Tracy
“A great teacher is a teacher who gives you knowledge to learn!”

Abdi
“I want to be an engineer, so I can make cars for people and do electrical jobs.”

Alex
“I like school because I want to learn, and achieve more.”

Mercy
When Mercy grows up, she wants to manage a company. She just hasn’t decided what type of company yet.

Thank you for visiting Umoja Primary School!

Learn more about the Dignitas model, our partnership progression and our impact here in Kenya.