

The National

Fund-raiser aims to build a school, one brick at a time

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A school for children with special needs has set out to sell five million bricks to raise the Dh25 million (US\$6.8m) it needs to build bigger premises and to take in more children.

The Special Care Centre, which has 66 pupils in an old villa where it has been based for 18 years, wants to boost enrolment to 300 and move into a purpose-built school.

Benefactors of the Donate a Brick campaign, launched under the patronage of Sheikha Shamma Mohammed bin Zayed, are asked to donate Dh5 per brick. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, has promised to match every donation.

The SCC is one of a handful of schools open to expatriate children with disabilities. When its waiting list reached 50 last year, the management began thinking about building a bigger and better school.

The school operates on a tight budget. Many of the children come from low-income families and to keep tuition costs down, many of the staff are volunteers. It hopes to sell five million bricks between now and Dec 3.

"Anyone who can afford to buy a brick should," said Isabelle Le Bon, the school's chief fund-raiser.

Places in schools for children with special needs are hard to come by in the capital. The SCC now has a waiting list of 74 and the Future Centre, another special needs school, has a waiting list of 150. Most private schools do not have the facilities or support staff to accommodate children with disabilities.

The SCC has already won significant support from the community. Several schools and universities, including the Sheikh Zayed Private Academy, the American Community School, and the American International School – Abu Dhabi, have hosted fund-raising events. An auction at the campaign's inauguration raised nearly Dh320,000.

"We want to contribute to the community," said Axel Tettenborn, the chief operating officer of Daman. The national health insurer is one of the seven sponsors of the campaign. "It's part of our company's social responsibility to the community."

This week, SCC volunteers are fanning out across Abu Dhabi malls seeking donations. The school has set up a website at www.donateabrick.org where donations also can be made.