

BUSINESS FOR BETTER SOCIETY

Impact Report

From Linen to School Uniforms: Creating Opportunity in Goma

A Threads of Transformation Initiative

October, 2026

At Business for Better Society (BBS), we believe meaningful change can begin by reimagining what is possible. Through our Threads of Transformation programme, we find creative ways to give surplus textiles a second life while supporting communities, creating opportunities and advancing sustainability.

This pilot began with a generous donation from Quality Inn & Suites in Lethbridge, Alberta. The hotel donated 40 king-sized flat sheets that had reached the end of their guestroom lifecycle. Shipped to Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the sheets were transformed into 400 school uniform shirts by participants in the Remember Youth for Change (RYC) tailoring programme, working alongside volunteers and under the guidance of their sewing teacher.

The completed shirts were distributed on September 21 during a special Back-to-School event organised by Remember Youth for Change. The event also included new backpacks provided through the Elevate Prize. For children everywhere, the start of a new school year is an exciting occasion. In Goma, having a new shirt and a backpack of their own brought smiles, pride and excitement for the year ahead.

This pilot demonstrates how an unconventional idea can address a practical challenge facing families in Goma. School uniforms are required by many schools, yet the cost of purchasing them can be a significant burden for families already experiencing poverty, displacement and insecurity. By repurposing surplus hotel linens, we explored an alternative that turns an overlooked resource into something useful, while supporting local skills development.

The project also took place against an exceptionally difficult humanitarian backdrop. Alongside years of conflict and displacement, communities in eastern DRC were facing another serious Ebola outbreak. These overlapping challenges affected everyday life and placed additional demands on local organisations and volunteers.

We invite you to explore this report and learn how a simple donation, combined with local knowledge and community collaboration, resulted in 400 school uniform shirts and demonstrated the potential of Threads of Transformation.



Kelly Brantner
Chief Executive Officer
Business for Better Society

Current Climate in Goma, DR Congo

A Humanitarian Crisis Disrupting Everyday Life

Goma, the capital of North Kivu Province in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is at the centre of a prolonged humanitarian crisis. While the current escalation has received some international attention, communities in eastern DRC have experienced decades of conflict, displacement, and instability.

Conflict and Displacement

- The resurgence of the M23 armed group, which began expanding operations in North Kivu in 2021, has significantly intensified the humanitarian crisis in the region.
- In January 2025, M23 forces took control of Goma, creating a new wave of insecurity and displacement.
- More than 6.5 million people are internally displaced across the Democratic Republic of Congo, making it one of the largest displacement crises in the world.
- Eastern DRC, particularly North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, has experienced repeated waves of displacement as families flee violence, leaving behind homes, livelihoods, and access to basic services.

Impact on Children and Education

- Children have been among the most affected by the conflict. Across North Kivu and South Kivu, approximately 795,000 children have been deprived of education due to insecurity and school disruptions.
- More than 2,500 schools and learning spaces have been affected by the conflict, including schools that have closed, been damaged, or been used to shelter displaced families.

A City Operating Without Normal Systems

- There is currently no functioning postal service in Goma. Organisations must route shipments through neighbouring Gisenyi, Rwanda. When crossing back into the DRC, individuals are met by Militia 23 members who require the payment of “taxes” to continue.
- Banking services including ATMs are not operating, requiring residents and organisations to rely heavily on mobile payment systems such as Airtel Money.
- There is no reliable road connection between the DRC capital of Kinshasa and Goma. The country’s vast geography, limited infrastructure, and insecurity make the movement of goods and resources between western and eastern DRC extremely challenging.
- The formal justice system has also been significantly impacted. Court operations have not returned to normal, with judicial buildings damaged, legal personnel displaced, and uncertainty surrounding the authority of newly established judicial structures under AFC/M23 administration.

Project At A Glance

DONATED
40
King-Sized Flat Sheets by
Quality Inn & Suites in Lethbridge, Alberta

↓

SHIPPED
Canada → Democratic Republic of the Congo via Rwanda

↓

REPURPOSED
≈319 m^2 of Usable Fabric
Primarily Cotton, with a Small Percentage of Polyester

↓

CRAFTED BY
Remember Youth for Change Sewing
Program Participants & Volunteers

↓

PRODUCED
400 Kindergarten
School Uniform Shirts

↓

RESULT
Retired Hotel Linens were Transformed into 400 School Uniform Shirts, Helping Children Meet a School Requirement while Reducing Textile Waste and Creating Opportunities for Local Skills Development.

Why School Uniforms Matter

When a Basic Requirement Becomes a Barrier

In Canada and the United States, most public schools do not require students to wear uniforms. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, however, school uniforms are commonly required by individual schools as part of their dress policy.

Uniforms are intended to promote equality by ensuring students wear the same clothing regardless of their family's income, make it easier for schools to identify pupils, and foster a sense of belonging and discipline. While these goals are positive, the cost of purchasing uniforms can create an additional financial burden for families already living in poverty.

Although primary education in the DRC is officially free, UNICEF estimates that 7.6 million children aged 5–17 are out of school and identifies indirect education costs, including school materials and uniforms, as one of the factors preventing children from enrolling.

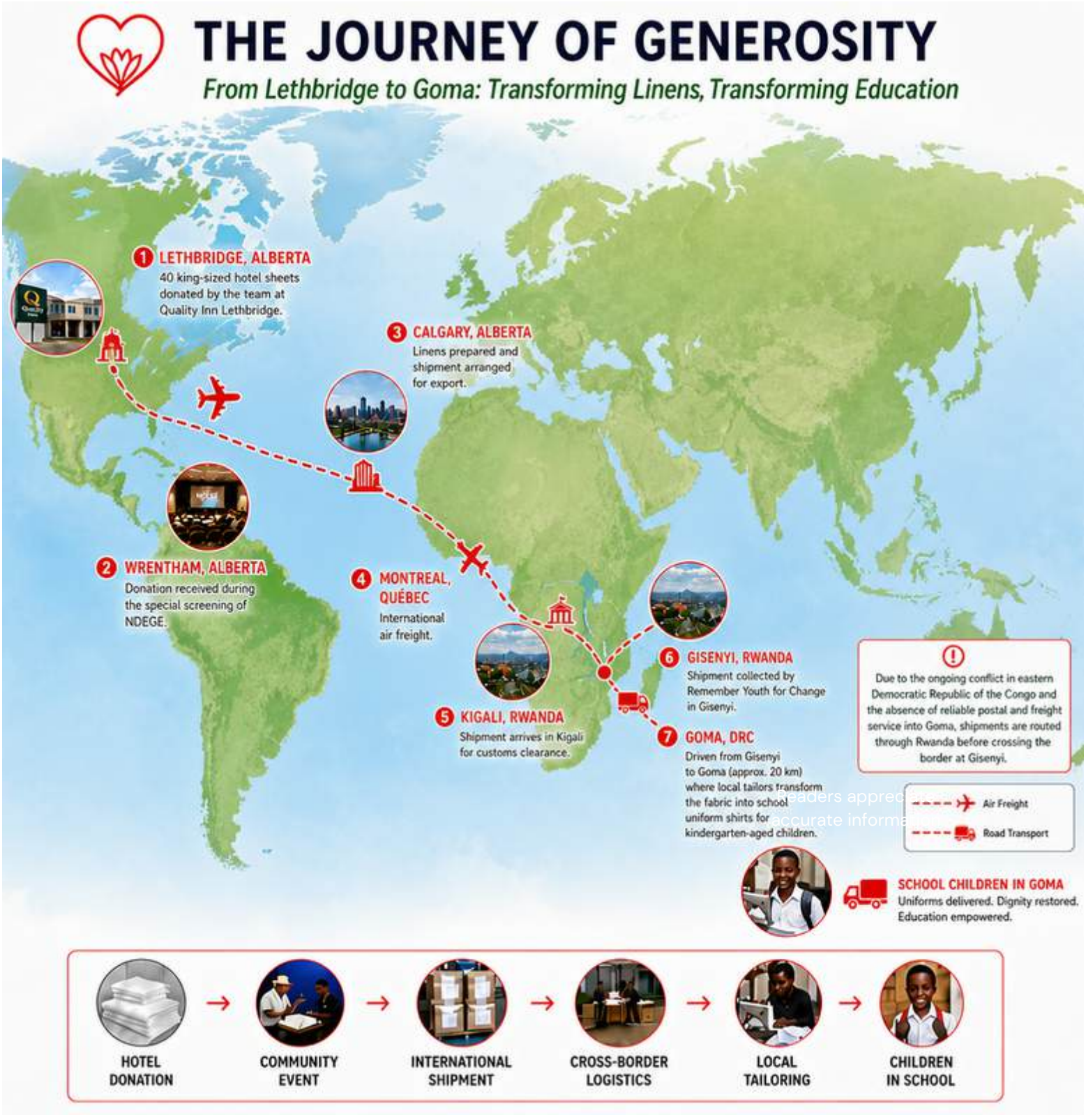
In Goma, the challenge is compounded by ongoing conflict, displacement, and shortages of affordable fabric. By repurposing retired hotel linens into white collared school shirts, this pilot helps reduce one of the costs associated with sending a child to school while creating skill development opportunities for the tailoring apprentices through the Remember Youth for Change programme.



The Sewing Teacher Working with the Volunteers to Figure Out How to Best Utilize the Sheets

THE JOURNEY OF GENEROSITY

From Lethbridge to Goma: Transforming Linens, Transforming Education



HOTEL DONATION → COMMUNITY EVENT → INTERNATIONAL SHIPMENT → CROSS-BORDER LOGISTICS → LOCAL TAILORING → CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

Threads of Transformation

From Retired Linens to School Uniforms: Testing a New Resource Pathway

To address the challenge of mandatory school uniforms, BBS launched a pilot project to explore whether retired hotel linens could be transformed into a practical resource for local school communities.

The donation that made it possible

Quality Inn & Suites in Lethbridge, Alberta, donated 40 king-sized flat sheets that had reached the end of their guestroom lifecycle. Together, these sheets provided approximately 319 m^2 of fabric.

The sheets were made primarily of cotton, with a small blend of polyester. This fabric blend was particularly well suited to the project, offering durability while making the finished garments easy to wash and care for.

According to the head of the sewing programme at Remember Youth for Change, the donated material was sufficient to produce approximately 400 kindergarten uniform shirts.

Local skills, practical solutions

Using locally available resources and skills, tailoring apprentices at Remember Youth for Change transformed the retired linens into complete school shirts featuring collars, short sleeves and snap fasteners.

The shirts were sewn using traditional treadle sewing machines, demonstrating how existing tools, craftsmanship and local knowledge can be used to create practical solutions within the community.

The project was designed to put the philosophy of Threads of Transformation into practice: rethinking, reusing and repurposing materials that might otherwise be discarded. We specifically chose hotel linens that had reached the end of their lifecycle for guestroom use, rather than materials that could still serve their original purpose. This required the sewing team to approach the fabric differently, carefully assessing each sheet and planning how best to maximise the usable material. Some sheets had imperfections, including stains or tears, but these did not mean the fabric had lost its value. The apprentices learned to work around

Threads of Transformation

From Retired Linens to School Uniforms: Testing a New Resource Pathway

damaged areas, adapt their cutting plans and make the most of what was available. In doing so, the project demonstrated that materials can have a valuable second life when we rethink how they can be used, while also helping to divert textiles from landfill.

This process encouraged the apprentices to develop problem-solving skills while ensuring that as much of the donated material as possible could be put to good use.

From the sewing room to the children

Once production was complete, the 400 shirts were distributed during a Back-to-School event held in Goma on September 21, 2026.

Volunteers from Remember Youth for Change helped coordinate and carry out the distribution, ensuring the shirts reached the children. The event also included new backpacks generously provided through the Elevate Prize.

For the children receiving them, the shirts represented more than a piece of clothing. They provided something practical that the children needed to attend school, while making the beginning of a new academic year a little more special.

The successful distribution marked the completion of the pilot: 40 retired hotel sheets had been transformed into 400 school uniform shirts.

Building on an established partnership

This initiative builds on the ongoing partnership between BBS and Remember Youth for Change in delivering community-based projects.

Previous collaborations have included humanitarian food aid distribution, clothing distribution for 300 children who arrived in displacement camps without basic necessities, as well as the provision of reusable feminine sanitary pads to 1,000 women and girls.

These initiatives reflect a shared commitment to identifying practical needs and developing locally led responses that support vulnerable members of the community.

Operating Context

Ebola Impact & Response in Goma

The implementation of this pilot project took place during an exceptionally challenging period for communities in Goma and the surrounding region. Alongside ongoing insecurity, displacement and the effects of armed conflict, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo was also dealing with a serious outbreak of Ebola disease.

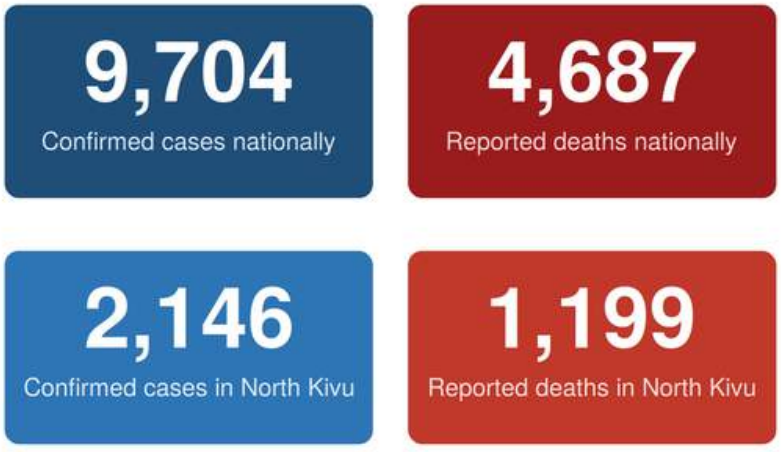
For many, Ebola may be familiar as a disease associated with previous outbreaks in West Africa, but the 2026 outbreak in the DRC involved a different strain of the virus and created significant additional pressures for local communities.

What is Ebola?

Ebola is a rare but severe infectious disease caused by viruses that can lead to serious illness and death. It is transmitted through direct contact with the blood or other bodily fluids of an infected person, or through contaminated materials. Unlike illnesses such as influenza, Ebola does not typically spread through casual airborne contact. Preventing transmission requires early identification of cases, appropriate medical care, contact tracing and careful infection-prevention measures.

The 2026 outbreak in the DRC was caused by the Bundibugyo virus, one of the viruses that can cause Ebola disease. This was particularly significant because vaccines and treatments developed for other Ebola virus species cannot automatically be assumed to work against Bundibugyo virus.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the DRC had recorded:



Source: WHO Disease Outbreak News, October 23, 2026. Figures reported as of October 20, 2026.

Operating Context

Ebola Impact & Response in Goma

These figures on the previous page illustrate the significant public-health pressures facing communities across the region, including North Kivu, where Goma is located.

BBS's response to the health crisis

In response to the growing health concerns, BBS also launched an emergency fundraising initiative, working alongside its local implementation partner, Remember Youth for Change.

Support helped RYC establish hand-sanitation centres in villages, providing several thousand community members with access to important preventative measures.

The Ebola outbreak also affected the timing and implementation of the school uniform project. Activities had to be adapted to prioritise the health and safety of the young people and volunteers involved.

Despite these additional challenges, the Remember Youth for Change tailoring team successfully completed production of all 400 school uniform shirts. The shirts were distributed during the September 21 Back-to-School Campaign, alongside new backpacks provided through the Elevate Prize.

The successful completion of the pilot is a testament to the commitment and adaptability of our local partners, the young people participating in the sewing programme and the volunteers who helped bring the project to life.

It also demonstrates why locally led initiatives and strong community partnerships are particularly important in places where families face multiple and overlapping challenges

Secondary Project Beneficiary

Wrentham Community Library, Wrentham Alberta

While the primary purpose of this project was to repurpose donated hotel linens into school uniforms for children in Goma, the shipment itself also created a meaningful secondary benefit within the Wrentham community.

As part of Business for Better Society's commitment to supporting the communities where it operates, BBS ships materials from Wrentham, Alberta, whenever possible.

The Wrentham Community Library also operates as the community's Canada Post outlet. The library depends in part on postal activity to support its funding allocation from Canada Post.

The shipment of hotel linens from Wrentham to Rwanda represented an increase in postage activity for this small community outlet and contributed towards the postal volumes needed to support its ongoing funding.

The Wrentham Library is much more than a postal outlet and lending library. It is a vital community hub, providing educational resources, activities for children throughout the year, support for homeschooling families and a welcoming space where local groups can gather and host programmes.

By choosing to ship from Wrentham versus a large urban postal location, BBS helps support an essential local service while connecting a small Alberta community with partners and communities thousands of kilometres away.

In this way, the project created value beyond its primary beneficiaries, demonstrating how one initiative can generate positive outcomes in multiple communities.



Pilot Images

The following photographs were taken by Remember Youth for Change (RYC) in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

They document the progression of the project, from the sewing classroom where the shirts were made to the finished garments and the September 21 Back-to-School distribution event.
































THE ELEVATE PRIZE
Help those who need it
Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
Bringing Hope for Children affected by war.
BACK TO SCHOOL
2026-2027






















need it
Children
war.





We aim to continue this programme in 2027 and welcome others who share our vision to get involved.

Please contact us to find out how you can be part of what comes next.

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