

THE COST OF RAISING CHILD WITH DISABILITY

PHOTO BY JULIET KASIRYE

By Juliet Kasirye

Raising a child with a disability can be overwhelming, especially if you are financially unstable.

Baker Mulindwa, a resident of Kyabagu zone in Njeru town council, Buikwe district, says the expenses for medical care and daily support for a child with a disability cost an arm and a leg.

Mulindwa says due to brain damage, his child is paralysed, though he can see and hear.

"When my wife gave birth to our child in 2017, we did not know that he had a disability. However, when he turned one year and five months old, we fully understood his condition. Besides hearing and seeing, the rest of his body parts were not functioning," he says.

However, his wife failed to cope.

"She abandoned us saying she often felt embarrassed when people asked about our child's condition in public. Since I had to make ends meet and also provide all the basic needs for my child, I took him



Vujcic (centre) with children with disabilities during the launch of the Beyond the Canvas initiative at the Reach A Hand headquarters in Lunguja, Kampala on Monday

to my mother's place".

Five years later, Mulindwa's mother had grown too old to manage, so he took full responsibility and hired maids to help. Unfortunately, when

his child became heavy, the maids couldn't cope either.

"As a lorry driver, I had to abandon my job to care for him. To survive, I rely on friends to give me gigs, which I pass on

to others for commission. Since my child is 18 years old now, my biggest challenge is finding reliable help to care for him."

Since persons living with disabilities (PWDs) need special care, Mulindwa urges the Government to provide equal opportunities for them and also support vulnerable parents in hard-to-reach areas with essential items, such as wheelchairs and free treatment.

"It is expensive to raise a child with a disability. For instance, my 18-year-old child requires a special diet and frequent hospital visits to Nalufenya Children's Hospital because of the seizures," Mulindwa says.

He raised the concern during the launch of the Beyond the Canvas Initiative at Reach A Hand Headquarters in Lunguja, Kampala on Monday.

The launch was held under the theme: *Abilities Beyond Limits*.



Baker Mulindwa

MOMENTS WITH VUJICIC

During the launch, over 100 PWDs, parents and caregivers in different regions shared a jovial moment, experiences and challenges facing PWDs with Nick Vujcic, the World-renowned motivational speaker.

Beyond the Canvas is a multi-faceted Africa-wide platform designed to promote inclusive talent development and access to decent work opportunities for young people aged 30 and under, including PWDs.

This initiative, according to Reach A Hand, seeks to address the persistent gaps in opportunities for young people to showcase their talents within the creative industry, while positioning arts, music and performance as tools for inclusion, advocacy and economic empowerment.

According to the 2024 Census Report, in Uganda, 13.2% (close to six million) Ugandans have some form of disability.

DISABILITY INCLUSION

The disability inclusion facilitator of Ripples of Resilience, Doreck Ankunda, said inclusion is about reorganising talent, dignity, leadership, creativity and humanity.

According to Ankunda, inclusion is not charity, it is justice, opportunity and ensuring that every person

ENHANCING AND RECOGNISING TALENT

Reach A Hand Uganda programmes director Benson Muhindo said the disability inclusion programme is looking at enhancing, recognising and celebrating the talents of PWDs.

To challenge societal stigma that far too often equates disability with inability, Muhindo said they will support young PWDs in harnessing their talents and skills.

Christian Blind Mission country director Jackie Marlene Kwesiga said this platform reminds them that inclusion is not charity and disability is not inability. Rather, inclusion is justice, dignity and an opportunity in action.

To improve the quality of life of PWDs, Kwesiga advised young people that "inclusion must be led by PWDs. Continue to challenge the stereotypes, pursue your dreams and inspire change in your communities."

regardless of their ability actively participates, contributes and leads.

"We cannot talk about inclusion while the talents of PWDs remain unemployed and children with disabilities are hidden in homes. True inclusion means accessible communication, sign language interpretation, accessible infrastructure, inclusive education, equal opportunities in employment and leadership, as well as decision making, among others," Ankunda said.

NO ARMS, NO LEGS, NO LIMIT

Born without limbs, Australian evangelist and motivational speaker Nick Vujcic shared his source of motivation and the remarkable story of faith and resilience.

Vujcic, 43, is married with four children.

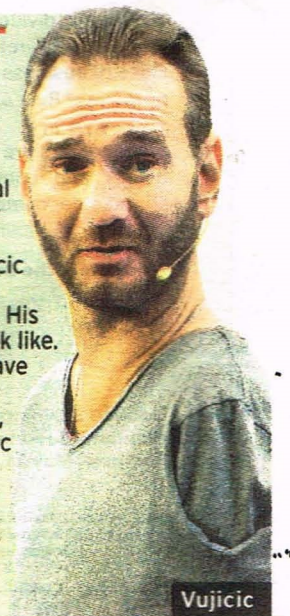
"I was born in Australia without limbs, and there was no medical explanation for it. My parents married in their 20s and I am their first son. Even though they had ultrasound images of me in the womb, they didn't know I would be born with this disability," Vujcic said.

According to him, the doctors were shocked when he was born. His parents cried because they had no idea what their son would look like.

"I had no arms, no legs, but a little foot. With this little foot, I have learnt how to walk, jump, swim and write. I have two toes. When my parents told me, Nick, we love you. No one has a plan for you, but it is going to be okay. That was the beginning of hope," Vujcic stated.

He added that the world still has so much to learn about true inclusion for PWDs.

"Regardless of the pain you are going through, never isolate yourself or give up just because you can't do what other people do".



Vujcic