

Baylor's teacher Jane wins award

By Joachim Buwemba

It all started with a chance encounter at a suburban church in southern Kampala. School teacher Jane Beyeza was acting as an usher when she got into conversation with a stranger who did not want to enter but continued to pray from the entrance. In their conversation, she learnt that he was a foreign doctor training medical workers who was responding to HIV/AIDS challenge in children at Mulago and he suggested she passes by when she gets time to see the big task on their hands. That was in 2004.

Ward 15

Teacher Jane found time the following week to visit Ward 15, which, then was the centre of action at Mulago and she was struck by the whole atmosphere where something was definitely wrong in her sight as a teacher. For Teacher Jane, any group of children together are supposed to be playing and chattering away. But the dozens of children she found at Ward 15 were all sad and looked depressed, even though most were not visibly sick. This to her was an emergency and without any further delay, reacted by getting down to work, trying to engage the children.

Like she would at her then work place Alpha and Omega School on Busabala Road, Teacher Jane asked the children questions, telling them a story or two. Time passed and by the end of the day, she hadn't made much progress though it was clear that there was a lot that needed to be done here.

First of all the kids' parents themselves were quite hostile. Why should a stranger be talking with their children? Some harshly called them away. The kids themselves, already traumatised, were not easy and some did not even respond. All these just kindled the fire of determination in Teacher Jane and returning the following day, she was more prepared and systematic in her approach. The response of the children this time more significant. She told them stories and they listened. She led them in sing and they sang. And then the great reward that only a person who has ever anxiously nursed a sick child knows, they smiled!

Getting Teacher elated, Jane delved deeper into the newfound obsession with making the children happy. The parents who had to bring the children for treatment also started finding Teacher Jane's distraction quite welcome. Many started feeling the reward of seeing their children smile, a much unexpected occurrence at the unfriendly ward. The parents started sending the children to join Teacher Jane in the small open space where she was conducting her play and story-telling sessions.

Getting children on medication

The most visible benefit that Teacher Jane's uninvited 'intrusion' into Mulago was the children's becoming willing to take their medication. It is not easy, actually impossible, to make a child like to take medicine when they are not sick. Because the bulk of bulk of the children were below the age of eleven, nobody



Beyeza during one of the sessions at Baylor College of Medicine Children's Foundation in Mulago

had told them why they had to take medicine when apparently not sick. How do you tell a three, five or eight year old that they have HIV and must take medication daily all their lives? For most parents, it was just by order, by force – take the medicine or get punished. Others were even worse; telling the kids to take the medicine or die!

But Teacher Jane changed all that. Her strategy was to give the kids incentive to take the medicine willingly, using scenarios that they know. President Museveni's image came in handy.

"You see his soldiers who are always ready to defend him if attacked?" she would ask. "They are very strong because he gives them food. But for you, you have very few soldiers in your blood to fight the bad guys who want to hurt you and come through disease. To make your soldiers strong you must also feed them like Museveni feeds his soldiers. But your soldiers only eat medicine. So you have to take the medicine for them to eat and then be able to beat off the bad guys."

The good teacher that she is, Jane gives the kids a quick demo of a big guy fighting a small guy. The smiles advance into excited laughter. Medicine acceptance problem solved. A few years ago, a police officer called Muhammed Kirumira gained fame fighting dangerous robbers around Nansana. Kirumira thus unknowingly became one of her models for motivating the kids.

PEPFAR hero

Teacher Jane's good works was not passing unnoticed. The administration started giving her a cup of tea to regain her breath halfway through the day. Her volunteering days coincided with the time Baylor College of Medicine was taking root in Uganda at the teaching hospital of Mulago. Baylor was also registered as a local NGO so as to be able to seek more funding and support. Teacher Jane was employed after two years of volunteering.



Jane Beyeza aka teacher Jane was named PEPFAR hero

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As the year 2017 drew to a close, Teacher Jane received a pleasant surprise she had not even imagined for a single moment would happen. An email arrived informing her that she was being declared a PEPFAR hero. PEPFAR is the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief which enjoys bipartisan (both Republican and Democrat) support since its inception 15 years ago. It is managed by the State Department

that no child is unable to learn.

Teacher Jane's second phenomenal success was a girl in lower primary at Gayaza Kadongo whom the father threw at her, with a threat that if she did not take her up, the father would just kill her since he had never had such a dense child. Jane embraced the poor girl and today, she is a senior doctor, in fact a pediatrician at Mulago National Referral Hospital.

Her third huge success started in similar circumstances. He has specialised in agriculture and owns a large modern farm in addition to a string of businesses. And now comes the PEPFAR Hero's award. Jane expects to receive the award before the end of the year.

Her love for children has a curious origin, though. Her own father was excessively tough, or more accurately, harsh. He never allowed children to play and anybody found playing in his homestead was punished severely. Jane, therefore, grew up cherishing any opportunity she could steal to play. Any child who cannot play to her constitutes a very serious problem. And she treats it as an emergency.

At Baylor, where Jane is simply 'Teacher Jane', she handles many children. Her role is now institutionalised and there are assistants in her department at Baylor College. The play area is equipped with games and a large screen TV. The children are excited to come to "school" every week, after all it is a world famous college, Baylor College of Medicine. The porridge and fruit provided are both an incentive and of nutritional benefit to them. Many of Jane's clients at Baylor have grown to graduate in a different discipline. Thanks to Baylor, it is not enough to save the children with HIV alive, they are also helped to lead positive, productive lives.

The New Vision TV broadcast her story yesterday. Find it on YouTube by following the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPt8WYcQao>