Zziwa drank his way to Butabika

Kennedy Zziwa, 30, started drinking in his first year at Makerere University. However, it was the start of a journey that would end up in Butabika, writes Lawrence Ogwal

It is a hot Monday afternoon when I arrive in Kamwokya, north east of Kampala, for a scheduled interview with Kennedy Zziwa, a celebrity hairstylist.

On the third floor of Krishna Mart Mall at Kisementi, a business hub in Kamwokya, I am directed to Hair by Zziwa, where I meet a young man of average build. He has been waiting for me for at least 30 minutes.

"Welcome my friend," he says between a giggle that passes for a stretched smile inviting me to take a seat in another corner of the salon.

Inside the well-lit salon we engage in chitchat before we delve into Zziwa's alcoholic chronicles that saw him booked into Butabika Hospital.

"Coffee is my new addiction. I have been taking plenty of it ever since I left Butabika," he says, pulling through his dreadlocked hair.

"It was never my plan, I just found myself in Butabika. Actually, I was driven there by friends after a night out of binge drinking at Sky Lounge [hangout]," he says.

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KENNEDY ZZIWA'S AGE. THE HAIRSTYLIST UNKNOWINGLY DRANK HIMSELF TO REHAB.

Zziwa's addiction, he says, was a blend of binge drinking (beer, wine and whiskey) and smoking hard stuff such as cocaine.

"I would drink from the time I wake up until I blackout. It was just bad. It had reached alarming levels. I used to work [in a salon] after 4pm. So it was becoming difficult to even go to work," he says.

The 30-year-old hairstylist would spend roughly Shs300,000 on alcohol and cocaine a week with no regard to the huge spending.

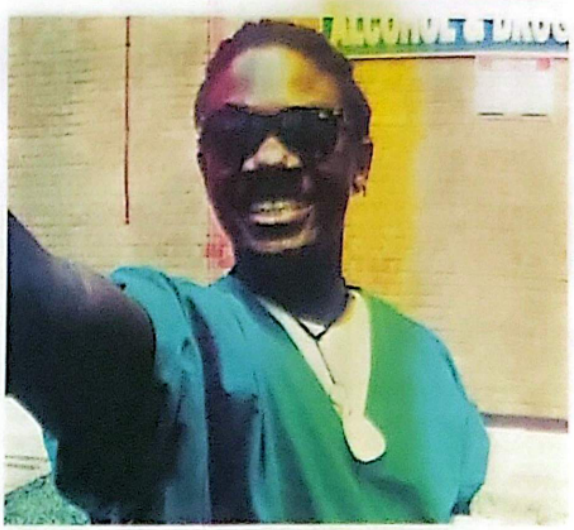
Zziwa went through this routine for at least six years until the day he blacked out at Sky Lounge in March.

That same day he was driven to Butabika by his friends who had habits. At Butabika he was registered as a rehab patient and handed a uniform that would become a part of him for about two months.

"I learnt a lot. It had become dangerous. I do not think I can ever drink like I used to," he says.

Currently, he has settled into a new life to operate his hair studio that he started in 2010 but has now been improved to a high end hair and nail clinic.

Zziwa first tested beer during his first year at Makerere University, which gradually became a habit.



Zziwa takes a selfie at the Alcohol and Drug Unit at Butabika Hospital. COURTESY PHOTOS

"The first time I took a beer, it tested funny and bitter. However, I got used after some more testing and before I knew it had become hard to live without it," he says.

The drinking, which he would start in the day, would stretch into the night robbing him of working time and lots of money.

However, the journey to Butabika Hospital has changed Zziwa's life.

"The last time I drunk was the day I was driven to Butabika. On the way I had a bottle of Bond 7. It is the last alcoholic drink I tested," he says.

The first born in a family of three boys, was born on May 19, 1987 to the late George Byamukama and Harriet Kyagaba of Wakiso District.

He attended Kampala Nursery School, before moving to Buganda Road Primary School and Lubiri Secondary School. In 2007 he joined Makerere University, where he attained a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science in 2011.

He has had acting stints with Ebonies and has featured in a number on TV shows such as *Diamond ring, Bibawo, That's Life Mwatu* and *Kitobero Alacarte*, among others.

Changes since he left Butabika Hospital

Zziwa spent 60 days in rehab and has been a different person ever since he returned last month.

"Back then, I would wake up at 4pm but now I wake up at 8am to prepare for work," he says, adding that even when he chooses to hangout, he only takes a soda or a bottle of water, which his friends find boring.

As an addict, Zziwa has had tremendous changes. He is now able to manage as well as control himself.

"I used to pick quarrels and fights with friends and family members but that has changed. I think I am now a reformed man. I no longer sleep around or fight with anyone. I like my peace," he says.

Back then, drinking had become a serious problem for Zziwa and he was severally arrested for drink-driving.

He is now planning to start a rehabilitation centre to help drug and alcohol addicts at no cost.

Common signs

Repeatedly neglecting your responsibilities at home, work, or school because of your drinking. For example, performing poorly at work, flunking classes, neglecting your kids, or skipping out on commitments because you're hung over.

Using alcohol in situations where it's physically dangerous, such as drinking and driving, operating machinery while intoxicated, or mixing alcohol with prescription medication against doctor's orders.

Experiencing repeated legal problems on account of your drinking. For example, getting arrested for driving under the influence and disorderly conduct.

Continuing to drink even though your alcohol use is causing problems in your relationships as well as drinking as a way to relax or de-stress.

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