

Abandoned blind Jinja twins start school

KAMPALA
Twins Festival
Double the fun!

On August 20, Sunday Vision will host a twins festival at Kyadondo Rugby Grounds in Kampala. Entrance fee is sh10,000. In the run-up to the event, we are profiling inspiring stories about lives of twins. Do not miss your souvenir copy in Sunday Vision

By George Bitu

The four-year-old duo busily piece up learning toys set on the table before them at Buckley High School in Iganga district.

Except for the clattering noise made by their study tools and the click clack of the teacher's shoes, there is no other sound in the classroom.

Ever since Bright Tenywa and Herman Waiswa joined the School of Blind and Deaf early this year, they were started on nursery lessons.

Rashida Babirye, their teacher, observes that being visually impaired implies that once they start primary school, they will be shifted to the nearby school of the blind. "Their sponsor, sourced by Sense International, pays the boarding fees as they attend nursery. When time comes for Primary One, we shall take them to the school of the blind that offers braille study," Babirye reveals.

Charles Luletero, the deputy headteacher, narrates that the rather shy twins often recite songs learnt during the day when they return to the dormitory.

"The academic progress is commendable," Luletero emphasises.

However, this status quo passes like a shift from hell to heaven, given their condition barely a year ago.

Background

"In 2008, I delivered Ivan Kisule, followed by Emma Muwata two years later. But when disabled Waiswa and Tenywa came into the picture, all hell broke loose," Scovia Nanangwe says.

Most of her husband's family members considered the visually impaired twins a bad omen, thereby disowning them.

Nanangwe narrates how she travelled to her husband's ancestral home in Kamuli, hoping to get assistance, but



Tenywa (right) and Waiswa attending Pre-school at Buckley High School in Iganga. Photos by George Bitu

"I was chased out of his family residence, where we had been staying and I had to fend for myself."

failed to trace his relatives.

"What I found was an abandoned semi-permanent building in a compound overgrown with bush. I had no alternative but to return and try to make ends meet for my children's sake," she adds.

Nanangwe currently digs in other residents' gardens in addition to making mats and baskets for sale to purchase items for home use.

Sam Kipanda, the ICI chairperson appreciates efforts by Nanangwe to make life better for her children.

"She rarely waits for handouts, but tries to make money to buy food, soap and other basic necessities," Kipanda says.

He observes that Kisule and Muwata are in Top and Middle class respectively at the nearby Sunlight Primary School because of their mother's hardwork.

Help arrives

Christine Asire, a volunteer

worker with Sense International, says a white man volunteered to pay the twin's school fees.

"That is how they ended up at Buckley High School in Iganga. In addition, their mother was offered money to rent a more than decent house, but she declined over worries of sustainability of the offer," Asire says.

She says a donor had suggested Nanangwe gets a rental house of at least sh40,000 per month, but Nanangwe preferred to use the funds to pay for the rent of her current house and stay there.

New Vision readers also fundraised some money last year that was used to buy essential domestic items for the family.



Nanangwe with Waiswa and Tenywa

Facing challenges

The blind twins were born to 27-year-old Scovia Nanangwe, a mother of five.

She lives in a dingy structure with a leaking roof at Wabulenga village, Namulesa parish in Matubira sub-county of Jinja district.

Although Nanangwe was paying sh10,000 monthly rent for the squalid building, the figure has now doubled.

The mother of twins had been living a seemingly good life until that day in 2012 when she delivered the visually impaired boys.

She says her husband, Ronald Irongo, a peasant farmer, informed her that those could not be his children as no such offspring ever featured in his family lineage.

"I took the matter up with the area Police and Irongo was arrested for child neglect. After one day in Buyala jail, he was released and I did not get anything," Nanangwe recalls.

"I was chased out of his family residence, where we had been staying and I had to fend for myself. Irongo usually surfaces once every three months and then disappears," she says.

It is during those rare visits that enabled conception and delivery of their last-born; a two-year-old girl called Natasha Babirye.

Nanangwe explains that she was orphaned at three years of age and grew up believing that her aunt, Merida Mbeiza, was her biological mother.

"She paid my tuition at Bituli Primary School in Butagaya sub-county, Jinja district. At the time, we were living in Buwuma village," she recalls.

She adds that no sooner had she reached P4 than her aunt stopped paying fees to turn her into a housemaid.

"I tried to resist, but my aunt turned a deaf ear. She boldly told me the money for my tuition fees was over and I had to stay home to work for her as a maid," Nanangwe says.

She cannot forget that day in 2003 when her aunt's friend came around with a man, prompting Mbeiza to inform her that she had to marry him.

"My subsequent escape plan was nipped in the bud, earning me merciless caning from my aunt, who the invited Irongo to take me away as his wife. I had no option but to accept after the heavy beatings," she says.