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Uganda's dog therapy documentary wins award in Mexico

BY JAMES OWICH

GULU: A 30-minute documentary showing the healing power of dogs has been voted the best at an animal festival in Mexico.

The dogs are being used as therapy animals to aid recovery among individuals grappling with trauma due to violence perpetuated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels in northern Uganda.

'The Comfort Dogs of Uganda' documentary was last week awarded as the most inspiring short film at the Fauna Tepoztlan animal festival in Mexico.

The film by Big Fix Uganda is a reflection of how therapy dogs and victims of the over two-decade-long LRA insurgency in northern Uganda are helping each other heal.

The film shows how three dogs rescued from the streets of Gulu City and trained to offer therapy to two men and a woman who suffered violence, learn how to heal together, after their traumatic experience.

The film premiered on February 21, 2026, in Gulu City, with three of the victims and their dogs featured in the documentary in attendance, portraying a deeper bond between the canine and human beings (their masters).

The documentary portrayed how the trauma of war stays with the victims for years. However, the lives of Francis, Lucy and Jennifer (LRA victims) changed after they adopted Sadik, Tommy and Ogen (therapy dogs) to cope with social stigma and severe post-traumatic stress disorder.

AWARD WINNING

The *Comfort Dogs of Uganda*, a 30-minute documentary premiered on February 21, 2026, in Gulu City, with Francis, Lucy and Jennifer (LRA victims) and their dogs featured in the documentary in attendance, portraying a deeper bond between the canine and human beings (their masters). The documentary portrayed how the trauma of war stays with the victims for years. However, the lives of the victims changed after they adopted Sadik, Tommy and Ogen (therapy dogs) to cope with social stigma and trauma.

According to the new documentary, as the three victims struggle to overcome trauma, the adoptees are also working towards recovery and overcoming abandonment and mistreatment.

Mr Francis Okello Oloya, the centre manager of Comfort Dogs Project, said the film portrayed how dogs, as social animals, can do more than provide companionship to human beings.

"Few people appreciate dogs. But this film shows how dogs can help us cope with trauma, grief, loss and violence. Humans trust dogs with their painful stories because they do not reveal their secrets to others. They do not insult their friendship. They take it as something very important," Oloya said.

The Acholi people keep dogs for

hunting, as pets and for security purposes.

With low numbers of mental health professionals, and high cost of living amid donors' aid cuts, a growing number of LRA war survivors in the former war-ravaged region are embracing the use of therapy dogs, on their long way to heal from their traumatic experience.

The documentary will be screened in London, Australia and Mexico in the coming months to show how war survivors and dogs are supporting each other on their long way to healing.

Mr Richard Wainwright, the Australian film producer behind the film, said, "It is heart-warming to see the Big Fix Uganda and its Comfort Dog Project being recognised for their incredible dedication to both the dogs and war trauma survivors of northern Uganda," he added.