



Nun restores hope for children with disabilities

Progress. Through the programme, many disabled children have been able to transform their lives for better.

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SOROTI. Though society tends to underlook persons with disability, Sr Margaret Awori of St Francis Rehabilitation Centre has instead utilised her calling as a nun to uplift and empower children with disabilities.

Sr Awori's zeal to equip children with disabilities with practical skills to eke at a living has changed many lives much to the surprise of their families and communities which had once neglected them.

At St Francis Rehabilitation Centre, a Catholic founded project in Soroti, Sr Awori runs a number of projects such as bread baking and tailoring, where children with disabilities learn practical skills at no charge before they are reintegrated into their communities.

The empowerment the children obtain from Francis Rehabilitation Centre is seen in a number of baking activities.

Under the project, they also make garments, uniforms from which they earn for those who choose to remain at the rehabilitation centre. For others who opt out, they earn a living through tailoring and baking bread after acquiring the skills.

Sr Awori says her dream started even before her calling to serve as a nun, to give a sense of life to people with disabilities, uplift the poor and change public perception about such persons.

"It is against this background; having seen as a little girl people with disabilities discriminated against, that while at the Sister's home [Convent] in Nkokonjeru [Buikwe District] in 1996, I passionately won the hearts of Catholic friends in the Netherlands through a proposal to support my dream," Sr Awori explains.

From the funding extended by the



Results. One of the beneficiaries from the programme displays her products at the bakery recently. PHOTO BY SIMON PETER EMWAMU

benefactors from the Netherlands, Sr Awori says a number of rehabilitation centres courtesy of her proposal were set up in Budaka, Tororo and Iganga districts to help children with disabilities acquire skills.

"My conviction in my day-to-day engagements with the disabled is to have a society that is accommodative of persons with disabilities, to nurture them equally like other able-bodied children," she adds.

The Catholic nun says the children whom she started nurturing at the centre in 2006, are today breadwinners for their families.

One of Sr Awori's beneficiaries, Mr Jimmy Ojok, the manager at Mama Kevina bakery, says after failing to have chance to enrol for A-Level, Sr Awori picked him up in 2009, taught

Voices



"My conviction in my day-to-day engagements with the disabled is to have a society that is accommodative of persons with disabilities, to nurture them equally like other able-bodied children," Sr MARGARET AWORI, HEAD OF ST FRANCIS REHABILITATION CENTRE

him how to bake bread and tailoring, for which Mr Ojok admits to have excelled.

According to Mr Ojok, Sr Awori posted him to serve as a manager for Mama Kevina bakery.

"From the salary they paid us here, we were advised to save, once this savings accumulated I was in position to enrol for a certificate in Business studies at UCC Soroti, since then I have assumed the position of accountant at St Francis," he says.

Mr Ojok says because of the skills acquired and being absorbed back to work at St Francis, it has enabled him enrol again for his diploma in Business Studies.

"I am so happy; perhaps this would have not materialised if it were not for Sr Awori's dedication, in her we have a guardian, she has

uplifted us that we use the little practical skills to make ends meet. Another beneficiary, Ms Betty Akello, the fourth born in a family of six, with disability from Kamuda Sub-county, Soroti District, says prior to being absorbed at St Francis rehabilitation centre, she had not seen value in her life.

"My first experience here was to get skills of how to make cakes, slowly I learnt the process, today besides working here for a pay at Mama Kevina bakeries, I also make bread at home which my siblings sell to enable us buy necessities," she says.

Ms Akello says unlike six years ago when she never dreamt of having Shs100,000, today she can have it, as she is now a breadwinner in their family.