



Ntambazi somersaults during a performance by Kampala School of the Physically Handicapped. Courtesy photos

WHAT THEY SAY

John Mwasigye, P5  
I acted on stage and can never forget that. I also sang. Disability is not inability. If you see one physically disabled child, do not despise him or her.



Gift Kampara, P5  
I recited a poem on life, which was encouraging. I also danced ballet. Previously, I did not know how to sing and dance, but I can now do them to express myself.



Aaron Takiweraza, P6  
I did not know I could dance. However, my trainers interested me, and they told me that believing in ourselves is the best way to success.



# Unseen Dreams uses art to revive hope of learners with disabilities

By Denis Nsubuga

“I somersaulted and danced on stage,” nine-year-old Lawrence Ntambazi says, his face beaming with joy.

Ntambazi, a pupil of Kampala School of the Physically Handicapped at Namirembe Hill, was born without hands.

He was one of the 20 pupils who recently represented his school at the third annual Unseen Dreams Inclusive Dance Arts Festival at the National Theatre in Kampala.

“I was happy to perform for many people in the auditorium,” Ntambazi says.

He had never dreamt of ever being on a national arts stage. That is what motivated the team behind the Unseen Dreams programme.

“We want to provide a platform for people to nurture the art in individuals who have not previously expressed themselves, mostly persons with disabilities,” Kenneth Tereka Desire, the artistic director and team leader of Unseen Dreams, explains.

“There was no platform for them to watch and do art, theatre and dance.”

A video documenting the event shows Ntambazi twisting his body with the agility of a seasoned dancer as the audience cheers him on. Behind him is a line of four others in wheelchairs. They sing angelically as Ntambazi dances.

space for these children to express themselves in a way that people did not expect them.”

This year’s edition was themed *Unlimited*.

The one-day festival is part of the Unseen Dreams’ programme of promoting social inclusion of children with disabilities in the arts.

Tereka says over 150 children with special needs participated in dance, drama, poetry and acrobatics.

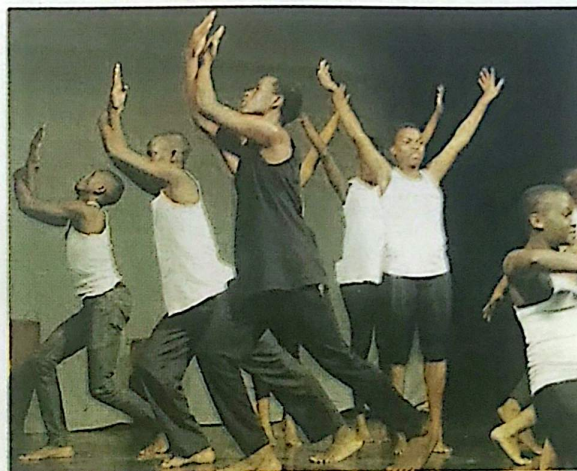
Performers included the deaf, blind, physically handicapped and people living with albinism. It was a convergence of schools for special needs and community-based organisations.

Participating institutions included Kampala School of the Physically Handicapped, Entebbe Welfare School for Children with Special Needs. Others were Ntinda School of the Deaf, Wakiso School of the Deaf, Salama School of the Blind, Home of Joy Centre for Children with Disability, DradanMwa Africa, Sossolya, and The Deaf Dancers.

The arts festival is the tip of the iceberg of regular inclusion activities that have taken place under the Unseen Dreams programme for the last four years.

Under the initiative to develop the artistic side of children with disabilities, the team of eight dancers goes to special needs schools and engages learners in music, dance and drama.

Since 2014, Unseen Dreams has been looking for children with disabilities, mainly in schools and



Dancers trained by Unseen Dreams performing during the festival

organisations.

Initially, the idea was to train and engage the children in activities at their schools.

“We thought it would not make sense if we only trained them in music, dance and drama. They needed to express themselves in front of people who do not know them,” Tereka says.

“Some of these children, who had closed in their lives, started freely expressing themselves,” he adds.

John Mwasigwa, the director of Kampala School of the Physically Handicapped, says children who

participate in the festival are keen to show their abilities. “It gives them a chance to show their abilities, one of the things lacking in the education system,” she says.

Mwasigwa adds that since the handicapped learners dance with professionals and do professional workout movements, it builds their confidence.

One of their challenges the organisers of the arts festival face is limited funding. They have been running these activities and festivals, using their meagre earnings.

It is limited, but we would want to

reach as many children as possible,” Mwasigwa says.

During the festival, they encourage people to donate scholastic materials, such as books, while others donate basic items, such as clothes for the struggling children.

Today, the programme focuses on performing arts as a form of expression, regardless of the children’s disabilities. They train each child in what they can do best.

Hellen Businge, one of the artists on the team, says they are preparing the children for the world, where all other able-bodied graduates work.

“A child might not have legs but they have hands to do something. We are raising a generation that can fend for themselves regardless of their nature, a generation that is able to also contribute to the economy,” Businge says.

“They have something in them. This is like an announcement; that these people exist and can do things others do. We organise the festival to also encourage those who have children with disabilities at home or at school not to disregard them as a curse, as many sometimes think.”

Businge observes that when the children perform at a level where people see what they are capable of, it gives them confidence in what they are doing.

“If children with disabilities can perform arts with their limitation, it shows they have rare abilities. And if you can build on that, you are setting a future for the child,” she explains.