



Denise Mutambi the Acting Executive Director of Joint Medical Stores receives baby Balam from Robinah Nantongo Community Director at Teresa Children's Home. PHOTO/SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA.

Teresa House: Where the abandoned find home

Teresa Children's home is under the care of Teresa ministries founded by Fr Raymond Kalanzi in 2014, the Nsambya branch started operating in 2023, but officially opened 2025.

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

On a quiet morning in Nsambya, the soft cries of infants drift through the corridors of Teresa Children's Home. It is feeding time one of many moments in a tightly scheduled day that keeps dozens of abandoned babies alive, comforted, and, against all odds, hopeful.

Here, life begins again.

Robinah Nantongo Community Director at Teresa Children's Home, says caregivers attend to children from the most fragile stage of life starting from newborns just hours old to toddlers of three years.

"Many arrive under heartbreaking circumstances; abandoned in markets, left in churches, discovered in rubbish pits, or rescued from pit latrines and unfinished buildings," she says.

Others are brought in by police after being found buried or discarded in unsafe conditions.

"We receive calls from different police stations, especially through the Child and Family Protection Unit. When a baby is found, we are contacted immediately. We respond, pick up the child, and bring them here for urgent care," she says.

The first hours: A race against time

Nantongo adds that the moment a child arrives, the priority is survival where every infant is first taken to the home's in-house clinic for medical assessment. This initial check determines the baby's condition whether they are stable, premature, malnourished, or suffering from infections.

Nantongo says that for more serious conditions, the home relies on referrals to major hospitals such as Nsambya and Mengo. "We sometimes spend weeks there," she says. "A baby can stay in hospital for three weeks or even a month before discharge."

The cost is staggering. Hospital bills accumulate quickly, stretching the already limited resources of the home. Yet, for the caregivers, there is no choice. "You cannot put a price on saving a life," one nurse says quietly.

"Back at the home, care continues without pause. A team of three nurses works in shifts day, night, and weekend to ensure that every child receives attention at all times. Feeding, bathing, monitoring, and comforting are constant routines," she says.

She adds that in a separate isolation room, babies with infections or weakened immunity are kept under close observation to prevent the spread of illness.

"Infants are very delicate," Nantongo explains. "Even a small infection can become serious if not handled quickly."

She adds that common illnesses such as cough, flu, and measles pose a constant threat. When outbreaks occur in the wider community, the home feels the impact almost immediately.

She says that the result is a continuous cycle of treatment, monitoring, and prevention an effort that consumes both time and money.

The hidden cost of compassion

Phionah Nassanga an administrator at Teresa Home notes that running a chil-

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The daily task of caring for abandoned and vulnerable children goes beyond providing shelter,

it demands consistent access to quality healthcare. It is this gap one of the stakeholders Joint Medical Store (JMS) seeks to address through its Community Health Programme.

The Acting Executive Director Denise Tusiime Mutambi says Teresa House will benefit from the initiative implemented under JMS's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) framework, with Shs500m over five years into strengthening community-based health systems.

"Since 2014, Teresa Homes has provided a safe haven for abandoned children, offering care, protection, and hope. With JMS's support, the facility is expected to improve service delivery and respond more effectively to the children's health needs," she says.

dren's home, especially one dedicated to infants, is an expensive undertaking.

"Medical care alone takes up a significant portion of the budget. From routine check-ups to emergency hospital admissions, the costs are relentless and healthcare is only one part of the equation," she says.

Nassanga adds that the home must also provide food, clothing, bedding, and sani-

tation supplies. Formula milk, diapers, and medications are daily necessities none of which come cheap.

"Caregivers are often referred to as mothers within the home since they play a central role in nurturing the children. They feed them, hold them, sing to them, and provide the emotional warmth every child needs," she adds. She also reveals that they do not have a consistent donor who supports salaries, the administrator says. "We have to look for support from different places just to sustain the team." At times, donations run low, forcing the home to make difficult decisions.

"Our latest baby is baby Balam, who is just one month and two weeks. He was abandoned in a banana plantation in Nde Makindye Ssabagabo a few hours old. He was rescued by officers from Katwe Police Station," she says.

The oldest baby is Jude who is one year and eight months old, the home in total has 21 babies now.

The path to fostering and adoption

Agnes Nanozi one of the social workers at Teresa House says that while the home provides immediate care, the ultimate goal is not to keep the children indefinitely.

"Every effort is made to trace the child's biological family."

She explains that this process can take months. In some cases, families are located and reunifications are arranged. But often, no one comes forward.

"When all efforts fail, we begin the process of finding alternative care," she says.

She says that for children who cannot be reunited with their families, fostering and adoption offer a chance at a permanent home.

Nanozi adds that after the fostering period, the case is presented before a court of law. A judge, along with legal representatives and probation officers, reviews the application.

"They ask a few questions to determine if the family is fit to adopt. If successful, the adoption is granted, and the child becomes a permanent member of the new family," she says.

Occasionally, adoptive parents share updates photos, messages, small glimpses into the child's new life.