

Monitor Daily News | July 21, 2007

Frontpage

Business Bringing hope to HIV orphans

News STELLA NAKAKANDE

Regional Special KAMPALA

Opinions Namugongo Fund for Special Children, a non governmental organisation, is giving hope to hundreds of HIV/Aids orphaned children. The organisation, with the help of friends from the United States of America, is offering food, ARVs, basic essentials and scholarships to the parentless suffering children.

Letters

Features At the organisation's centres in Kira, Bulindo, Kiwologoma and Kyaliwajjala, the children barely know what is going on. In their eyes is pure innocence, clearly evident in the way the children show eagerness to learn and associate with the foreigners (bazungu) - who have come to be with them - and Rosette Sserwanga, the founder of the project.

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Her mother died way before she could even understand her surrounding while her father died in June this year. At her age, one would expect her to know the cause of her father's death but she simply says: "My father was suffering from fever and his legs were weak." She says he was sick for two years. Ironically, she says her father's death was not a surprise, but that is the most she is willing to say about it.



RENEWED HOPE: Ms Lindsey Hollister of the Namugongo Fund talks to pupils of Kyaliwajjala Umea Primary School on July 14.

The family lives in a three-room mud and wattle house close to the school where Nakanwagi studies. Their survival in the school is only graced by Namugongo fund. For Nakanwagi whose greatest worry is financial survival, the fund is a straw of hope worth clutching.

"They give us text books, breakfast, medicine, clothes and even our school uniforms," she says, describing her young life as often lonely. Mathias Kimanga is six years, his age clearly defined by his missing teeth. He is in Primary One and stays with his grandmother who also lives near the school.

Kimanga says he doesn't know his mother who he says went away before his father died. "My father died when I was old," he says. But given that Kimanga is only six, the death must have been very recent.



Rosette Sserwanga, the founder of the fund, plays with 7-year-old John Mulya

According to his innocent calculations, they are eight children in the family - all under their grandmother's care. Like any youngster, he loves the 'bazungu' because they give him porridge, uniforms, shoes, books, pencils, sweets and toy cars.

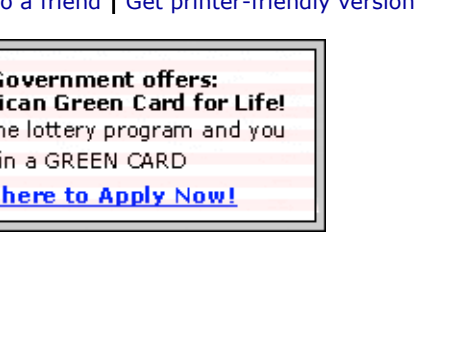
His favourite sport is football and his excitement is visible as he tells the story of how he acquired his ball. "They (bazungu) came to our home with sweets and a ball," he says as he pulls out packs of chewing gum from his pocket as though to prove his story.

With Kimanga, there's never sorrow as long as he gets his morning porridge and plays sport. It is the elders who understand these children's plight. Christopher Lubwama, a guardian to four orphans says it all. Without the fund, he says, all would be lost since many children are with out parents.

The Namugongo fund caters for 1,098 children. Founded in 1986 to take care of physically handicapped children, the fund is not all about food and clothes for the children.

In 2,000, it was expanded to include orphans, especially those affected by Aids. Besides taking care of the children, the fund also offers scholarships and sponsorships. The most positive move is perhaps the HIV/Aids testing services for the orphans and provision of ARVS. Part of the programme includes a six-day weekly clinic for the children's treatment for any ailment, Ms Sserwanga told Daily Monitor in a recent interview.

There is also a Wednesday clinic in conjunction with Joint Clinic Research Centre (JCRC) that brings in paediatricians, two physicians, two nurses and a counsellor to handle the children's mental health. Those found to be HIV positive are put on prescription of ARV therapy.



Rosette Sserwanga directs the children. Photos by Abou Kisige

The Namugongo Fund works with SPARK, a Boston-based non governmental organisation in the United States which funds the programme. The American-based donors, led by Timothy Williams, were in Uganda last week to visit the children and engage them in extra curricular activities to assess possibilities of exporting talent through music, dance and drama.

With all these efforts, the fund could breathe light into the lives of many hopeless children whose chances of a better livelihood had dwindled with the death of their parents.

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