

HELPING PARENTS AND CHILDREN TO FIND WAYS OF PROMOTING DISABILITY UNDERSTANDING WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA

BY OKUNE JOAN

Helping parents and children find ways of promoting disability understanding within their communities in Uganda.

Key Message:

Parents and children can help develop tailor-made programmes to promote disability understanding within their communities.

Introduction:

The abilities of disabled persons are best brought out in a home and community environment where they belong and are comfortable. It is important for communities to understand and appreciate that children with disabilities need their support to live fulfilling lives. This article is about how parents and children can help communities understand disability.

First, you as parents, relatives of children with disabilities, well-wishers and school children can get together into groups to form parent support groups and child rights clubs. These groups help share ideas on how to raise disability awareness. For example, parents of children with disabilities in Apac district in Northern Uganda formed a group to share advice on ways of coping with disability in their families. The need for such a service in the community was so great that soon there were too many members for one group. Today, there are four other groups that have started as a result of the activities and support of this particular group. There is a better understanding of disability in the community because of the work these parents have done to improve lives of children with disabilities.

Next, you can look at what other people in the community have done to support disabled children to help identify useful examples for their work. There could be a parent who managed to train his/her blind child to walk around in the village or a craftsman who uses local materials to make crutches and wooden legs. Workers in NGOs like Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC) have a lot of experience and can also be asked for advice on how to help the community understand disability.

Similarly, child rights clubs can plan skilful ways of using sport and play for awareness raising programs within the community. They can arrange music, dance and drama activities that carry disability messages so people can enjoy while they learn. Pictures about disability can be drawn and used as notices around the community to help raise awareness. In Kalangala district, during celebrations to mark the day of the African child, able-bodied children were blindfolded and played a game of goal ball with naturally blind children using a ball that had a bell inside. The blind children won with a score of 3-0. While the people present were surprised, the blindfolded team had seen what it feels like to have a disability. For a long time it was the talk of the community.

Also, parents and children, with the help of opinion leaders, can form advocacy groups that have a message to the community. These groups have the responsibility of educating the community on issues and important facts like:

1. Children must be immunised

2. Witchcraft does not cause disability

3. Money is not the only thing you can use to support disabled children

4. Disability programmes are not for personal gain of the workers but for the disabled child.

Besides that, parent support groups can get community support through meetings with local leaders, families, disabled persons organisations and district officials. These meetings also help introduce the programme to community members so they take ownership and welcome activities planned by parents' and children's groups.

Finally, by arranging talks at community centres or taking part in radio programmes on local FM stations, messages can reach more people and be easily understood. This is because most people in rural areas cannot read or write. For disabled persons it is made worse, since society attaches low value to their education and schools cannot meet their special needs. Information must be presented in a simple way so that everybody can understand.

Conclusion

Always keep in mind that the best resources that a nation has are those that can be mobilised through their own people. These resources include time, places, environment and the people themselves. You as parents and children in the community can use these resources to promote disability understanding and help improve the lives of children with disabilities.