

Steps to positive parenting: the story of Shamilah Najjita

Shamilah is the caregiver of John, a seventeen-year-old child that had been reunified with the family under the DOVCU project. The additional members of this household include Shamilah's two (2) biological children aged fourteen (14) and seven (7) years and her husband.

Shamilah has a retail shop as a source for her livelihood while her husband works in transportation business as a lorry driver. Shamilah's husband refused to attend the EMM sessions regarding them as time wasting. However, Shamilah observed that his attitude towards sessions and relationship with family members has been influenced in subtle positive ways. This she believes is a result of him witnessing her behavior and practices, John's and the other members that participated in the sessions.

Shamilah testified that initially, she had been very impatient with the children and could not see herself ceding her parental authority. This was a major transition for her in the EMM parenting program which required her to start reflecting on positive actions that strengthen attachment. She noted that continuous practice even after the end of the sessions created an environment of happiness in her family.

John was institutionalized at the age of 7 into one children's home in Wakiso district. Currently, he is in boarding section at a school within the district and only joins the family during holidays. Earlier in 2010, John sustained severe burns when the family house was set ablaze from a burning candle. His family was unable to support his treatment that required plastic surgery and thus sent him to the children's home. The family also had continuous domestic conflicts that further made John's continued stay there difficult. While at the children's home, John was supported to benefit from free medical care at the CORSU International Hospital and he steadily recovered.

The exercise using mirrors was most outstanding for me. I learnt that what children saw in their parents was mirrored in their own lives. For instance, if you are a quarrelsome parent, then that is the behavior the child carries forth. This realization helped to start demonstrating the kind of positive behavior I want my children to carry forward. Shamilah's challenge remains how to get her husband to directly benefit from parenting programs such as the EMM. She suggested that interesting men to participate in sessions would be best achieved by approaching them in their most comfortable spaces including work groups and leisure time spots.