Families First

The Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Uganda (DOVCU)
Simba Machingaidze, Country Director, Child Fund in Uganda. Child Fund International is the lead agency for the Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Uganda (DOVCU) project.

The poorest families literally have nothing and the only hope for their children is outside the home. Many end up in institutions or take to the streets. How do you even begin to tell them different?

SM: This was a learning experience for everyone involved including ourselves, the families, and the communities we worked with. The assumption was that children living in institutions were better off. This is true in some cases, but we learnt that in many cases they are not. Our job was to give families a peak into the realities of living in institutions and on the street. When we started, a lot of institutions were not well supervised, and did not follow government standards. Once we helped parents to appreciate that they had a lot more stability to offer their children even in the poorest homes, attitudes began to change.

How did you work with families to enable them take back their children?

SM: This project has been able to demonstrate that if you can strengthen the economic situation of the family it will increase the chances of them staying together. Access to finance, understanding and utilising local resources to improve livelihoods gave families the opportunity to better provide and care for their families. This has been a major contribution of the project –to reduce separation of children from their families.

How did you effect changes in parenting skills?

SM: Parenting is critical in the discussion on why children are separated from their families. We did not set out to criticize parenting methods rather to equip and strengthen families and communities to provide quality attention to children. If we gave an opportunity to all the families in Uganda to improve their parenting skills we would reduce separation as it gives both the family and the child a chance to work through
most difficulties. Parents begin to change the narrative that institutions are a better place and work on keeping the family together.

**Child Care Institutions have been around a long time and the business of deinstitutionalization can mean loss of business. How did you work with the institutions?**

**SM:** It has meant a mindset shift and we are all still learning. When we started we realized these institutions didn’t see how else they could help children. All they did was bring in children from difficult economic backgrounds and keep them. We enabled them to see themselves as important caretakers of those children in their care which meant that they had to follow standardized procedures and tools in their work. We also made the institutions begin to see themselves as a temporary residence for at-risk children with the end goal of resettling these children back in homes.

**The project worked with several partners through a multi sectoral process, how did this help?**

**SM:** A problem of this nature cannot be handled by one sector. It was imperative to take a multi-sectoral approach because each of us has a unique contribution. We learnt a lot from Local Government and vice versa. Local Government staff begun to see that they could contribute to keeping families together building on resources already available to them by mobilizing communities, and other actors to play their part in keeping families together. Some Local Governments didn’t have tools to assess and supervise child care institutions leading to serious gaps. We provided these tools and worked together. There is a role for everyone in reintegrating families and helping children stay safe. Working with TPO Uganda for example, was rewarding as it enabled us to expand the range and quality of services through provision of psychosocial and mental health services.

In recent years, child care practitioners and policy makers have seen Alternative care emerge as an important component of efforts to reintegrate children back into caring families and to mitigate the risks of family separation. Having worked closely with the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development in the development of the Alternative Care Framework and its action plan, TPO Uganda utilized the opportunity of the DOVCU project to test the efficacy of some key elements of these policies in practice.

The results are very compelling and in this publication, we describe some of our most impactful experiences and how they can be adapted in similar contexts. The stories we are about to share depict how we have collaborated with child care institutions as well as remand homes through an intricate process of negotiation, case management and community participation for the best outcomes for children and youth.

*Patrick Onyango Mangen*

*Country Director, TPO Uganda*
Vulnerable households have the potential to change their lives and support their children but they need financial help to get meet basic needs. We were amazed at the “lift”. Families found a way to meet their basics, saved money, and started vibrant enterprises.

57,000 children living in child care institutions

10,000 children living on the streets

35 orphanages in the mid-1990’s to over 500 in 2012.

The United States Agency for Development (USAID) in 2014 funded a Child Fund International pilot to develop programs addressing a growing number of children living outside of family care. The Alternative Care project/Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable in Uganda (DOVCU/Alternative Care) is led by Child Fund International with TPO Uganda, Childs I Foundation and Retrak as consortium members.

Regardless of the case, every child deserves a good family whether or not it is their biological family. Yet more than 50% of the child care institutions (CCI) assessed by Ministry of Gender and Social Development in 2012 did not offer reintegration or alternative care programs and an additional 22% only offered international adoption. Children who grow up in institutional settings are more likely to experience delays in social, behavioral and cognitive development and struggle with attachment disorders.

Multi-sectoral approaches enable child actors to leverage their competencies to deliver holistic responses.

There are many reasons why children are living on the street or child care institutions. From abuse within the home, gender based violence, war, poverty, family and community breakdown, dangerous cultural practices that precipitate child abandonment, high prevalence of alcoholism and substance abuse, psychosocial problems, and violence, the reasons are numerous.
The Consortium

Child Fund: Consortium lead for project implementation

Retrak: Reintegration of street children

Child’s i Foundation: Foster care and adoption initiatives including Ugandans Adopt campaign

TPO Uganda: Child protection, mental health, psychosocial support

Project Areas

TPO Uganda provided technical guidance for child protection and psychosocial support for the entire project and implements a full range of activities in Kabale, Kabarole and Kasese.

Additional districts supported: Gulu, Iganga, Jinja, Kampala, Kamuli, Lira, Luwero, Mbale and Wakiso.

Katushabe Muhereza and his family, Kasese district, were supported with cash transfers for basic livelihoods and parenting skills.
Our approach to alternative care
Start where they are, build on their strengths, inspire lasting change.

The push factors: What drives children outside of family care? Poverty and financial hardship can be all consuming leaving families desperate. For those families on the brink of destitution any economic shock will often mean they lose all their assets and institutionalization of children quickly becomes the best option.

The economics are a priority
Some families we work with have nothing. Influencing their finances strengthens families’ ability to look after their needs. However the type and level of vulnerability varies, and so must our interventions.

Cash transfers
We helped the critically vulnerable families “destitute families” to manage the economic shocks that render them unable to take care of their children. These households were provided with cash to stabilise consumption and enable them to pay for their most immediate short-term needs such as food.

Stabilising incomes
Some vulnerable households are able to meet their immediate needs, but as a result of fluctuating incomes, struggle with larger long-term needs, such as school fees. We equipped these with strategies to build and sustain resources. Older children as well as caregivers from OVC households for example were enrolled in savings, credit and investment groups to help them consistently meet their key needs and work towards increasing their savings.

Growing the resource base
Once households have stabilized the next step is expanding their income and resource base. We worked with them to develop microenterprises based on their local market needs and capacity to maintain.

Vocational Skills
Where there are skill gaps, particularly for youth from child headed homes, we worked with them to gain marketable skills by enrolling them in vocational training. Upon graduation, the youth were provided with starter kits to jumpstart their enterprises.

Financial literacy
Before any money or resource is provided, education on how to handle money is offered so that households make the right decisions to get the most out of the resources they have.
Positive Parenting

Good parents learn and practice behaviours that support their children to thrive. We worked to create positive home environments by equipping caregivers with parenting skills. Though parent group meetings and home visits, we helped care givers to better understand and address issues of child protection, health, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health. We were intentional about male engagement.

Psychosocial Response

Among the key drivers of family dysfunction is alcoholism, mental health problems and stigma can also devastate families. The right support is paramount. Alcohol abuse and neglect are key drivers of family disintegration and mental health problems. Through Alcoholics Anonymous Groups we provided communities with structured therapeutic process to enable them address and reduce on alcohol abuse. For those in need of clinical mental health care and disability services referral to the nearest provider was offered. Individual and group counselling, however, were provided right in the community.

Reinforcing Community based support

After every project ends, community structures stay. Formal community structures such as parasocial workers and informal structures well trained take lead in protecting children and supporting vulnerable households to do better. We identified the community structures which could best be harnessed to deal with harmful cultural practices and bring about positive change in families and communities. Through interactive sessions, training in child protection and legal avenues for redress, as well as the development of community by-laws, we worked with community structures to create safer communities for children. We also established a network of community volunteers to monitor children’s behaviour and prevent abuse and neglect.

Towards a better child care system

Implementing a framework that keeps families together is done in the best interest of children. The Alternative Care Framework is a set of standards and procedures developed by the Ugandan government and civil society to guide the national response to orphans and vulnerable children. The goal is to keep families together and prevent separation. We worked to sensitize local government, communities, child care institutions and social workers about the framework, in order to pave way for its operationalization. Key in this process was the standardization of the child care institutions to ensure quality service that prioritises reintegration of children.

Referral for additional services enhances outcomes

Families need an array of services to support them in making significant and lasting changes. We linked families to additional services including education, medical services.

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Putting our house in order

Working with district local governments, we reviewed the requirements of the Alternative Care framework and built their capacity for implementation including supervision of child care institutions, re-integration processes, and overseeing standards of Child Care Institutions.

How was the probation and welfare team involved in the project?

Shamillah: The Ministry of Gender had introduced the Alternative care framework, we used to hear about it though we did not understand it. This project opened our eyes as it has helped to operationalize and implement it in Kabarole. There was a big gap especially on the standards of children’s homes—(Child care institutions-CCIs); we were operating in a total mess. With the project we had to make all institutions in the district re-apply for their licenses following Ministry of Gender directive to check their fulfillment of standards. The approved institutions must have manuals and regulations.

How have you built the resilience of families to prevent their children from leaving for the streets or becoming institutionalized?

Shamillah: We work with communities to identify the most vulnerable. This helped us select the right families which has prevented bias in selection. Secondly, we teach families how to manage money. The cash transfers to households improved food security and enabled them to start income generating activities like piggery and poultry. These transfers have been utilized well by the beneficiaries which success I attribute to TPO’s approach to provide financial education before disburssing the funds. At the sub-county level, VSLAs were formed and this improved saving culture. My last visit to the VSLAs indicated a total savings of UGX 3.3 million by four groups from April to December 2016.

What progress has been made on deinstitutionalization?

Shamillah: We celebrated great success when we resettled 101 children to their homes. Before, there were 291 children in institutions so we have reduced the number. The relationships among the child care institutions have taken a new shape; they used to operate in isolation. SOS Children’s Home, together with my office, offered to conduct training to support other CCIs in areas of record keeping and basic counseling. They now communicate with each other, and unnecessary admission of vulnerable children into CCIs has reduced.

Are there any promising approaches that you can recommend?

Shamillah: Resettling children without proper procedure can be disastrous and traumatizing. TPO helped us to form a committee (Team Around the Child-TAC) to guide on home assessment, preparing children and families and inspecting basic services like health and education. The team comprises different child protection actors including probation officers, para-social workers, TPO project staff, local council leaders and other community resource persons.
Safety Procedures

Child Care Institutions were not following standards and did not have policies when we started. We were able to train them on procedures of resettling children into the community and with their families. All manuals and operational procedures were printed and circulated.

Parenting children with difficult behaviors

It is one thing to parent, but for children with difficult behaviors and temperaments, special understanding of their challenges is needed. We provided special parenting skills, psychosocial support and counselling for families with these type of problems. Together with para-social workers we supported families that were being reintegrated to guide them in their journey.

Outreach through radio

We secured the good will of district leadership such as the Resident District Commissioner (RDC). We were provided free radio airtime, weekly, on Tuesdays and Sundays. Through radio, key messages on good parenting and child protection were aired. We also raised awareness on the alternative care framework.
How was the remand home handling re-integration of children before the project?

Theopista: We've always been confirmed as a model remand home but before the project, we used to release children and let them return to their homes by themselves and most of them were not accepted by community and in a short time you could find some being rearrested and returning here as repeat offenders. Some children do not commit these offences intentionally, but because of poor parenting they find themselves in trouble.

How have procedures in reintegrating children changed?

Theopista: TPO attached two volunteers to support home pre-visits and records which have improved reintegration. We learnt how to carry out family tracing before resettling these children so we know that the children will be safe. This has minimized repeated offences. Counselling for parents has also improved the resettlement process. Transport was also provided to take children to court sessions. Previously we would have children released and they would have to wait for over two weeks due to lack of transport. The other added value has been skills provision from vocational institutions for young people being reintegrated. It gives them something to do to make a living.

How can we consolidate our successes?

Theopista: The children will need to be involved in skills building and other social development activities such as sports, leadership and other activities to help them stay out of trouble and improve themselves. Data retrieval is a challenge, there is need for a system for the remand home.
Success Stories: Economics are a priority

The economics are a priority, some families we work with have nothing, giving up their children can quickly seem like the only practical option.

Cash transfers and financial stability

“We helped families to manage the economic shocks that render them unable to take care of their children. The most destitute households were provided with cash to stabilise consumption and enable them to pay for their most immediate short-term needs such as food, education and housing. For families that were struggling we supported them to join VSLAs to improve access to finances and savings for economic stability.”

170 households reunified with their children either from the child care institutions and the remand home supported with cash transfers and financial literacy training.

“When households are equipped with basic financial management skills before cash transfers they will surprise you with how they improve their lives”. Lubega Thaddeus, Kabarole District - SCDO

Vulnerability is not in the head

“I have learnt that “vulnerability is not in the head”; out of the cash transfers, vulnerable families have proved to run petty businesses successfully. As an individual, I cannot use $20 to start a business but these families did. We have seen this model work coupled with financial management training.” - Eunice Kyakimwa Kugonza – Community Development Officer, Kasese

Several steps forward

The impossible: Suzan is 41 years old, a mother of 8 children. She takes care of 5 orphans and 3 widows. Suzan’s husband became bedridden after a surgery. “I used to plant beans and rent fields to plant maize and Irish potatoes on a small scale. But this was all eaten by the family and a few sales used to help us meet the other necessities”.

A turn around: From the funds TPO provided, I started trading in chicken, bought 3 ducks and one goat. I used part of the cash transfer to buy a coffee garden at Ugx.200,000 which already has ripe berries. I hope to yield double the investment. The other transfer I used to construct a house for the family I care for (orphans and widows) which I managed to roof. I hope to eventually complete it from the profits I earn from the business. - Suzan Kisuki, Kasese district
“Working with TPO and Child Fund trained us on how to teach financial management skills to the communities. We provided several trainings that helped very vulnerable households do a lot more with the cash transfers they received. The cash transfers were provided to help stabilize destitute homes so they could at least meet the basic needs of their families such as food, health, reasonable shelter, and school fees. Because they were trained, they did more than that. Child enrolment in schools has improved because their parents' economics are stronger. Homes are more food secure; some beneficiaries in the past did not know where to get the next meal.”

I worried about everything
Before joining the VSLA, I could worry about money to buy food yet I had nothing to sell to earn any money. I had never been trained on how to manage my money, but since then I know that if I need a loan, it must be of purpose. When I borrowed my first loan from the group, I rushed and bought a pig. I have piglets already. I am now confident that I will be able to sell piglets and earn some money. This provides me security, if I don’t have fees at the school I can excuse me as I sell a piglet and pay school fees for my children.- Iryn Kadoma, Kabarole district

Biirá gets a cell phone
“I could hardly provide more than one meal for my children. At one point, one of my children fell sick and I gave him herbal treatments as I did not have money to take him for a test to see what he was sick of. Four children had dropped out of school by the time TPO came to our community. With the money I received, I started a small business selling oil, tomatoes, cassava flour, onions and pancakes. Out of the profits, I have been able to buy two goats, 5 chickens and saved UGX40,000 in the VSLA. I joined the VSLA in March 2016 and was trained in financial management. The para-social workers kept coming to help me understand how to manage my business. The business is doing better and I even have a cell phone now.”

New controls
“Shortly before TPO’s intervention, the chairperson of our VSLA group run away with our savings, over one million shillings. The financial management and VSLA training made us realize how we had put our money in the hands of the leader. It was very risky. We immediately closed the previous account and started off with new ones. The savings and financial controls. We keep records of savings and withdrawals which we all look at. Before, any one could sign, now two people must sign for any withdrawals. Group leaders are also changed after sometimes.”

Beer bottles for milk
“I was a well-known drunkard in my community and never saved any shilling. I had failed to raise my children since my wife has passed on; their education was not in our plan”. I have been able to use the cash transfer to invest in a wood business. I now sell 20 bags every three months. I have also been able to buy bricks to prepare for the construction of my permanent house. The financial management classes have helped me know how to use my money. It is six months since I reduced on alcohol consumption, at least I substitute the many bottles for milk and water. I believe that if I remarried, my wife would be peaceful, not as when I was not aware of all the effects of my behavior.”

What other people look like. Macklin Bwambale,
At 25 years, Macklin was living with her 3 children under a leaking hut. The family was in despair. Macklin was one of the families identified to join the project. With a cash transfer of UGX210,000, she was able to buy iron sheets and roof her new structure. “I started a business selling cassava flour and palm oil. I also bought a piglet and some domestic needs. TPO supported me in parenting skills training and I enrolled for tailoring at South Rwenzori institute. I plan to buy my own tailoring machine and increase my income sources because I have all it takes to earn money. I now look like other people.”
Abandoned, and raising 9 children: Muhindo Neverless

Sixteen years ago, Muhindo’s husband abandoned her with nine children. “I have depended on casual work all these years. We could afford one meal a day and my children only attended school when money was available.”

The difference: TPO trained us in financial management and later I received money from them which I used to buy two sacks of maize and five tins of soya beans which I milled to get flour and later sold. I have been able to save and send some of my children to school. One of my children had failed senior four, she was able to repeat the class, and many others are now able to attend school. I started a small business selling cooking items. I also bought coffee gardens, an acre at UGX130,000 in which I hope to gain a double profit. I have been able to buy six iron sheets and started building a permanent house. My children now have a balanced diet because of the training we had about nutrition, and we have kitchen gardens where we grow vegetables. TPO saved me from working in peoples fields, am now in control of my life. Today, we have three meals a day.

William last held a job 25 years ago when his senior 2 qualification permitted him to teach in a public school. Shortly after he lost this job, William and his wife Katusabe and family of 8 children sank into abject poverty.

“We shared an open house with our children that doubled as a kitchen. Two of our youngest children (three and two years old) were taken to the Child Care institution. I have only been there once when they were taking them. Because my husband has “a good hand”, he always gets other peoples animals (goats) to rear. My reward is one kid a year when the goat reproduces which I sell at UGX30, 000. My other children failed to sit for their exams when I failed to pay school fees balance. TPO was just in time they helped us build a better home with a parents room and the children have theirs. We were trained about parenting and this Christmas we are celebrating it with our two children from the child care institution. They will come to visit us and there is a good room for them.”

–William and Katusabe Kuyamba

Where we found destitute homes such as the Kuyamba’s, the cash transfers helped address the most urgent basic need, in this case, shelter. By having an appropriate home the Child Care Institution was able to let the young children spend time with their family during Christmas as the beginning of a safe plan to reintegrate these children with their family.

Breaking the curse: Biira starts over

I thought God had cursed us my husband sold off our land, leaving me with 9 children to look after all by myself. I got sick and had to sell the only thing we had left, our home. I had to start renting a place to stay, we started all over again. This is the time TPO came to my village, I attended their training in parenting skills and financial literacy. With UGX246, 500 I stocked food in my house and started buying chicken which I trade across the Democratic Republic Congo border. I buy and sell boiled maize as well. I also bought a goat that now has one kid. Out of the profits, I was able to negotiate and buy the shop which I was renting. I have been able to pay UGX400, 500 and I hope to pay off the balance in the next 5 months. I have a child with mental sickness who I almost failed to manage but thanks to TPO, I was referred to Kagado hospital where a dose of his medicine for 3 months is only UGX, 000 which I can afford. My 14 year old had been assaulted but she got the counselling she needed from TPO and is now better. We are hopeful.

–Biira Maria, 56 years
Reinforcing community based support is a strategic move. When a project ends, community structures stay. Formal community structures such as trained para-social workers take lead in protecting children and supporting vulnerable households to do better.

We identified the community structures which could best be harnessed to deal with harmful cultural practices and bring about positive change in families and communities. Through interactive sessions, training in child protection, and legal avenues for redress, as well as the development of community by-laws, we worked with community structures including para-social workers, community drama groups, women and orphans support groups and youth groups to create safer communities for children. We also put in place a network of community volunteers (Team Around the Child-TAC) to monitor children’s behaviour and prevent abuse and neglect.

“What was it like to introduce the alternative care framework in Kasese district?”
At the start, institutions were hesitant to take on the new framework requirements. Yet none of the childcare institutions were approved by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and some did not have social workers. When we started working with the institutions many were not interested in resettling children.

“How did you address this?”
We worked closely with Probation Officers and Community Development Officers together with the management of CCIs to understand government requirements, and the validity of the framework. Soon we realised changes in the behavior of the institution owners; they have appreciated the need to return children home; a deliberate plan was made and many children are going to be resettled in December 2016 and February 2017.

“What did you learn?”
Needs based allocation: We realized that vulnerable households do not have the same challenges. Our allocation depended on their need; there are households that could not afford a meal a day. Releasing cash transfers in tranches gave us enough time to monitor and support the households in the progress they were making. Much as the original idea was not to have households’ startup businesses with the emergency cash transfers, vulnerable households were taught financial literacy and many decided to start businesses and this will help to sustain the change they have achieved and reduced their dependence on others for help.

Integrating interventions: The uniqueness of this project has been combining interventions so that whether it is a cash transfer for the most vulnerable homes, financial literacy and psychosocial support are added. These households have amazed us with what they can do with little. The transfers were disbursed in tranches which worked better as the households could plan and achieve their goals against the funds they got.

Partnerships: Working with those on the frontline like Local Government, especially the probation officers, community development officers and para-social workers together with management of childcare institutions enabled joint ownership of the process and government framework. We have seen all the five Child Care Institutions operating in Kasese complete their application with the Ministry of Gender. This happened because of the joint participation of all key players.

Do no harm
“We worked with child clubs on journey of life (art therapy), trainings on parenting skills including how to identify a child with problems, how to communicate and mediate with children and where parents need to run in case they cannot handle their children’s challenges. In everything we teach families to ‘do no harm’ to the child.” - Nzerende Wisley, Chairperson para-social workers.
We know that people are not born with manuals on how to raise their children, good parents learn and put in practice behaviors that support their children to thrive. Sometimes the parents must first change behaviors that hinder them from doing a good job. We worked to create positive home environments by equipping caregivers with parenting skills. Through parent group meetings and home visits, we helped care givers to better understand and address issues of child protection, health, nutrition, and sexual reproductive health.

**Parenting in the VSLA**

I don’t regret having joined this group, it is of great support when it comes to school fees. In the past it was rare for my children to attend school without being sent home. They were always missing exams and classes all because I could not raise the school fees on time. Even if I hoped to get money I didn’t have any other option to borrow or earn money from. In the group, our small savings can secure us much more money to meet our pressing needs then we can pay back. Although my main reason for joining was the financial relief, we have gained more. I recall the training about parenting, I always struggled to look for school fees but I hardly looked at the reports. I got so much guidance, I had never thought I needed to sit and listen to my children. **Mwesige Andrew, Kabarole district**

**Margaret Kabagaya, Kabarole district**

Before TPO’s intervention we had similar savings groups but with little knowledge on how to run them properly. In the past I could hardly account for my own money and past groups did not offer the benefit of borrowing more than you had saved. The training taught us better ways to manage our village savings and loans association. We now have group rules, passbooks to track member loans and savings. In our group, if I have UGX.200,000 in savings, am allowed to borrow UGX.300,000. I have a child in nursery school, so if I need money to top up fees, I can borrow from the group.
Uganda is one of the youngest populations in the world; because of the HIV epidemic many youth are in charge of families and raising children by themselves. Youth peer groups provide an opportunity to influence positive attitudes, teach parenting skills, improve financial management and livelihoods.

Supporting youth to care for children

“We youth are always on the move, and in our area most of us drink a lot of alcohol and do not know how to care of children. We have been fortunate to partner with TPO; we formed a youth drama group in which we meet to encourage and support each other with parenting skills training and savings. Weekly savings day is the opportunity we use to support each other. We had no idea about children rights violation. Through this group we have helped youth identify and support households; we have a number of child headed households and it is hard for elder siblings to take care of the young ones pay for their school fees in addition to their own school needs. We identify these types of youth and help them learn skills that can help them earn money and improve their lives; some of us have been able to start projects like salons.”

“In some cases of child headed homes children were taken to institutions. Siblings would never see each other again. It was painful. Today, we have been able to support such families through TPO’s parenting skills and psychosocial support to always ensure that they keep in touch with their siblings so they keep their family together and relationship stronger.”

-Kenneth Yassin Bagonza - Karago Tweheyo Farmers SACCO- Kabarole district

Marketable skills

“I am the eldest of five children and my father is disabled. He paid my school fees until I reached primary 5 when he couldn’t afford it anymore. I stayed home for a long time until I got an opportunity with TPO to train in hair dressing. I have learnt a number of hair styles; I started weaving neighbors who pay me a minimum of UGX 5,000 for the cheapest hair style”. Margaret plans to find a salon to enhance her experience so that she can later start up a salon of her own. -Margaret Kembubazi, 22 years, becomes a hair stylist, Kabarole district

A group called hope, Francis Kasaija

Francis Kasaija is the leader of ‘Hope for the Voiceless Group’, Kabarole district, which is concerned with the needs of at risk youth. We support young people who have problems like substance abuse, those caught in petty theft and other troubles in the community. We help them change their ways and get skills like tailoring, hair dressing and shoe making. TPO’s trainings about substance abuse helped us understand the problem of addiction and how we had to counsel, be patient and keep encouraging these youth to keep up with the process of quitting alcohol and other drugs. As part of supporting young parents and those youth caring for little children to improve their livelihoods we started home based projects like rearing chicken and growing potatoes to improve family welfare.

“I was a victim of alcohol”, says John Monday, 22 years. “We were a big group all not attending school and we spent our time drinking alcohol. I was taken through a number of counseling sessions by Francis Kasaija. It took me over 8 months to adjust, but when we started farming, I decided to acquire 10 chickens which have now accumulated to 20. I feel better and I am more productive than I was.”

-A group called hope, Francis Kasaija

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Our youth group had been in existence years before TPO’s support, but our main business was savings for members and financial support. After several trainings with TPO, we included parenting, domestic violence, food security and substance abuse. We have since had outreach to the youth especially those who had been arrested for reasons like food theft from gardens, and when some of these youth got drunk they started fights with their parents. These reconciliations were not easy for us. It required a lot of patience and continued counseling. We learnt that these problems were partly caused by poor parenting and such children had grown at the mercy of the community (food, clothes, security provided by the community). This has prompted us to keep talking about child neglect during our outreach and also sensitize families with children in institutions on how to handle their parental roles and plan for them even when they are still being supported in the institutions. 

-Nalumansi Evelyn Amooti-Vice Chairperson, Ibonde Abagambakamu Group

Everyone’s day matters, strengthening child headed households

From a family of four, Patrick the eldest sibling lost his parents at 17 years. He says, “I would return home after midnight daily after a nightclub session. I was selling matooke in the market, but after providing food for my siblings, education was optional. We had never had an opportunity to sit and talk about the future, the house was just a convenient place to sleep and everyone starts their day as they wish. I have been supported by TPO meeting my tuition for Mechanics and driving course. I am already earning in garages and am hopeful that I will support my 3 siblings through school.” -Patrick Nyakahuma, 21 years
Success stories: Community Connections

Uganda is one of the youngest populations in the world; because of the HIV epidemic many youth are in charge of families and raising children by themselves. Youth peer groups provide an opportunity to influence positive attitudes, teach parenting skills, improve financial management and livelihoods.

“I was touched by the issue of parenting our own children. TPO talked to us about more benefits in staying and caring for our own children. I learnt how I can better use my little cash to take care of my family because I know now how to plan and manage my money. I decided to bring my children back home”. - Koowe Kiguma Orphans & Widows Empowerment Group

What is your role in the community?
I was trained through the project as a parasocial worker to support the community. I am mainly working with the Koowe Kiguma orphans and widow empowerment group.

How has Koowe Kiguma Orphans & Widows Empowerment Group changed?
• After the training, the group was streamlined. Only children who are orphans are the ones we kept. However even with the orphans we now know that they must be in touch with their relatives
• We have also learnt to identify and support children with psychosocial support and those with trauma whom we always thought were ‘mad’
• Introducing savings in the group has provided support to members through their savings they can borrow also to help them meet their family’s needs. One of our members has seen her child through primary seven because of the group savings and loans support.

-Mbabazi Justine 48 years; Para-social worker, Koowe Kiguma Orphans & Widows Empowerment Group

A Love Act
Josphine Katutu, 35 years, was certain she had no option. She had been widowed, and there seemed to be no way she could pay for her children’s school fees and take care of them. By the time TPO was teaching about parenting and families being the best option for children, Josephine’s girls had been at Ibonde Children’s home for one year. In the Koowe Kiguma Orphans & Widows Empowerment Group training she realized that money was the problem. “I had taken them to get free education and food.” In her community group, Josephine and the others learnt that they could use the little they had saved to start income generating activities and care for their families.
Success stories: Group power

Drama can be a strategic tool to promote good parenting, stronger and healthier families

Drama for Change

The Kazigobe Bakyara Twakamba Association is both a drama and AA group which addresses alcoholism, parenting, child protection and livelihoods improvement.

“Our group has been in existence but we had never engaged members in more personal concerns like child upbringing, alcoholism and gender based violence yet some of us were having at least one or more of these challenges. Our group has been taught through trainings how to raise awareness in the community, and we were provided with guiding materials to use when performing. TPO has brought development in my home, I now contribute to my children’s school fees, I am a better parent by using what we learnt like counseling and listening to my children. These were simple things but I did not know them. I used to drink irresponsibly but drinking has reduced. I have been able to realize a number of gaps that group members need like skills development in tailoring to make them more productive and earn income.”

-Kahunde Yuster, 47 years; Chairperson Kazigobe Bakyara Twakamba Drama Association

The “Amaarwa” (Alcohol) Culture

Amaarwa has always been part of us, though some of us took too much. Personally, I used to drink a minimum of four beer bottles but now I take one and some days go by without any. The different discussions we had helped us know the effect too much alcohol has on our lives. Since we are also part of the AA group, we decided to find a way of saving some of what we had been spending on alcohol. We formed a saving and credit group. All of us can afford to save. This helped members to adjust, people started reducing on the amount of “sachets” they would take per day. One who consumed 10 adjusted to 8, other who consumed 5, now took 3 and the other money saved. We all don’t have enough money, so we decided out of the savings to start a stone quarrying project which has accumulated savings of Ugx.600,000 (six hundred thousand shillings) in four months.

Tukwatanize Alcoholics Anonymous Group

“I grew up with close friends and our group was known for evening drinking at bars. I was not required to have money for every sitting because each day one of us would be the sponsor (pay) for the groups’ drinks. Meanwhile, I had a lot of violence back home; we could fight and quarrel with my wife every time I came back drunk.”

Augustine was among those identified by the community to join the AA group. “Even when I joined the group, I kept on drinking as usual. But when we learnt and started seeing how alcohol affects us, I decided to reduce on the amounts I consumed. We have group savings and we are required to save every week. In the first cycle (after one year), I was able to save UGX 170,000 and it was exciting so I decided to reduce my intake from three bottles to one per day. My shares in the group have since doubled and I am also saving UGXs, 000 weekly”

-Augustine, Kusemererwa Tukwatanize A.A Group
Culturally, “the head of a home is never directed”. Thanks to TPO, we were trained in parenting that we can listen to our children and handle conflict better. We are more involved in their lives.” - Mugabe Joshua – AA group

“Before TPO I had a retail shop and a bar, but for every single coin I made I drunk it. I always returned home late given the nature of my business but I was always drunk and we could always fight with my husband. Children’s upbringing was not my concern and because I wasted all that I worked for, education was not catered for; not even their feeding. Thanks to this group and the teaching we had about substance abuse and parenting, I am a better person and I still have a business. The savings group has helped me trace the money that I earn from my business and I can see how I can use it. My children now attend school with packed food. As women we need to continue and get more skills like tailoring, hair dressing so that we can supplement our income.” - Juliet Nikirize; 30 year old mother of 5

“I got to know the reason why we need to have our children taken care of from our homes. In my home, we now take children to school and we can sit and talk listen and counsel them which I had never done. Our drama group is now recognizable with uniforms, and we anticipate more business to perform at different functions.” - Monday Jimmy, 59 years old

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Parenthood
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