

Spring 2024 Professional Fellow

Name: Josephine Namirimu
Country: Uganda
Job Title and Employer: Communications and Advocacy Officer
Cheshire Services Uganda
Project Title: Empowering Youth Advocates: Advancing Inclusive Education Policy in Uganda

Issue: Education is a constitutional right for all Ugandans; however, learners with disabilities continue to be excluded from both mainstream and special education settings in Uganda, negatively impacting their participation in civic life (NCD Uganda, 2014; World Bank, 2020). Out of the 17.7 million children in this country, 16% (2.8 million) are children with disabilities (UBOS, 2010). Unfortunately, only 5% of students with disabilities access education through inclusive schools (UNICEF, 2014). Perpetuating the issue, the National Inclusive Education Policy, which seeks to ensure equitable access to quality education, has remained in draft form since 2011.

To reinvigorate this initiative, Cheshire Services Uganda convened diverse collaborators in July 2023 to form the National Inclusive Education Advocacy Committee. This committee is voluntary and includes national and local Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), such as the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU), the Uganda National Association of the Deaf, and the Uganda Society for Disabled Children; Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), such as Strome Foundation; representatives from the Ministry of Education; international development partners, such as UNICEF, Sight Savers International, and Enabel; and school representatives. This committee actively engages policymakers in ongoing dialogues through policy briefs and reviews of the draft policy, persistently working toward and advocating for its approval.

Project Objective: Josephine's project aims to empower youth with disabilities to advocate for inclusive education through tailored informational and training materials, storytelling, and policy engagement.

Project Activities: As the Secretary of the National Inclusive Education Advocacy Committee, Josephine will use her unique position and understanding of inclusive education in Uganda to create informational and training materials specifically tailored for youth. These materials will educate both youth with and without disabilities about the draft policy and its relevance and impact on all learners.

Leveraging her work with Cheshire Services Uganda, which is currently active in over 100 secondary schools, Josephine will identify student inclusion clubs in a select number of secondary schools. These clubs, consisting of students with and without disabilities, will serve as platforms for disseminating the newly created materials and advocating messages about inclusive education and policies.

Concurrently, Josephine will identify students with disabilities who are willing to share their stories about navigating inclusion in school and the challenges they faced. She will assist them in crafting these narratives and provide opportunities for them to share with the committee. She will also incorporate these stories into the informational and training materials for youth.

Following this pilot, Josephine will advocate for Cheshire to incorporate the informational and training materials into both its student club manual and teacher training manual.

References:

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- Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (2010). *Uganda National Household Survey (2009/2010)*. Retrieved from: https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/03_2018UNHS_2009_2010_socio-economic_Report.pdf
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