

medcare newsletter

A lifeline for Ugandan children

Summer Edition | August 2020



Our fight against COVID-19 in Uganda

The first case of COVID-19 in Uganda was recorded on March 21st 2020. Since then numbers of cases have gradually risen to over 1,000, but, thankfully, with only 2 recorded deaths, so far.

On March 31st the Ugandan government imposed a strict lockdown in an attempt to prevent the spread of the disease. Sadly, Uganda's poor are bearing the brunt of this nationwide shutdown, particularly affecting the most vulnerable – the children, the elderly and those people already suffering from sicknesses. This lockdown has seriously interrupted supply chains of essential drugs to treat TB, HIV and other diseases. In addition, for people living from day to day, reliant on going out into the villages to 'dig' to earn a few pence a day, even a few days' lockdown is the difference between poverty and starvation.

In April, Medcare became concerned about reports of children and their families facing starvation in the villages served by the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre. An urgent appeal was set up, named 'A Generation to Honour', aimed at raising funds to feed the children and their families starving in the villages. By the end of April sufficient funds were raised to feed 112 families – 676 children and their guardians - for 2 months.

Although lockdown has been eased in Uganda certain restrictions still apply with regard to movement and public transport, and night time curfews remain enforced. The very poor are still struggling to survive and transport to medical facilities is often unavailable or unaffordable. As a result



the 'A Generation to Honour' appeal remains on-going in an attempt to continue to save the lives of Ugandan children and their elderly grandparents during the pandemic. Please follow the link below if you wish to provide funds for this appeal.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed to this appeal so far.

JustGiving™

Please click here to donate to Medcare.
justgiving.com/generationtohonour

A Generation to Honour

In Uganda 60% of the population is below 18 years of age, with an estimated 2 million orphans. Many elderly grandmothers take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren, sometimes caring for up to 10 children, following the deaths of their 'adult' children.



In a country where those with AIDS or disabilities are often discriminated against, these hard working women have little resources or assistance from others. For many poorly educated, elderly Ugandan grandmothers their only source of income is to 'dig' in the fields of local landowners, despite their advancing years and increasing infirmity. In the face of COVID-19, these elderly grandparents, many of whom are undernourished and of poor health, are at risk of death if infected with the disease.

Please spare a thought for the Ugandan grandmothers and their grandchildren. A donation of just £20 will help feed a Ugandan grandmother and her family for a month, food which is essential for these families to survive the pandemic.

Together we can help in preventing the loss of yet another generation within Ugandan families – the very elderly grandmothers, loved and relied upon by so many young children. Thank you for caring.

JustGiving™

Please click here to donate to
Medcare's 'A Generation to Honour'.
justgiving.com/generationtohonour

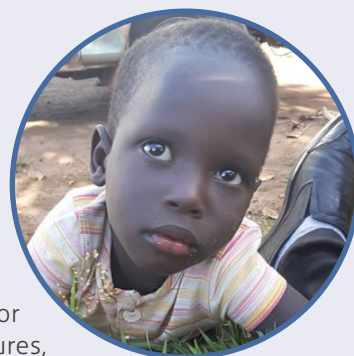
Cash in the attic

Have you recently been in your attic? How many nick knacks are stored there which you haven't seen for years? Medcare is trying to raise funds to support our work in Uganda – saving the lives of children living in dire poverty. We would like to challenge all our amazing supporters to assist us in raising urgently needed funds, by climbing up into your attics and finding the hidden treasures which you have stored for years, and maybe forgotten!

Please look out goods which are not needed and sell them on ebay or the marketplace or any other social media links you can access. Alternatively, please collect up your treasures, contact Medcare and we will pick them up and sell them on your behalf.

Funds raised can be sent to Medcare by sending a cheque – written out to 'Medcare' and post to our office at PO Box 163, Frodsham WA6 1DF; or [click here to send via PayPal](#); or transferred into the Medcare account via BACS (Medcare: 20-29-50: 53045102).

Medcare is aiming to raise £2,000 in our 'Cash in the Attic' challenge. This will be put towards medication needed for those children admitted to Wellspring over the next few months with malaria, chest infections, typhoid and other commonly presenting diseases. Thanks for your help!





Wellspring's response to COVID-19

A report from Esther Namukasa, Wellspring Administrator

An outbreak of Corona virus (COVID-19) was declared by the republic of China in December 2019. This outbreak spread globally, including Uganda which confirmed cases of Corona virus (COVID-19) in March 2020. The government of Uganda urged all people to be on high alert and exercise preventive measures to avoid contracting this virus.

Emphasis was put on regular washing of hands with soap and water, avoiding close contact with people with flu-like symptoms, covering the mouth and nose while sneezing or coughing and reporting cases of fever, cough and difficulty in breathing to the identified health facilities or call centers. Flyers and posters with illustrative information about the same were distributed around the country, to ensure maximum awareness by the population. Wellspring Children's Medical Centre also joined in the struggle against COVID-19 by redirecting some of the work strategies to fit the pandemic situation. Several approaches and strategies were adapted to work together with the Government of Uganda to ensure that we prevent the spread of the corona virus. We continue to treat our patients with conditions other than COVID-19 and also disempower the social and psychosocial consequences of COVID-19 and the government restrictions on the people in our catchment area.

COVID-19 has had very detrimental consequences on the economy as well as the social status of all Ugandans. We have keenly observed during this period that even families that we usually considered as stable and able to survive on their own, can reach a point where, if no social or psychosocial support is extended to them, a point of

collapse or domestic violence can occur. The relevance of the social aspect of Wellspring CMC has been so useful to the community we serve because at this very critical period of life, where even schools and churches had to close off, the medical centre serves as a one-stop shop for social, psychosocial and medical services, especially to the needy children from households living in absolute poverty. The availability of free medical services, food support and well organised outreaches has enabled us to keep the children in our communities alive, healthy, safe and with restored hope of a future after this trying period of the pandemic. One scholar mentioned that one can lose everything in life but, if their hope for a future is retained, they can easily rebuild all that was lost. We are hoping to borrow this line in re-drawing our activities for the next quarter so that we can support our beneficiaries to rebuild their lives, their family units, their economic activities and livelihoods. In doing so, we will be striving to rebuild all that was destroyed so that the medical centre can continue to deliver our services into the communities for God's greater glory!

Importance has been given to the need to do outreaches (including immunisation) to reach out to the vulnerable children while supporting other clients, through phone calls where outreaches were not possible. This move worked so well for us especially enabling us to take ARVs to our clients, food support, as well as counseling. Truthfully many lives have been saved amidst the challenges of the lockdown.

Our thanks go to Wellspring's amazing staff for their courageous and dedicated support of the needy families served by Wellspring.

Anitah's story

Born disabled, or becoming disabled through other causes, does not mean that one is cursed. Many parents and relatives mistreat disabled children because of what they are, in ignorance seeing them as cursed, not knowing that all that happens is in God's plan.

Anitah's parents showed no discrimination despite the fact that she had a very large head and was unable to sit up. They never sought any medical attention for her disability because they related her condition as being caused by small gods, which needed sacrifices in order to let their daughter live a normal life. But sacrifices did not help Anitah.

When Anitah was 2 years old her father died. At this time her paternal aunt took her away from her mother to her own home, offering to take very good care of the little girl. Little did her relatives know that this aunt wanted to exploit Anitah, by getting support from different people for her disabled niece, funds which were to be used for the benefit of the aunt. At the age of 4 years Anitah was seen at the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre. We were told her parents were dead. She had, apparently, been abandoned at her father's funeral and the aunt was looking for help. We assessed Anitah for sponsorship and put her on a waiting list. Anitah was found to have hydrocephalus and was unable to sit, roll or stand. We advised her aunt to start physiotherapy while we looked for a sponsor. Initially, the aunt took Anitah for physiotherapy but eventually her visits became increasingly infrequent and then stopped. On attempting to see Anitah at the address we had been given, we discovered

that she wasn't there and no one knew where she was living.

After some considerable time Allen, our social worker, discovered Anitah living a distance away, with her mother and maternal grandmother. Her aunt had lied about the death of her mother. She had eventually got fed up with Anitah because no sponsor had been found. She then took her to her grandmother and left her there. Anitah remained on the sponsorship waiting list, waiting for assistance.

In May this year, all the children on the sponsorship waiting list were provided with food, donated by Medcare during lockdown. Anitah was one of these children. By this time she was 6 years old. She still had a big head (Hydrocephalus) with involuntary movements of her head and nystagmus (flicking movements in her eyes). She could sit up and moved around by shuffling on her bottom.

When we arrived at her home Anitah immediately recognised us and asked us if we had come to teach her to walk. On talking to her she started crying and told us about the abuse she had received when living with her aunt. She said, "My aunt told me that I will never get any person to help me in life because I am cursed. She also told me that I will never be able to walk." With tears running down her cheeks she then said, "Dr. William, will you make me walk?" By this time we were all in tears.

Anitah's desperate plea was relayed to Medcare and in June a sponsor was found. In July funds were provided for a neurological consultation and surgery. A CT scan revealed that she still had hydrocephalus and a colloid cyst. Surgery was successful. Immediately her nystagmus disappeared and her involuntary head movements reduced. She has now started physiotherapy and we believe that, in due course, Anitah will receive her greatest wish – to be able to walk, and be seen as blessed by God instead of cursed by man. This very bright, beautiful child now has hope for the future and will be able to develop a confidence in her own self worth.

Lubyayi George William



Reaching out to people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic

A report by Wellspring physiotherapists, Ibrahim Sengendo and Pascal Muhindo



Globally, over one million people live with some form of disability. About 93-150 million children aged 0-18 years suffer from physical, developmental or communication disabilities. Low and middle income countries contribute 80% to the 100 million children with disabilities under five years of age.

The Lancet global health analysis on disabilities indicated that the risk of developmental disabilities among children younger than 5 years in low and middle income countries is likely to exceed 350 million (roughly three in every five children).

In Africa, children with disabilities are among the most neglected in society, and with their families they face enormous economic, political and social barriers, with adverse impact on their physical, social and intellectual development and wellbeing. More than half of the disabilities are a consequence of illness acquired in the first five years of life and most of these disabilities are preventable. In Uganda, with a total population of around 44 million people, 2.5 million children live with some form

of disability. Children aged 6-19 years contribute 53% of the national disability burden. The majority of the burden of disability in Uganda is comprised of physical impairment (34%), vision impairment (22%) and hearing impairment (15%). Developmental disabilities including cerebral palsy and spina bifida are reported to be more prevalent in Uganda than in higher income countries.

The burden of living with disabilities in Uganda is intensified by inadequate access to basic services. Repeated household surveys indicate limited access to rehabilitation services with 60% of persons with disabilities not able to receive any form of rehabilitation. This has become even worse in this time of complete country lockdown.

In Uganda, there are 2.5 physiotherapists per 100,000 population compared to 18 per 100,000 in South Africa and 59 per 100,000 in the USA. Parents in Uganda continue to carry their children with disabilities on their backs as assistive devices are not always available or applicable for use in their settings.



About 80% of children with disabilities served by Wellspring live in poor conditions. Having a child with a disability has economic consequences on families when a family member needs to be a full time carer and hence cannot take up employment.

Following measures set up by the Ugandan Government to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, access to health services for such children has been a very big challenge. None of our regular clients have been able to access the medical centre because they often have to move long distances with their children on their backs or hire a *bord borda* (motorbike taxi). The curfew restricts the time carers can travel when walking with the children and *bord borda*'s are not allowed to carry passengers. The department and the health centre at large came up with strategies on how we could bring the physiotherapy services to these children during this hard time, including reaching out to their homes.

In many villages and homes, family members of disabled children have figured out ways for persons with disabilities to do things better and move about more easily. We have seen examples where local carpenters have put together simple crutches, wooden legs and other aids. Some parents have figured out ways of adapting daily activities so that the children can help to do some form of work and at the same time get much of the exercise they need. But this

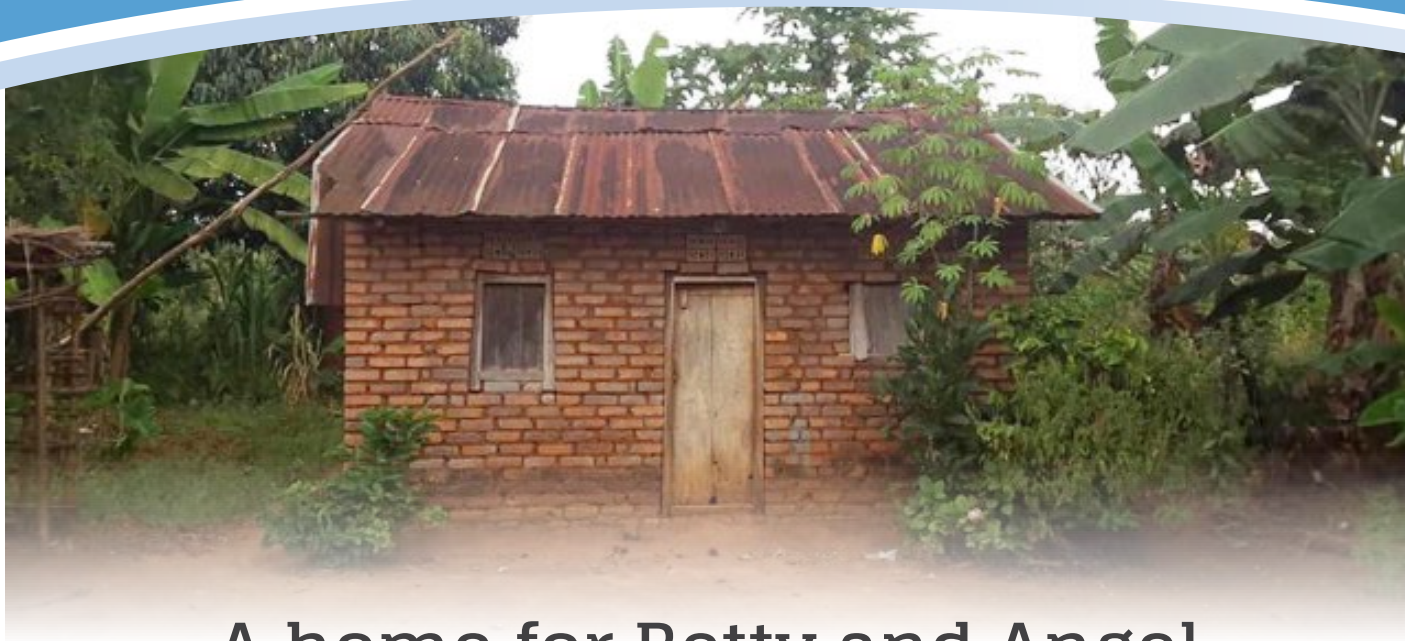
becomes much easier and effective with the guidance of a professional physiotherapist. With a little help, encouragement and freedom, the child can often become his/her own best therapist and we therefore intend to do an exploration in the communities during this lockdown so that best therapy can be provided. 'BEST THERAPY' is built into every day activities: play, works, relationship, rest and adventure. Visiting them will therefore help us explore all these in detail.

Alongside the challenges posed by the lockdown, bad weather and the rains have made some of our roads impassable. The Wellspring physiotherapy department has only one motorcycle and, from the measures put down by the government, only one person is entitled to one motorcycle and therefore its only one of the therapists who goes into the community. This means the client coverage is low and it will take us a long time to see every one of the clients we need to visit. Presently, one physiotherapist works in the villages visiting homes and the other works at the medical centre, with patients who can access the centre easily.

Please continue to pray for us as we seek to save and transform the lives of disabled children served by Wellspring.

Comment from Medcare Chair...

The needs of disabled children in the communities served by Wellspring are increasing during the pandemic. This is due to lack of food and medicines, physical exercises, physiotherapy equipment, counseling and the encouragement found when meeting others with similar problems. We pray that lockdown will be soon removed and funds made available to enable us to reach as many disabled children as possible, through the work of our dedicated physiotherapists. We have proved that excellent, professional physiotherapy, such as that provided by the Wellspring physiotherapists, together with counseling for the children and their carers, transforms the lives of the children and their families.



A home for Betty and Angel

The bond between a grandmother and her grandchildren is very special – that bond being formed through mutual love and affection. In Uganda that bond is enhanced by dependence – as thousands of orphans rely on their grandmothers for love and support.

Betty is one such child. She is a 9 year old orphan, her parents having died from AIDS. Betty was born HIV+ve and needs good nutrition, hygienic surroundings and access to medical care, in order to avoid her meeting the same fate as her parents. She now lives with, and relies on, her 80 year old grandmother, Angel, for her continued care. They live in a house with crumbling walls and leaking roof, infested with mosquitos and bats. Despite her extreme poverty and age, Angel manages to feed Betty and send her to school by working as a peasant farmer.

Angel's face and story has been the inspiration behind the 'A Generation to Honour' appeal. Angel told us that she has buried all of her children and now just has Betty, her granddaughter, to care for. She admits to being fearful for Betty's future, since Betty will have no one to care for her when Angel dies.

On hearing of the urgent needs of this grandmother and her granddaughter, a sponsor was found for Betty. Betty now has additional food supplements – even during lockdown – and free access to Wellspring for her medical care. In addition, funds have been provided to build Angel a new home, which will be free from bats and mosquitos, with a roof which will not leak and a toilet, shower area and kitchen in separate buildings behind the house.



Our sincere thanks go to Betty's sponsor and to the donor who provided the funds for the new home. Their compassion and generosity will save and transform Betty's life and give Angel hope for the future, secure in the knowledge that others will continue to care for her granddaughter in the years ahead.

In tears, Angel has sent this message to the Medcare supporter who provided the funds to build the house...

"Praise be to God; truly God does not forget His servants. Where could I have got all these millions (Ugandan shillings!!) to build Betty a house? Great is the Lord! Tell that white friend of mine that I love her so much. I would give her a hug if she were not far away from here. There are not enough words I can use to express my gratitude but only God knows how to reward you."



Wellspring Home for Disabled Children (Noeline's Home)

Amidst lockdown due to coronavirus, many people in the villages are finding it difficult to make ends meet. However, those living in homes, such as Noeline's, are facing a far tougher life.

Before the imposition of lockdown, Noeline had stored various foods, such as flour, rice, and beans, to provide sufficient food for the children for the months ahead. However, with the lockdown extension and the children remaining at the home all day due to the closure of schools, all the stored food is now finished. We were very worried about how to feed the 42 children under Noeline's care. Fortunately, a number of the children in the home are individually sponsored through Medcare. Together with their normal monthly food allowance, these children were included in the provision of additional food during the COVID-19 crisis, raised through the Medcare appeal. Additionally, some of Noeline's friends, who sponsor one of the children, provided some food.

All the land around the home has been utilised to grow food, such as bananas, cabbages, maize and other vegetables. Encouragingly, Noeline was also able to borrow a piece of land from a neighbor on which she has planted more maize.

The Kalungu COVID task force gave the home 100kg of maize at the beginning of lock down, provided by the government. This is a very small amount of food to feed so many children. We had hoped for a bigger donation, but the official who brought it told us that we are a rich home and, therefore, could have no more. Having observed the quality of the home and land, they did not think we were justified in receiving any more assistance. They judged us on our accommodation, not on who we care for - 42 disabled and disadvantaged children.



Ever since lockdown we have locked the gates to the home and nobody is allowed to enter the premises. The children's temperatures are checked regularly and Jane, Wellspring's 'in charge' (senior nurse), visits every week to check on the health of individual children. Funds, which had been given by Medcare for maintenance of the home, have been diverted to provide transport for those children who need to access Wellspring for medication and physiotherapy.

Sadly, before lockdown, we had many visitors, both local and international, who had promised to help. They always take videos and pictures with the children, but none have come back. Now no visitors are allowed. Both Medcare, Noeline and Wellspring are trying to find others who will help provide long term sustainability for the home and complete some of the building work which has yet to be done. We are trusting that God will continue to provide for these needy children and secure their future with Noeline.

Written by:

Allen Businje

Warden and Wellspring social worker



Child Sponsorship

A report from Wellspring's Sponsorship Manager, William

It is our gratitude to God that Uganda has registered only 2 deaths due to COVID-19, although the numbers of positive cases of the disease are increasing. This is according to the updates we get from the ministry of health. In our villages, the sensitization is ongoing, making sure that the people are well equipped with information about COVID-19 in order to protect themselves from contracting the disease. Within the villages, we have not heard of any deaths due to unknown causes.

Much has changed due to lockdown. Almost every person is affected, most especially, financially. This also leads to lack of food to those who have to buy their food on a daily basis and have nowhere to cultivate their own food. The majority of our families, sponsored and on the waiting list, were relieved in the last two months because Medcare secured some food for them. But I am not so sure what is to happen when the food we gave them is finished. Even if the lockdown is stopped now, many people have no starting points to boost their family's incomes.

School closures have resulted in many children spending most of their time in non constructive activities, simply because group gatherings are prohibited. It would be good if we could continue with the adolescent meetings at Wellspring, so occupying their time and minds with

constructive ideas. My worry is that we are likely to register more adolescent pregnancies due to this redundancy.

In village homes there is an increase in domestic violence. The cause is attributed to the lockdown that has led to financial constraints in homes, leading to shortage of home basics. I suspect many of our children receive psychosocial abuse yet we are prevented from meeting them or visiting their homes.

A total of 178 children are presently sponsored through the Wellspring Child Sponsorship Scheme. 52 children are waiting for sponsorship and hundreds more are waiting to be found. During 2020 four children on the waiting list for sponsorship have died. It was too late for them. Please would you consider sponsoring one of these very needy, sick children and provide them with hope for the future.

A video called 'A Child at the End of the Rainbow' has been produced by Medcare and can be seen on YouTube at youtu.be/ijEXmrv0AGO. This video aims to promote the needs of children living in Ugandan villages in an attempt to gain more sponsors. Please watch this video and share it with your contacts.

Together we can save the lives of many more children.

Here are 4 children from the waiting list...



Jovia Nabakooza

10 years old. Suffers from HIV/AIDS and lives with her grandparents and 5 siblings in extreme poverty.



Aloysious Bwanika

3 ½ years old. Malnourished and suffering from HIV and AIDS. He lives with his mother and grandmother in extreme poverty. The family are in desperate need of help.



Fahimah Nakaweesi

15 years old suffering from HIV/AIDS. Her father has died from AIDS and her mother abandoned her to her elderly grandmother. The family are extremely poor and need help in the care of Fahimah.



Anisha Batebi

14 years old. Suffers from Sickle Cell Disease. She lives with her parents and 3 siblings in extreme poverty. Her father has had a stroke and cannot work. Anisha needs urgent sponsorship.

Please spread the word of the needs of such children. Working together we can save many more lives.



Chairman's letter

COVID-19 has impacted the lives of children all over the world, including those in Uganda. The Wellspring Children's Medical Centre continues to be a rainbow of hope for the thousands of children it serves. Despite restrictions, the sick have been cared for, the hungry have been fed and the desperate have been given hope for the future. "Where there is hope in the future, there is power in the present." (John Maxwell)

Putting our trust in God and working together with all our supporters and our Ugandan colleagues, Medcare will continue to be a lifeline for Ugandan children in the years to come.

"Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly." 1 Corinthians 13 verse 13 (Message Bible)

God bless you and keep you safe.

Pauline Hutchinson

Chairman of Medcare

My lockdown

A poem written by Charlie, aged 13

*I have times when I feel full of sadness,
I do not know the reason for my feelings.
I cannot say it is because of one thing,
But it's all just sad, so sad.*

*The skies have been clear but I feel cloudy within,
I don't know how to feel better when we cannot see the end.
Today the rain has come and the sky cries with me.*

*I can't see my friends,
This really hurts me inside.*

*After the rain has cleared, the sun will come out,
The rainbow will appear giving us hope.
This time will end, I'm sure of that.
Lockdown, lockdown, we will never forget.*



In remembrance...

Medcare would like to pay tribute to two faithful supporters of Medcare who sadly died this year – Marlene Longdin (pictured left) and Joan Griffith (pictured right). Their families and friends raised over £1,800 for Medcare in memory of these two wonderful ladies. We thank God for them. They will be greatly missed.

