

medcare newsletter

A lifeline for Ugandan children

Spring Edition | February 2023



End of Winter, beginning of Spring

The Spring Equinox is one of the two periods of the year when the sun crosses the equator and the days and nights are in equal length all over the earth, marking our spin from winter to spring. But the equinox is just the beginning...

The spring equinox ushers in a period of rebirth. We are pulled toward tackling new and exciting projects with new opportunities, perspectives, and adventures ahead!

- Thousands of children's lives have been transformed and saved, through the work of the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre and the Child Sponsorship Programme.
- Many more very needy disabled children have been admitted to the care of Noeline and her helpers, now receiving the love and care they so desperately need.
- Thousands of children and adults have been fed in the face of severe starvation - occurring as a result of the serious rise in the cost of living in Uganda, lack of essential supplies imported into the country, a severe prolonged drought and the continued repercussions from the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020/21.
- The excellent work of the staff at the Medical Centre has continued in the face of increasing poverty and the threat of diseases such as COVID-19 and ebola, threatening staff and patients alike. Despite these difficulties Wellspring staff have continued to work their hardest to provide care for the thousands of children coming for assistance in 2022. Medcare wishes to recognize and applaud their loyalty and dedication in the face of such difficulties.



Miraculous funding has been provided for Medcare to set in motion 2 exciting new projects in 2023 - the Community Based Rehabilitation project (CBR) and the new Rehabilitation Unit for Special Children. The Medcare Board, the West Buganda diocese and all Wellspring staff are looking forward in excited anticipation to the development of these projects this year. Truly exciting adventures are ahead for us all in 2023!

Anthony's story - in her own words

Born and raised by a single mother is a daily experience for most of the children with disabilities. My name is Mary Anthony Babirye. I am now 17 years and it is by God's grace that I have grown up to this age. I thank God that He has brought me this far to testify and tell what children with disabilities go through.

I was born a normal child like others and developed well, according to my mother. We lived a very poor life and at the age of 3 years, I started falling sick.

Many illnesses attacked me yet my mother could not afford hospital fees. My father would not help us. She used to buy some drugs for me but nothing worked. Among the many illnesses I suffered from was a constant cough. She finally took me to Masaka Hospital where I was diagnosed with TB. I was started on TB treatment and completed it. My mother thought that all was well because the coughing stopped. Shortly after the completion of the treatment, my mother tells me that I woke up one morning and could not stand. My mum went and told my dad all that had happened to me, but still he would not help. In addition, I changed from a child who could control her bladder and bowel, to wetting and soiling every cloth I was dressed in, at anytime, without feeling.

As time went by, I became totally useless. My mother had to look for food for us to eat and to protect me, she locked me in the house when she went for work. Since I could not help myself, my mother used to find me all drowned in faeces and urine on her return. One day, my Mum was directed to Mummy Noeline to seek for advice on how to care for a disabled child. My mother said that she had been told to visit a witch doctor for a solution for my disability. She hoped that Mummy Noeline would assist her by giving her money to pay the witch doctor. Mummy Noeline welcomed us and requested that my mother would leave me in her care. She told us that disabilities come in different ways and she had doctors whom she will consult about my health. Looking at the children in this home all had a form of disability and so has Mummy Noeline. Somehow, I was happy because I had found a community where there were others who were also disabled.

Mummy Noeline comforted me, but I still had a lot of questions which I felt I could not ask her. Self-isolating was the order of the day. Not because I did not want to interact with others but because all the time I was smelling. I hated myself and cursed my father who never bothered to take me to the hospital.

One day, we had visitors at the home - Dr. Pauline and Dr. William. They took me to the hospital where I was told that

I had TB of the spine, which was the cause of my disability. I was treated and, from that time, Dr. William became my father.

He treated me and the other children in the home. The care and love I wanted, I then received when I was given sponsorship from Wellspring and Medicare. At the start, I felt I didn't deserve to be loved and never drew close to anyone, because I knew that all the time I wasn't clean. It was the problem I wanted to seek help for but I failed to address it. Eventually I sought Dr. William's attention and he started providing me with pampers.

Continued overleaf...



The day I got pampers, was the best day in my life! I spent the whole day not being wet or smelly. Dr. William encouraged me to learn to live with my disability and never to stigmatize myself. He taught me to learn to fight for my rights. Now I am a happy girl with special abilities.

Since I started appearing clean, I have made many friends and I no longer isolate myself. I know, that out there are many children who have undergone or going through the same life challenges or worse. My message to them is, "Never give up, don't give up on life and understand that all the disabilities affecting us have causes. Some disabilities can be treated or prevented and if not, rehabilitation is available. You should look forward to the future with hope in your heart"

Don't ignore any child with a disability; the little you can do for that child can change his or her life forever. The care and love I received from Wellspring and Medcare, have transformed my life. These days, I have learnt to manage myself hygienically. While I am at home, I no longer use pampers because I know how to help myself. I now only used pampers if am travelling.

I thank Medcare, Wellspring and Mummy Noeline for having come to help a Ugandan child like me. I could have been dead by now if you had not given me all I need to survive.

God bless you all, Anthony



Anthony is presently undertaking vocational training as a tailor. Her training is to take place at the Smiling Hearts home in Masaka. During their training as tailors, Anthony and her fellow pupils at Smiling Hearts are preparing to make disposable nappies which can be used by other children suffering from incontinence in the greater Maska district. A wonderful opportunity for disabled children to assist others with similar life challenges as themselves.

Webele Nyon (thank you very much) Ashton Heyes School

In October half term 2022, the children of Ashton Heyes School in Cheshire were challenged to think of a way they could raise money for the starving children in Uganda, during their half term holiday.

33 children came up with ideas such as a sponsored silence (the most popular one I imagine with the parents!), a sponsored walk or cycle ride, keeping their room tidy all half term (another popular one!), making cakes to sell at school and many other great ideas. Between them they raised over £1,000. These funds were sent straight out to Uganda to buy food for 57 children and their families, starving in the villages - over 500 people fed. Well done Ashton Heyes School!



Charities working together to save and transform a child's life

Morning Star Foundation

Morning Star Foundation is a global nonprofit organization that helps families with severe heart disease in children, get life-saving medical treatments.

In September 2015 Medcare and Morning Star Foundation began to work together to save the life of a 2-year-old child, Johnson, who suffered with Fallot's Tetralogy. After 5 months of battling to save this child's life, he was eventually (and miraculously) fit enough to travel to the Naryana Hospital in Bangalore, India, where he underwent complicated cardiac surgery. Medcare provided the medical care in Uganda, all costs for his transfer to India, his cardiac surgery, his eventual return home and post operative care. Morning Star used their influence and connections to organize Johnson's travel to India, accompanied by a nurse, his mother and a member of the Wellspring medical team, Johnson's admission into Nayana Hospital and accommodation in India for his mother and the nurse.

It was a privilege to work together with Morning Star Foundation to save and transform the life of this little boy. Johnson now continues with good health, goes to school and is an active and happy child.



Johnson before and after

Samaritan's Purse

Samaritans Purse have been helping people in need worldwide since 1970.

In December 2020 Medcare sent an appeal to Samaritan's Purse for assistance for the Wellspring Home for Disabled Children. The project was named "the Unique and the Special." For 2 years Samaritan's Purse has generously provided funds to assist Noeline in the care of her children; providing food, clothing, medical and school expenses, sanitary wear, and transport costs to clinics, physiotherapy and hospital appointments. In addition, they have enabled the vocational training of 2 disabled teenage children, Mary receiving training to be a hairdresser and Anthony to be a tailor. In 2023 Samaritans Purse is providing a further \$20,000, continuing to assist Medcare in their care of disabled children through the work of the Wellspring Home for Disabled Children, led by Noeline.

Working together with Samaritan's Purse has been a great encouragement to Medcdare, as together we attempt to transform the lives of seriously disabled children.



Noeline and her children

Smiling Hearts

Smiling Hearts is an initiative of HUG - Help Us Grow.

HUG is an Australian-based not-for-profit organisation that has been working tirelessly, since 2008, to implement and support sustainable community projects in the beautiful rural villages of Uganda. The Smiling Hearts Centre in Masaka contains a 'forever home', and a vocational skills training centre, and showroom, from where the children can sell their work. This is where Medcare's sponsored child, Anthony, is receiving her training in tailoring. When visiting the Smiling Hearts Centre, you are immediately aware of the love which has founded and developed this work. It is a privilege for Medcare to work together with such a compassionate charity as Smiling Hearts, aiming to provide hope for the future for many disabled children in the greater Masaka district.



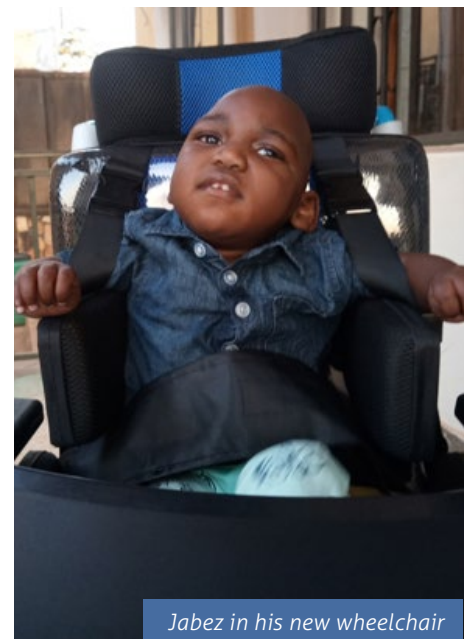
CreateCare Global

CreateCare Global (CCG), established in Australia in 2009, is trying to collaborate with grassroots organisations in Uganda, in order to make a bigger impact in the lives of orphaned and vulnerable children. Part of their mandate is to connect others to grow this work.

Sandy McDonald, founder of Create Care Global, approached Medcare for advice regarding a little Ugandan boy, Jabez, suffering from cerebral palsy. The Wellspring physiotherapists agreed to examine the child and provide advice regarding his future care, free of charge. He has since been provided with a wheelchair, with the help of CCG, and advice on rehabilitation techniques. He is so much happier now he can sit up and view the world!

Sandy later introduced Medcare to Smiling Hearts, and from that introduction and a sharing of the visions and missions of all 3 charities, a special relationship is developing as we learn to collaborate with each other to the benefit of needy Ugandan children.

Medcare would like to thank Sandy and CreateCare Global for enabling this special relationship.



Jabez in his new wheelchair

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Helen Keller

Across the world millions of children are suffering as a result of war, disease and neglect. The task to help these children would seem enormous, too big for individual charities to even make a dent in resolving the sufferings of children. However, when charities share information, resources and expertise, and work together in unity, far more children can be raised out of poverty, provided with the health care and the peace and security all children deserve.

Children desperately waiting for sponsorship

Medcare wishes to thank all our wonderful sponsors who are providing lifesaving care for 184 sick, disabled, starving Ugandan children. There are presently 13 children who have been waiting over 2 years for sponsorship - and there are hundreds more we are yet to add to the list. Here are 4 of them.



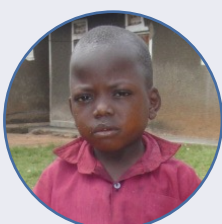
Abigail

7 years old with Sickle Cell Disease. Cared for by her grandmother. The family are extremely poor and cannot always find the funds for medication or hospital care for Abigail. Her brother has died for lack of care, also suffering from Sickle Cell Disease



Grace

7 years old with HIV/AIDS. Her mother is mentally unstable and abandoned Grace to her grandmother's care. Poverty prevents Grace obtaining all the medication and care she needs to survive.



Lawrence

7 years old with Sickle Cell Disease. His family live in extreme poverty struggling to find food for the children.



Ryan

8 years old with cerebral palsy. Cared for by his grandmother who has no form of income. Ryan needs regular physiotherapy in order to reach his full potential in life.

The Wellspring Welfare Fund

The Wellspring Welfare Fund was set up in 2010, aiming to assist those families who are too poor to pay even the smallest of fees for medical care at Wellspring.

There is a small charge for patients attending Wellspring clinics and laboratory services and these charges are put into the Welfare Fund.

Each patient is assessed on their degree of poverty and those suffering extreme poverty are not charged. Any additional funds required by these children, such as hospital referral or transport costs, are funded through the Wellspring Welfare Fund. This has worked very well for over 12 years and many desperately ill children living in extreme poverty have received additional care, saving many lives. Here are some examples of children cared for through the Welfare fund in 2022:



Madrine

6 months old with malnutrition. Referred to Masaka Hospital for nutritional care. Now on formula milk. Her mother is 16 years old.



Sam

HIV+ve baby with severe malnutrition and oedema. Sam was given transport and hospital upkeep at Kitovu Hospital and then connected to Thrive Uganda for more financial support and rehabilitation.



Phiona

2 years old with severe malaria and anaemia. Provided with emergency transport and hospital upkeep at Masaka Hospital.



Ryan

18 months old with severe malnutrition. Provided with urgent transfer to Kitovu Hospital for nutritional care.

220 children have been assisted through the Welfare Fund in 2022. 220 lives saved.

Many thanks to Caroline Nabasiye, Wellspring's In-charge, for her management of this fund and for her monthly reports.

Fun at the Medcare Christmas Fair 2022!

The annual Medcare Christmas Fair was held in Frodsham, Cheshire in November 2022.

There were some lovely stalls from which to purchase Christmas gifts and stocking fillers. Coffee or mulled wine and 'Olwen's Cakes' gave a sense of Christmas cheer! Many thanks to all the stall holders and to the wonderful Medcare volunteers. £700 was raised to assist Medcare in their care of thousands of Ugandan children.





Physiotherapy report

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics Census Report (UBOS) indicated that 12.4% of the Ugandan population lives with some form of disability implying that approximately 4.5 million Ugandans are persons with disability, hence a development concern. This Report showed that disability was higher in rural areas (15%) than in urban areas (12%).

Persons with Disabilities are still among the most neglected groups in the policy domain as well as in the private sphere. The majority of these persons face enormous economic, political, and social barriers that have an adverse impact on their physical, economic, social and intellectual development and wellbeing. Many of them do not have access to basic needs such as health and education, experience multiple deprivations even within their family and are invisible in the national policy agenda.

The Uganda Population and Housing Census indicated that the total population of all children aged 18 years and below was 19,874,000. Considering that 5.82% of Ugandan Children are estimated to be children with disabilities, this translates to 2,027,148 children with disabilities (1,052,000 boys and 974,488 girls).

Uganda is overall on track towards achieving education for all, with a net enrolment rate of 93% boys and 96% girls. However, only 9% of Children with Disabilities of school going age attend. The major challenges for these children not adequately attending school are: inadequate financial resources provided to responsible institutions at national and local level; insufficiently trained staff; inaccessible physical environment (disability-unfriendly classrooms and toilets); lack of communication and information means (e.g. sign language and Braille for the deaf); as well as a shortage and unaffordability of assistive and mobility devices.



Our Vision

For all children with disabilities to enjoy quality of life, function to their fullest and effectively participate in community activities.

Our Goal

To increase access for all children with disabilities to equitable and quality rehabilitation services, delivered by qualified multi- disciplinary professional teams.

Currently there are 17 special needs schools in Uganda, 84 attached units, and 27 all-inclusive schools at primary level. Kakunyu School is the only special needs school that enrolls children with physical and intellectual disabilities in greater Masaka and there is none in the Kalungu district, our area of operation. Most of the rest of the schools are situated in the urban city Kampala which makes access to them costly.

The Wellspring physiotherapy clinic has continued to grow in very many aspects, thanks to the Almighty, Medcare and the physiotherapists who run it. Throughout this year and the past years, we have been working towards meeting our set goals and we are happy to report that we have been able to achieve some of the set goals whereas others are steadily progressing.

The clinic continues to be run by the two qualified and experienced physiotherapist working five days a week providing 2,032 physiotherapy sessions a year. We are hopeful that a third physiotherapist will join us sooner as part of the developments happening in the department, courtesy of Medcare.



We believe that no child with disability should live a discriminatory life from all other children. Our goal is to ensure that all these children, who have no access to rehabilitation services in the Kalungu district, are reached and served as equally as others.

Wellspring Community Based Rehabilitation Project (WCBRP)

With constant prayers, hard work and efforts put in by Medcare to promote the work of the Wellspring physiotherapy unit and Wellspring Medical Centre at large, very exciting news was received about the WCBRP grant that would fund the commencement of this project. Preparations are ongoing in the physiotherapy unit and the Medical Centre to affect the commencement of the project. Thanks to the physiotherapy team, Wellspring staff, the Medical Committee and Medcare.

This project aims at ensuring children with disabilities have access to equal opportunities and thrive without stigma and discrimination, through:

- Equipping health care workers including VHTs, carers and teachers with detailed knowledge about disability.
- Extending physiotherapy rehabilitation services nearer to those children who can't access them at the medical facility.
- Improving the nutritional status of those children who are suffering from malnutrition.
- Providing rehabilitation gadgets and empowering parents with the skills to use them, for the benefit of their children.
- Using locally available resources for some of the rehabilitation equipment

Our main goals for the WCBRP program, for the disabled child

- To help him/her be physically comfortable, clean, and safe and well fed
- To help him/her with positioning and exercise to prevent further deformity and to make caring for them easier.
- To help him/her learn whatever basic skills they can in developing head and hand control and in some form of communication. Also help them learn to interact with others in a way that his/her needs are met and behaviour acceptable.
- To make caring for the child easier and more enjoyable for those who are responsible for them.

We have expectations to go above and beyond to ensure that every special needs child has access to the services we offer at the Wellspring physiotherapy clinic. Our CBR program is implemented to reduce stigma, educate communities and provide therapy to the children in their local communities at a completely free cost.

*Ibrahim Ssengendo and
Pascal Muhindo*

Wellspring Physiotherapists

The Rehabilitation Unit for Special Children

Cerebral Palsy (CP) in Uganda: Cerebral palsy is the most common motor disability in childhood and the most common movement disorder in the world.

The incidence of cerebral palsy is approximately 150-250 per 100,000 live births worldwide. The rate of CP is believed to be significantly higher in less developed countries with a lower standard of medical care.

CP prevalence is higher in rural Uganda than in urban centres, and children younger than 8 years are more likely to have severe cerebral palsy than older children. There are approximately five times more children with post-neonatal cerebral palsy in Uganda than in high income countries, suggesting that cerebral malaria and seizures are prevalent risk factors in this population.

Malnutrition and CP

In Uganda, children with CP are at a greater risk of malnutrition. This is because their neurological condition may affect the muscles and movements involved in chewing, swallowing, and eating. These children may also have gastrointestinal complications that affect what they can eat and how they absorb nutrients. Malnutrition is more common in children with cerebral palsy under 5 years of age. In children with CP, malnutrition has been shown to increase the severity of gastroesophageal reflux. Equally, nutritional rehabilitation has been shown to lessen the symptoms associated with gastroesophageal reflux.

The motor disorders of CP are often accompanied by disturbances of sensation, perception, cognition, communication, and behaviour; by epilepsy; and by secondary musculoskeletal problems. Although the primary problems associated with CP are neurodevelopment in nature, challenges with growth and nutrition are also common in affected children. Children with CP are smaller and more poorly nourished than their typically developing peers, these differences being more marked with increasing age and with the severity of the motor impairment. **Good nutrition is the cornerstone of health and well-being for all children, whether affected by CP or not. With malnutrition, any child is more susceptible to diseases and death.**

Children with cerebral palsy presenting at the Wellspring physiotherapy department

At the Wellspring physiotherapy department 60% of the children presented suffer from cerebral palsy. However, it is estimated that hundreds of children in the greater Masaka



district suffer from CP. Many of these children are never seen due to their extreme poverty and social exclusion. Such families cannot afford to travel regularly to Wellspring where their children can receive the help they need.

This very great problem leads to the following questions:

- Who can assess a CP child's nutrition status while at home?
- How can such a child's pain be managed in these rural settings?
- How can the expected contractures in such children be prevented?

All of these questions need to be addressed if we are to put a stop to premature deaths in children with CP.

Many premature deaths in CP could be prevented by:

- Early diagnosis.
- Management of any other illness/condition in a CP Child.
- Ensuring sufficient and good feeding.
- Regular Physiotherapy.
- Pain relief.
- Education in the communities of the needs and special nature of children with CP, so eradicating prejudice and exclusion.

The proposed Rehabilitation Unit for Special Children

Main Objective

To improve the well-being and nutritional status of children with CP in the greater Masaka districts through nutrition and physical rehabilitation, community sensitization and stigma eradication and encouraging families to at least have an income generating project to eradicate poverty.

Further Objectives

- To ensure early screening and management of malnutrition in CP children.
- To reduce/minimize pain among the CP children.
- To control contractures among the CP children
- To educate families with CP children on how to care for a CP child.
- To liaise with specialized hospitals for any additional surgical and medical treatment which may be needed.
- To promote inclusive living in the entire community.

A large, very generous legacy donation has been given to Medcare to enable the build and development of this Unit. The West Buganda Diocese have kindly offered land alongside the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre for this development. Once secure and good governance is assured in Uganda this development will begin. Architectural drawings are being drawn up by Roman Strzala in Manchester and, once these are agreed upon, Ugandan builders will be asked to submit their tenders for the build.

This is yet another exciting project which will further enhance our care of disabled children in the greater Masaka district of Uganda.

Our thanks go to William, Ibrahim and Pascal for their inspirational proposals. 2023 is indeed an exciting year for Medcare and Wellspring!



Many thanks

Medcare wishes to thank the West Buganda diocese, under the leadership of the Rt. Rev. Henry Katumba-Tamale, for the provision of land on which to build the new Rehabilitation Unit for Special Children.

We are grateful for all the support shown by the diocese for the work of Medcare and the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre.

Good luck, Kenneth!

Medcare wishes to thank Kenneth Mubiro, one of Wellspring's nurses, for all his dedicated service to the children attending the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre for over 12 years.

He is to leave Wellspring in March to further his career. Kenneth was a great team member and organized a number of new initiatives during his work at Wellspring, in particular the development of the computerized record system now used in all clinics. He will be greatly missed but we wish him all the very best in his new job.



“If we all work together, the happier we’ll be!”

These are the words of a song which Bishop Henry often gets us all to sing in Uganda. It goes on to say: *“For your work is my work, my work is your work and His (God’s) work is our work...”*

How very true these words are for the work of Medcare and Wellspring.



A team is defined as a group of people who perform interdependent tasks to work toward accomplishing a common mission or specific objective. The marks of a good team are good communication, respect and support for one another, clear common goals and a unity of purpose. “The strength of a team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team!”

Medcare has been blessed with many amazingly supportive and hardworking team members.

- The Medcare Board of Trustees, a group of business and medical professionals, extremely busy in their professional lives but sacrificing time to advise, supervise and support all Medcare initiatives.
- The Wellspring staff, a wonderful group of dedicated medical and ancillary workers, tirelessly working to save the lives of children served by Wellspring.
- The Medcare supporters, donors and sponsors, providing funding to assist in the work of Medcare and Wellspring even in the face of present, worldwide financial concerns.
- The West Buganda diocese, providing spiritual oversight of the work of Wellspring, encouraging us all to work together in our goal to save the lives of Ugandan children.
- Many other stakeholders in the UK, USA, Canada, Ireland and Uganda, joining with us all to achieve our goals.



Mother Teresa is said to have made this comment:

“None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.”

With God’s help this year we can all be involved in something wonderful for the children of Uganda.

Thank you all and God bless you in 2023.

Pauline Hutchinson

Medcare Founder and Trustee