

medcare newsletter

A lifeline for Ugandan children

Winter Edition | January 2020



A Happy New Decade to all Medcare Supporters!

As Medcare looks forward to a new decade with exciting challenges and miracles ahead, it is good to look back at what has been achieved in the last 10 years. Here are just a few of Medcare's amazing achievements in the last decade:

- **Wellspring Sponsorship schemes** have grown from 10 to 165 children (with 64 children still waiting for sponsorship in 2020).
- **12 young teenagers have graduated from the sponsorship schemes**, now living healthy, responsible lives, with jobs to keep them financially secure and hope in their hearts for the years ahead.
- **Partnership with Manchester Airports Group (MAG)** from 2011-2015 who raised funds to double the size of the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre and fully equip it with new furniture and medical equipment. Our sincere thanks go to all those at MAG supporting this project.
- **The miraculous recovery of baby Johnson** from life threatening heart disease in 2016 and many other children's lives saved as a result of the compassion and generosity of many people throughout the world.
- **Construction of the Wellspring Home For Disabled Children** in 2018 – with 42 disabled children now living in safety, in a loving environment, under the care of Noeline and her assistants.
- **Staffing levels have risen** from 7 in 2010 to 20 in 2019. The Wellspring staff are a remarkable group of dedicated medical and ancillary workers, showing exemplary team work, love and compassion for the children.
- **A rise in patient throughput** to 20,000 annually.
- Many, many stories of **children's lives being saved** and families transformed in the villages in and around the Kalungu District of Uganda.



Johnson today

medcare - Together we can make a difference

Penina's story...

This is the story of a remarkable woman living in the heart of Uganda.
Her name is Penina Nababi and she is 78 years old.

Penina was widowed many years ago. Her children grew up and left home and then they both died also, leaving their children, 2 boys, orphaned. No-one wanted to care for these little boys because they had serious health problems which many of the villagers saw as a curse. They were afraid that the curse would affect themselves and their families and so they were willing to leave the boys to die.

The eldest boy, Alex, was born normally, a healthy baby boy. But some time in infancy he contracted cerebral malaria – the greatest killer of Ugandan children. However, Alex did not die. He recovered from malaria but was left completely blind and with severe cerebral palsy. As he became older it became apparent that Alex would never be like other children. He was unable to sit up on his own, feed himself, or walk and talk; he never became continent and spent the majority of his life lying on an earth floor in a small room in a dirty tiny village home, the only items in the room being the rags on the floor on which he lay.

Dennis, the youngest of the cousins, developed brain damage after a difficult birth. As he grew up it was apparent that he was not reaching the normal milestones seen in healthy children and he too was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. When he was very young it was found that Dennis also suffered from AIDS and epilepsy putting his life at great risk.

It was at the time of the funerals of her children that Penina realised that no-one wanted Alex or Dennis. They were cursed and a disgrace to the families they were born into. But Penina had a faith in God and great love and compassion for her grandchildren. So she took them into her own home and worked in the day digging in the fields to raise money to feed the boys, locking them in the house for their safety, in the evenings coming home exhausted but giving Alex and Dennis the love they needed and understood.

It was in 2011, when Dennis was 8 and Alex 12 years old, that we first met Penina and the boys in their home during a visit to the villages. Despite the extreme poverty and extremely sad and hopeless condition of the boys there was much love in that home. And so Medcare found sponsors for both the boys providing them with the food and the medicines they both desperately needed, physiotherapy to help the boys mobility, stimulating them as they met other children, and helping to reduce Alex's painful contractures of all his limbs.

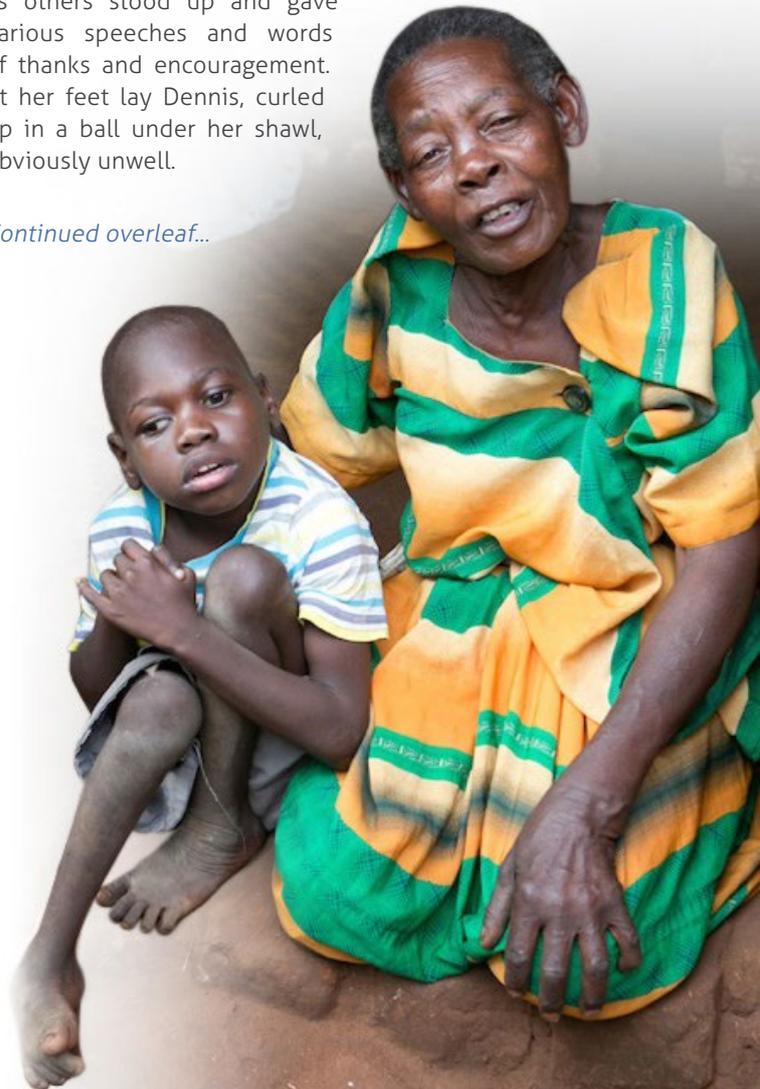
In 2013 we discovered that Penina and the boys were soon to be evicted from their home. The owner of the house, her niece, was selling up and moving to Kampala 60 miles away. She had asked her elderly aunt if she wanted to go with her. But she didn't want the boys. No-one wanted the boys. Penina

refused, saying that she trusted God for their future and that she wanted to be buried in the same plot of land as her boys and would never leave them. Medcare again raised funds and a new home was built for Penina and the boys, one which was larger and more hygienic, making it easier for her to care for such handicapped children.

Throughout the 8 years we have known Penina we have always been aware of her loving, compassionate, sacrificial nature as seen in her care of her grandsons. Although I doubt she has ever seen it as a sacrifice or a chore. She is always thanking God and the sponsors for their care of her little family, despite a life of hardship and poverty we could never imagine.

In 2015 Alex died in his sleep at the age of 15 years. A little while later I saw Dennis and Penina in the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre on what we call COIN day, the monthly event when we give out hundreds of pounds worth of food to all our sponsored children. Penina sat patiently all day on the floor as others stood up and gave various speeches and words of thanks and encouragement. At her feet lay Dennis, curled up in a ball under her shawl, obviously unwell.

Continued overleaf...



At the end of the day Penina came to me, knelt down in front of me and handed me a small plastic bag containing ground nuts – a favourite food for Ugandans - and of mine! She had probably spent many hours picking them and cleaning them and she wanted to give them to me as a way of thanks for what Medcare had done for her family. It was one of the most humbling experiences of my life seeing this woman who had suffered so much and yet because of her great faith in God and love for others wanted to give me what little she had.

Introducing the Medcare Board of Trustees

The Medcare Board of Trustees have worked together since 2011 ensuring good governance, sustainability and stability of the work of Medcare in Uganda.

They are all highly qualified, skilled individuals who give their time freely to the charity as volunteers, advising, guiding and sharing their knowledge and expertise.



Nick Taylor

Medcare Treasurer
Finance Director
Manchester Airports Group



Jamie Partridge

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Jane Tomkinson OBE

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Dr Andrew Dalton

Consultant
Histopathologist



Sarah Taylor (*nee Kemp*)

Executive Director at MIDAS
(Manchester Investment
Development Agency Service)



Elaine Darbyshire

Executive Director at
Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust,
Liverpool



**Dr Pauline Hutchinson
MBE**

Medcare Chairman
Full time Medcare volunteer

Thank you for all your hard work on behalf of the children in Uganda and the staff at the WellSpring Children's Medical Centre. Your input during the past decade has been invaluable and has resulted in the transformation of thousands of children's lives.



The Wellspring Teenage Girl's Action Group

Once a quarter Allen Businje, Wellspring's social worker, leads a group of Ugandan teenage girls who meet to discuss serious life issues encountered by teenage girls in Uganda and to learn valuable life skills.

Meetings are interactive, using role play, games and group discussion and a variety of innovative teaching techniques to keep the girls wholly involved in the session.

Allen reports that our girls have totally changed since this group began 12 months ago. It is encouraging to note that there have been no teenage pregnancies registered in this group for the past year. At their next meeting boys will be included, under the care of Johnmary and Yusuf from the Wellspring medical laboratory. The emphasis for this meeting will be on 'positive living'.

Allen reports that it is estimated that there are 160,000 children under the age of 15 years in Uganda who are infected with HIV, most HIV infections for young children occurring as the result of mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, labour, delivery and breastfeeding. 25 percent of babies born to women with HIV will be infected by the virus. With treatment that percentage can be reduced to less than 2 percent.

Unfortunately, not all mothers are able to access antenatal services and learn the risks of mother to child transmission. Due to the low levels of awareness of these risks, the poor economic status of people living in the Kalungu District and barriers of gender roles, many young women could benefit from increased antenatal services and health education.

'Positive living' training for teenagers is one of the mechanisms of scaling up behavioural change and HIV/AIDS intervention in the Kalungu and Masaka districts. 'Positive living' training is presumed an effective tool for reaching as many people as possible especially with regard to behavioural change and HIV/AIDS awareness, because it's an approach that involves sharing information among people of the same social group based on age and target area. It involves the use of people who are themselves trained to have skills and proper understanding so as to enable adolescents to disseminate these skills to fellow peers in their community.

Physiotherapy at Wellspring

Medcare has recently received a report from the physiotherapy department at Wellspring, outlining the needs of disabled children in the Kalungu and Masaka districts, served by Wellspring, and the work of the department throughout 2019.

Please look at the news section of Medcare's website www.medcare.org.uk to see this report. Your prayers are needed as Medcare looks at ways in which the needs of these very special children can be met in the future.



From homelessness, sickness and depression to a life as a responsible citizen

I am Johnmary Ssekiziyivu, (previously known as Mahad Ssekiziyivu) aged 23 years, a male Ugandan. I am a medical Laboratory Assistant by profession, currently working at the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre, under Medcare, and I am one of the orphans who passed through the hands of the Wellspring children's sponsorship scheme.



When I start narrating what the Lord and Medcare have done for me, I have to kneel down to thank God for Medcare and Wellspring for restoring hope in Ugandan children, including myself. God has given me a second chance of life through Medcare. Without Medcare and Wellspring I would not be alive today. I have lived a hard life. A life full of neglect, poverty, depression and diseases.

During my early years I lived with my mother. I used to have frequent fevers and my mother often took me to health centres for treatment. Eventually she took me for HIV screening where I was told that I had HIV. Within the same year, Mum suffered terrible headaches which led to her death. After my mother's burial, I was taken to my father and he was told everything about my life. I think he would have accepted me if I was not HIV positive but he took me to my maternal grandmother saying that he couldn't afford to keep me. I stayed with my grandmother for a few days and then she gave me transport and said, "Mahad, use this money and go to your father. I have many children here so I don't have a space for you. Moreover, you are sick and you need regular hospital visits." I took the money and went to my father. He was living alone in a rental house. After a few days, he went for his work and never came back. I was once again abandoned.

I was starving and had to rely on well-wishers to give me food. Time came when the landlord wanted her rental fees which I could not raise. She confiscated my father's property but allowed me to go with my clothes. From there, I went to live with my cousin, but there rose unending arguments with his wife which at times could end in fights. Their marriage was torn apart. I began to suffer from different illnesses but my cousin could not take me to hospital. I walked to Bukulula Health Centre where I could be treated but there was no improvement.

During that time, I remembered that my mother had friends. I went looking for Aunt Teddy, who is my mother's friend. I explained all my problems and she listened to me. I and Aunt Teddy went from person to person looking for someone to help me. We went to Noeline, a crippled lady, who referred us to Wellspring. Here I met William and other Wellspring staff. They all comforted me and sent me to hospital for treatment. We had been assured from Wellspring that all the hospital expenses will be met by them. I could not believe that! Later on, all I needed while in hospital was provided. When I was told that I was to be admitted, doctors from Kitovu refused to let Noeline stay in the hospital with me because she is disabled. If I had no one to nurse me I couldn't be admitted. Finally, William came along with Aunt Teddy and I received the treatment I needed. After leaving hospital, Aunt Teddy welcomed me to her home as a son.

Since that time I have had various hospital admissions, operations and accidents. I have also been treated for TB. However, Wellspring has continued to care for me and provided all I needed in life without my paying a single penny! TASO (a local AIDS agency) paid for my school fees and later my sponsor provided the money for my continued education, including my training as a Laboratory Assistant.

Although my Dad abandoned me my God has always been on my side. He has given me everything through the good people of Medcare and Wellspring. As I talk now, I am among the team at the Wellspring Children's Medical Centre, helping to save lives of Ugandan children as Medcare and Wellspring saved my life. I still have many dreams including that of going back to school for upgrading.

Proverbs 22 verse 9 says "Be generous and share your food with the poor. You will be blessed for it." This is what Medcare and Wellspring has done for me and other children in Uganda.

Happy new year to all our sponsors all over the world.

Monica's story...

Monica is 9 years of age and is one of the latest children admitted to the new Wellspring Home for Disabled Children.



Monica was born with no arms, just small finger appendages at shoulder level. She was abandoned by her parents when a baby and was brought up by her grandmother. As she began to grow it became apparent that Monica was also profoundly deaf.

Earlier in 2019 her grandmother became increasingly concerned for Monica's welfare. She believed that local boys were taking an unhealthy interest in the little girl and was afraid that she was at risk of sexual abuse. She approached Noeline and asked that Monica be admitted to the new home for her safety.

Monica uses her feet for feeding and is learning to write and draw with her feet also. Despite her deafness, in the short time she has lived with Noeline, she has learned to understand sign language, but obviously, cannot respond in the usual way because she has no arms or hands.

Medcare is very grateful that a sponsor was found for Monica in September which will help Noeline in her care of the child. It is hoped that, once additional funds are found, that Monica can be admitted to a school for the deaf where she can gain an education and a chance to earn her own living later in life.

Monica is the most charming, happy, well adjusted little girl and loves to help around the home with the other children. Despite her handicap she loves climbing on the playship in the grounds of the home, particularly sliding down the slide as fast as possible! She is very affectionate, loves to be hugged and to walk around the home holding the hand of any visitor with her tiny fingers.



Medcare is seeking an additional special sponsorship for Monica of £300 annually, which will add to her present sponsorship provision, and provide school fees and special equipment which is needed for her education at the School for the Deaf. For more information please contact Pauline in the Medcare office. Call 01928 740538 or email admin.medcare@icloud.com

An example to us all

Here are two young men who were cared for by Wellspring through the sponsorship schemes, now in full time employment and justifiably proud of their achievements.

First up is Frank, originally sponsored at the age of 14 years suffering from AIDS and neglect. He is now a healthy young man who has been trained to make beautifully crafted leather shoes, which he sells in Kampala. His hard work, determination and care for others has made him a wonderful role model for other young people. Well done Frank! See next page...



Frank showing off his shoes!

An example to us all

Derek was originally sponsored in 2010 at the age of 15. He was born with cerebral palsy and was unable to walk or talk. He now lives independently with his own business on the Entebbe Road, mending shoes. He is a remarkable young man who is greatly respected by other young men in his village.

You boys should get together!



Chairman's letter

Mattie Stepanek, an American poet, is reported to have said that UNITY IS STRENGTH – WHEN THERE IS TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION, WONDERFUL THINGS CAN BE ACHIEVED, teamwork being the collaborative effort of a group of people to achieve a common goal.

One thing that has struck me forcibly when considering all that has been achieved through the work of Medcare and Wellspring since 2010, is the amazing sense of unity and teamwork from people all over the world, whose hearts have been touched with compassion for the plight of thousands of innocent, suffering children in Uganda, brought to Wellspring for assistance.

Medcare's work in Uganda has proved that, when working together, with one goal and commitment to a common cause, miraculous events can take place. This team of hundreds of individuals includes sponsors, donors, businesses, organisations, churches, schools, community groups, and many more. But to hold together all these people in a common goal we have needed God to provide wisdom, guidance and miraculous provision.

I cannot mention everyone by name to thank you for your part in this teamwork because there are so many, but I hope that all who read this newsletter will know that this thanks is sent to you. Most importantly, on behalf of us all, I thank God for all that has been achieved in the past 10 years and for all that is to come in 2020 and throughout the new decade.

God bless you and a Happy New Year to you all.

Pauline Hutchinson Chairman of Medcare

