



SKILLING OF PARENTS OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES **PSN BRIEF**

SKILLING OF PARENTS OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES IS A NECESSITY FOLLOWING THE COVID 19 LOCKDOWN. LEARNING AND EXPERIENCES; WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Parents play a very vital role in children's education and this is evidenced in Windle International Uganda's PSN study. In study we learnt about the impact of COVID 19 on the education of learners living with disabilities. These learners either dropped out of school or are struggling with catching up with class under intense learning program and after class schedules as a result of the 2 years' school closure in Uganda. Through this qualitative study, we reached 70 participants in Nakivale, Rhino Camp and Adjumani Refugee Settlements using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). The key lesson was that parents should be enabled and empowered with skills to support their children. They do not receive any formal care giver trainings yet they are primary networks to enable the learners with disabilities reach their development and education mile stones. This learning brief therefore shares key learnings for WIU and partners for effective response towards learners with disabilities.

Key learnings

- There was limited or no bond between parents and learners with disabilities. Learners especially those with hearing, talking and seeing difficulties expressed a relief to having returned to school. During school closure, they often felt like a burden to their parents and family members, their parents were always away for work and never paid a lot of attention to them. This made their stay at home very difficult and were happy that schools were re-opened.
- For home learning, there was a willingness from parents to support their children continue learning from home. However, this was affected by the inability to effectively communicate especially for the parents that had children with difficulty in speaking and hearing. Especially communication using sign language.
- "... time came and I wished I knew sign language to help my child with school during lockdown... I wished I can get someone in the field (knows sign language) (SIC) to help my child." _ FGD parent Nakivale.
- There were no learning materials specifically designed for learners with disabilities and parents could not come up with any. This was because they did not have the knowledge and the case was different for the normal learners. This greatly affected the education of the learners with disabilities because when school reopened, they struggled and are still struggling to catch up.
- Given the available local materials and resources, parents are in position to make facilities to enable the learners with disabilities stay home comfortably. However, they are not aware of these facilities and the knowledge to make them.

- Before COVID 19, learners with disabilities used to spend more time in the special schools compared to their homes. Parents never felt the responsibility to take care of their necessities. During the school closure, parents needed to work twice as hard as other parents to ensure their children are well taken care of. Moreover, these parent do not have any training or skilling for Income Generating Activities (IGAs) and business management. Some of the aspects they needed to work hard that were provided in the special needs schools included nutritious meals, medication, maintenance of equipment hard ware among others.
- *“My mother used to dig in people's gardens in the morning...in the evening she sells food on the road side... to provide for us... now she has back pain and she is weak, we need more support... before COVID 19, she would only sell food on the road side.” _ IDI Primary 6 pupil, Adjumani.*
- There is a community perception that household with PSNs receive more assistance compared to others. This posed challenges for parents of learners with disabilities, because community members would not help or support them even when they had the means.
- Disability aids got spoilt because parents did not have the knowledge to maintain them. This has created gaps and a need that requires immediate response creating a better and safe learning environment for learners with disabilities.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Relevance	Actors responsible
There is immediate need for sign language literacy for parents with children that have difficult in hearing, talking and comprehension	This will give parents an upper hand to support their children beyond education	Local Government Inclusion partners Education partners Other development partners
Parenting sessions should be commissioned and conducted with in communities with special interest in parents to children with disabilities	This will open parents to the importance of bonding with their children. They will begin appreciating them as is and not viewing them as a burden.	Inclusion partners Mental wellness support partners Local Government and other development partners.
Trainings on how to make and maintain disability aid using locally available materials should conducted.	This will make maintenance of the materials cheap. Parents will have a skill that will improve their economic condition. Materials will be readily available at all time.	Local Government Development partners Local community structures. Schools Private sector
Invest in awareness creation and inception of projects for the target groups and the rest of the community to understand the rationale of the project.	This will address the perception that families with PSNs receive more support compared to others.	Inclusion partners Education partners Government.

Conclusion

As learners living disabilities are being supported, it is ideal to include and improve the lives of their parents and primary care givers. Having a child with a disability does not make one a certified care giver – parents to children living with disabilities need training too.