

CASE STUDY



Reintegration from residential to kinship care in Uganda

Attim¹ is a 54-year-old grandmother from Eastern Uganda. Attim lost her husband 10 years ago, and three of her four children have also died (her sons were killed in a car crash and her daughter died in childbirth). She is currently caring for her three granddaughters aged eight, 13, and 14, and her nephew Allan aged 12. Attim's granddaughters came to live with her when their parents died. Her nephew joined the household after five years in an orphanage where he was placed when his parents separated.

The family has a small plot of land which the children farm whilst Attim works on other farms to earn some additional money. Usually, they can manage this way, though occasionally Attim has to ask her brother for assistance.

Caring for four children has not always been easy. When her granddaughters joined her, Attim was still grieving the loss of her own children and worried about how she would cope.

¹ All names have been changed to protect identities.

“I cried every day and was depressed, while also trying to be there for my grandchildren. To survive, I work on other people's farms, and they pay me. But being the main breadwinner and now that I am aging, I don't know what the future holds.”

Attim

Life for the family was especially difficult during the COVID lockdown when Attim was unable to leave home for work. Caring for adolescent girls held particular fears for Attim at this time.

“I was barely able to provide even the basic needs for my grandchildren. Many girls in the community became pregnant. I was constantly worried that the same would happen to my girls. It was tough.”

Attim

Despite these struggles, Attim was happy to bring Allan into the family. She was approached by government social workers and a local NGO in 2021 and asked to care for the boy. She says:

“I wanted the child to know his other relatives and they also get to know him. I didn't want him to grow up in an orphanage.”

Attim

Social workers encouraged a gradual process of reintegration where Attim spent six months visiting and getting to know her nephew before he came to live with her. When Allan joined the family, they helped with clothes, a mattress, a solar-powered lamp, and a cow. Social workers are now providing follow-up support through regular visits to make sure that the family is doing well.

Allan is pleased to be living with a family once more. He says:

“I feel so happy living at home because home is the best.[My aunt] treats me well. And she encourages me to study hard. I am treated like another child at home. And my auntie listens to me when I want to go and play.”

Allan

Social workers in Uganda often find that placement with extended family members is the most appropriate option for children leaving residential care.

“Our work is basically to restore connections which for one reason or the other are broken. We encourage our kinship carers to do what we have traditionally done; to do what in our culture we have always done.”

Social worker

They have learned that successful reintegration from residential to kinship care requires preparing families well so that they have realistic expectations around the challenges that they may face. If parents are alive, kinship caregivers need help managing these relationships. It is also important to build up caregiver capacities so that they no longer need to rely on the support of the government or NGOs. This can take several years.

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