

CASE STUDY

Reintegrating children with disabilities in Rwanda

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David is a lively 12-year-old boy with Down Syndrome. When he was an infant, David's father blamed his mother for his disability and regularly beat her. Unable to cope, she left baby David outside his paternal grandparents' home in the middle of a rainstorm. David then lived with his father until he was five years old when his father died.

David was admitted to a residential care home for children with disabilities. His caregiver in the home recalls how David arrived highly traumatized, malnourished, and unable to walk. Having crawled around on his front, his stomach was bruised and sore. She worked for over a year to build up David's strength until he could walk, although he still crawled at times.

In 2019, with UNICEF's support, the Government of Rwanda began the final phase of the Tubarerere Mu Muryango Programme/Let's Raise Children in families care reform programme that aimed to see the end of large-scale residential care in the country. This last phase of the programme focused on returning children with disabilities in residential care to their families or placing them in foster care.

Social workers from the government's National Child Development Agency (NCDA) explored a range of possible options for David. They initially contacted David's mother to persuade her to care for David, and then reached out to the wider extended family. Eventually, David's maternal grandparents agreed to take David in.

David moved to live with his grandparents and two of his cousins in 2021 and has been there now for over a year. David's grandfather recalls how at first David found it hard to adjust to village living. For example, he didn't know how to use the toilets in the village which were different from those in the care home.

He was also excited by the new sights and sounds of the village. David is now thriving in the community, and following NCDA's interventions has a place at a local school. With the care, love, and support of his grandparents, David has blossomed and is discovering his own capacities and building his skills and resilience.

David tells us:

“I am called David. I am 12 years old, and I go to school. I know how to write numbers 1,2,3, and 4. I like sweets ...I love to play 'ikiyoni' ...I love Oliver [David's friend] and my teacher.”

David

REINTEGRATED CHILD , RWANDA

David's grandfather says:

“David has grown so much and become so strong. He had a problem with his back and that is why he couldn't stand or walk as he would crawl on the floor. He can now carry anything like any human being. He has grown mentally and physically. There are things he didn't know how to say, but he is now good...He plays well with other children; friends come to visit and he also gets along well with my other grandchildren. Now he knows what to feed the animals at home depending on which he is feeding example, cattle, and pigs. He is becoming such a hardworking boy and it's such an exciting thing. He is grown so strong that he wants to carry everything he comes across.”

David's Grandfather



David's grandparents have gained much from the experience of looking after him and their other grandchildren.

David's grandfather says:

“We never had any fears. We are not learned but we are not illiterate either, and we have hearts of love and kindness. We were so excited about getting a young child because all our other children had grown and left yet we want so many children in this home to keep the home warm and active. Also having someone to talk to, discipline, or show a path of life makes us happy. At least you have a reason to open your heart everyday. They follow the path that you show them and it's so fulfilling.”

David's Grandfather

Acknowledgements

This document has been produced as part of the regional learning platform on care in Eastern and Southern Africa. The platform and its corresponding documentation were planned and conceptualised by UNICEF Eastern and Southern African Regional Office (ESARO) and Changing the Way We Care™ (CTWWC). CTWWC is funded by USAID, the GHR Foundation and MacArthur Foundation. The platform provides an opportunity for government, UNICEF and others involved in care reform in the region to share learning on care reform.

This document has been made possible with funding from USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Funds. It was written by Emily Delap and Ismael Ddumba-Nyanzi of Child Frontiers.

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