

Changing THE WAY WE careSM

LEARNING BRIEF: Kenya County Disability Networks & Care Reform

Throughout Kenya, access to community-based and government services for children with disabilities is scant and costly. Children with disabilities and their families travel long distances or have infrequent access to services. These access barriers are one of the contributing factors to family separation for children with disabilities and complicates reunification. Disability networks, comprised of government and non-government actors, play an important role in addressing these gaps at the county level. Through their diverse membership, the networks work together to map services, monitor service gaps, and plan for improved coordination and coverage of disability services across the county. The networks also mobilize resources, sensitize communities, and advocate to government to uphold the rights of children with disabilities. These collective actions create a more supportive environment for family-based care for children with disabilities.

Changing the Way We CareSM (CTWWC) Kenya is currently supporting disability networks in Kilifi, Nyamira, Siaya, Kisumu counties. Each of these networks had gone dormant and were reactivated in 2021 with support from CTWWC. The networks each have approximately 40 members from Government of Kenya offices, organizations of persons with disabilities, faith-based groups, rehabilitation providers, and other civil society organizations serving persons with disabilities. The network secretariats meet quarterly, with ad hoc meetings as needed. In 2022, CTWWC supported each disability network to develop terms of reference and action plans to guide their joint activities. CTWWC also trained disability network members to improve service delivery through referrals and advocacy for policy change.

Across the networks, members attribute success to committed inter-organization membership from state and non-state actors. The active engagement of the county commissioner's office has been key because they serve as the gatekeepers to the community. In Kilifi, the network became inactive previously because they didn't have a guiding framework nor annual workplans. Network members are encouraged by the new TOR which will provide a roadmap for their work and contribute to network sustainability. The Siaya network shared a similar reflection, noting that CTWWC's efforts to strengthen their secretariat was key to achieving their workplans this year. In Kilifi, consistent communication has also been helpful to reactivating the network. They created a WhatsApp group where members share information, coordinate activities, and share

opportunities for referrals. This has greatly facilitated communication and collaboration across the network members, making it easier to mobilize as needed and to plan activities together. More consistent sharing across the platform helps members understand what each other are doing and direct community members to each other's services. Because members are aligned to serve all children with disabilities without duplication and do so through a multisectoral approach, the networks are able to holistically address service gaps within the county.

In the first year of reactivation, the disability networks are playing an important role in strengthening services and mobilizing communities to support children with disabilities and their families across the four counties. In Nyamira, the disability network trained community level case workers, Department of Child Services, and CTWWC partners on disability inclusion to better care for the needs of children with disabilities. The Nyamira network mapped disability-friendly service providers across the county, then established and trained disability assessment teams at the county and sub-county level and conducted disability assessment and registration outreach activities. The network has also conducted community awareness raising about disability inclusion and the role of the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPWDs). The Siaya network has similar accomplishments including disability assessments and registration activities. In addition, they have extended psychosocial economic empowerment services to families of children with disabilities, conducted sensitizations and service referrals, and provided children with assistive devices. These are examples of how network members are empowering persons with disabilities to attain their rights, while improving capacity of both government and community-based service providers to expand in quality and coverage.

The mobilization of disability assessment teams is especially important for bringing early identification services closer to where people live, meaning more children can be identified for early intervention, such as assistive devices, in hopes of mitigating longer-term disability. Importantly, mobile assessment teams have also minimized the burden on families to travel to county referral hospitals for the service. During the Nyamira outreach visits this year, several children received assistive devices and were registered with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) which facilitates access to other government services. The Kilifi network conducted similar outreach efforts to identify, assess, and register children at the sub-county level using a new county health system that collects and disaggregates assessment data. Due to recent policy changes at the county level, the assessment teams were also able to issue provisional disability status on the spot with an electronic notification to the citizen while they await their disability card. As a result, children with disabilities now access qualifying government-supported services, such as education and healthcare, more quickly. The close collaboration within the network helped county-level MOH and NCPWD teams rapidly operationalize these new policy changes.

Participation of persons with disabilities, both from civil society and government bodies, is another vital aspect of the networks. All four networks developed TORs through a consultative process led by NCPWD with support from CTWWC. Within the network secretariats, there is meaningful engagement from both NCPWD and other representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities. NCPWD representatives convene meetings and their leadership has encouraged network membership to grow. The Kilifi network has three representatives from disability umbrella groups across the county. Their knowledge of the challenges on the ground informs all the network's activities and decisions. Networks promote participation of persons with disabilities by ensuring meeting venues are accessible, facilitating members to be accompanied by their aides, using rights-based disability etiquette during meetings, and sensitizing members on the rights of persons with disabilities. In turn, members benefit from improved understanding of disability inclusion and etiquette. Through their experience sharing, members have learned the challenges persons with disabilities face which has helped prioritize the networks' activities.

While still in their early stages, networks believe they are reinforcing county systems that serve children with disabilities and their families. For example, the networks' non-state partners complement the NCPWD by providing financial and technical support, such as service mapping and training on new disability assessment guidelines, to help NCPWD achieve its mandate. The deepened partnerships and more consistent collaboration have surfaced new ideas, brought stakeholders together, and eased referral bottlenecks. In the coming year, the networks hope to further reinforce organizational capacity. They want to bolster membership by adding important missing voices such as caregivers of children with disabilities and assistive device service providers. Networks have also identified the need for improved advocacy and budgeting for county-level disability service provision. The accomplishments to date and collective commitment of state and non-state actors looks promising for improved, sustainable services that will support children with disabilities to live in family care in Kilifi, Nyamira, Siaya, and Kisumu counties.

Need to know more? Contact *Changing the Way We Care* at info@ctwwc.org or visit changingthewaywecare.org

©2022 Catholic Relief Services. All Rights Reserved. This material may not be reproduced, displayed, modified or distributed without the express prior written permission of copyright holder. For permission, write to info@ctwwc.org.