

Disability Inclusion

insight series

Skills development for **youth with deafblindness**

Fostering inclusion through skills training

In Uganda, persons with deafblindness/multi-sensory impairment experience deeper levels of discrimination compared to those with less complex disabilities. They face challenges in communication and interacting with others as well as learning and mobility difficulties. This often leads to lifelong exclusion within their own family, community and wider society.

Sense International – Uganda (SIU) looks to change these outcomes for persons with deafblindness, help maximise their abilities and enable them to live meaningful, dignified lives. Supported by National Lottery Community Fund, SIU in partnership with Uganda Parents with DeafBlind Children Association (UPDBCA), National Association of the DeafBlind in Uganda (NADBU) and selected Vocational Training Centres, is currently running a project focusing on skills development for youth with deafblindness.

The project hopes to foster inclusion of youth with deafblindness in community life through showcasing their abilities, enabling them earn an income to support their families and building their capacity to advocate for their rights.

The Skills Development Project approach

Selection of Learners

Learners were sourced with the help of the Uganda Parents with DeafBlind Children Association (UPDBCA) and its branches with a focus on eastern and central region. Priority was given to youth with deafblindness that were not enrolled in school or any vocational trade by the start of the project.

Once selected, an assessment was done to determine level of visual acuity and hearing. A functional and mobility assessment was also performed to determine the level of support the learner may require from instructors once enrolled.

SELECTION OF LEARNERS

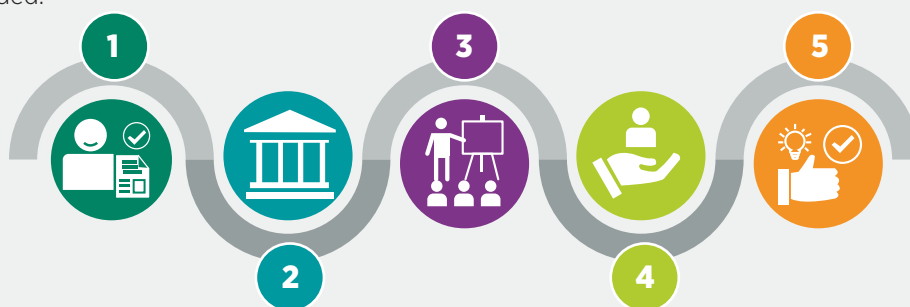
- With the help of UPDBCA and its branches.
- Visual, hearing, functional and mobility assessment done to determine levels of support needed.

TRAINING

- Learner's area of interest determined.
- Modules set according to curriculum.
- Support assistants provided during training sessions.

MONITORING

- Start-up tool kits provided upon completion of the course.
- SIU and Instructors from VTCs continue to periodically check on Learner's progress.



PREPARATION OF VTCs

- Training of staff in communication skills and support of learners with deaf blindness.
- Safe guarding measures; ramps, walkways and signage to reduce fall risk and accidents.

SUPPORT

- Parents and guardians are taught same modules given to their children and take up the responsibility of supporting the learner after completion of the course.

Summary of the Skills Development approach

Selection of Training Institutions

Mpummude Vocational Institute in Jinja (Eastern Uganda) and Uganda Society of the Deaf Vocational Institute in Namirembe (Central Uganda) were selected to train the youth. Teaching staff in these institutions, through a prior project run by SIU, had been trained on understanding the needs of learners with deafblindness and how to adequately support them in vocational skills training.

To supplement on this prior training, sessions were held on Tactile Sign Language, Mobility and Safe Guarding to enable these institutions create a suitable learning environment for these youth.

Uganda Society of the Deaf Vocational Training Centre in Namirembe, with support from SIU, has enrolled and instructed students with deafblindness since 2016. “It has been an interesting and rewarding journey,” says Beatrice, an instructor at the VTC.

Tremendous progress has been made to support these students in learning at the VTC, including adaptation of the learning environment, provision of support assistants and training of teaching and non-teaching staff on communication skills to enhance inclusion.

The VTC was also active in the development of the vocational training curriculum for learners with deafblindness. The curriculum is currently being used for instruction of the students at the VTC.

Extra attention is paid to students with deafblindness; changes are constantly made in teaching methodology to suit the skills and abilities of the individual learner. To cater for short attention spans, lessons are conducted in morning hours with breaks given as needed. Two weeks are allocated per module, and 3 months per school term.

The VTC hopes to expand its capacity to have even more students with deafblindness and be in a position to play an advisory role to other VTCs on support of students with deafblindness.



An instructor teaching deafblind students during a Snacks Preparation class

Curriculum

During a prior project, Sense International – Uganda in collaboration with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) developed a Vocational Training Curriculum for learners with deafblindness. This curriculum covers syllabi for seven vocational skills trainings and corresponding certificates. The modules developed include; Beverage and Snacks preparation, Ceramics, Jewelry, Basketry and Weaving, Crop production, Animal and Poultry rearing and Crocheting.

Instructors at the selected VTCs were trained on how to follow the new vocational curriculum and transition graduates of the project to start their own businesses.

Safeguarding

Persons with deafblindness are prone to accidents and falls due to poor vision and hearing. It is therefore mandatory for learning environments to be assessed and adapted to reduce this risk. Modifications are currently underway to address identified safeguarding concerns in the selected training institutions. These include walkways connecting dormitories, classrooms and workshops. Ramps to replace staircases, and clear paths with gradual inclines to reduce fall risk along steep slopes.

Safety of learners within the premises of the training institutions was also considered. Institution grounds were fenced off and security guards employed to ensure protection of learners while training.

Training and Support

During orientation, learners, with the help of instructors, determine an area of interest. They are usually given 2-3 different modules to try in order to assess both interest and ability. Modules may be adjusted to factor in market changes and demand.

Learners with deafblindness require one-on-one attention in order to properly grasp modules taught to them. Classmates, usually deaf learners, are brought in as support assistants. This not only aids classmates to learn how to communicate with persons with deafblindness but also encourages peer support and accelerated learning.



A support assistant helps a learner with deaf blindness during a knitting session

SIU conducts monitoring visits to check on the learners' progress and support the VTIs on enhancing the experience of the learners.

Make it Work! Tips on skills training for learners with deafblindness

- Assessment of the learner is important before any training starts. Considering the diversity in deafblindness and varying degrees of impairment, learners will have different abilities and require different levels of support.
- Start off with simple activities that the learner already knows or pick an activity they seem to enjoy. This will help capture their interest from the start and enable new concepts to be added on gradually.
- Instructors need to focus on building a relationship of trust and friendship with the learner. Learners tend to pay more attention and give their best output when there is a close bond between them and their teacher.
- Establish a routine and break tasks down into simple components repeated in sequence over a period of time to enhance learning.

Support to parents and guardians

UPDBCA strives to bring parents with deafblind children together and harness the power of peer support to uplift each other and present a stronger voice to advocate for the rights of their children. Part of the success in training youth with deafblindness under the project can be attributed to engaging their parents and families as active participants.

Parents and guardians are invited twice in the year to undergo the same skills training taken by their children in order to build their capacity to adequately support the learners post-training. They are also trained in communication skills to ease interaction with their children.

Under the project, increased parental self-efficacy has been realised. Parents have also reported decreased feelings of isolation and perception of judgement.

With renewed hope for their children's futures, parents willingly take on the role of keeping their children on track to better the skills attained and tirelessly look for opportunities for their benefit.



Christine, a trainee, knits with support from her guardian

Make it Work! Tips on engaging parents and guardians

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to engaging family members of learners with deaf blindness. Each family and each situation is different and should be treated as such. Seek to understand the family dynamic first.
- For families to adequately support persons with deafblindness, the importance of skills development and benefit of the activity to the entire family should be emphasized. Gain their interest and their support will come along!
- Respect the views of the family and tailor your approach to fit within their boundaries.

Monitoring

Upon completion of the course, trainees are given start-up kits with tools and sets of equipment they need to start off earning an income. At this stage, parents and guardians take up the responsibility of supporting the individuals to further develop skills learnt.

Sense International – Uganda and instructors from the vocational training centers continue to periodically check on their progress, assist in areas of concern and handle any issues that may arise.

Nalwada Christine (R), a participant of the Skills Development Project, completed her one-year course in knitting from Mpumudde Vocational Training Centre. She commends her instructors that took her through the course stating they were firm but friendly. Her learning environment was supportive and she made many friends. Christine feels confident in her ability to continue learning with the help of her sister, Nantale Jane (L).

Jane, who also attended the course, appreciates the project and support given to her and Christine by SIU. “Before the project, I did not have any marketable skills. At least now, if we continue practicing, we have something that can help us earn money and support our family”.



Jane (L) and Christine (R)

Their bond has grown stronger through the training. “Sometimes, she remembers something I don’t and I am able to help where she has difficulties. She gives me morale to keep trying and I also motivate her when she’s feeling down.”

Since receiving their start-up tool kit, they have managed to knit a few sweaters and scarves which have since been sold. This has been a great motivator for them and the entire family. In the coming months, they hope to perfect their skills to manage larger orders of products and capture the market in their community.

Vocational Skills Training has a lot of impact on the lives of persons with deafblindness, their families and communities. They attain skills that provide useful services or products for other members of their community. Seeing persons with deafblindness actively engage in community life helps dispel myths and negative stereotypes other community members may have had about them. The interactions and discussions created helps to further drive the idea of an inclusive society where everyone is respected despite having diverse appearances and abilities.

With the skills gained, persons with deafblindness get to enjoy financial independence and the dignity that comes with earning one's own income and supporting one's family.

For more information:

Sense International – Uganda – email: chrisiga@senseint-ua.org

Author: Andera Delfyna

The Skills development project for youth with deafblindness is implemented by Sense International, Uganda Parents with DeafBlind Children Association (UPDBCA), National Association of the DeafBlind in Uganda (NADBU) and selected Vocational Training Centres. For more information: Sense International – Uganda – email: chrisiga@senseint-ua.org



The Disability Inclusion Insight Series is a series developed by Light for the World. The series shows different approaches taken by organisations on disability inclusion in economic empowerment, providing inspiration and practical support to development professionals in their endeavours to make disability inclusion happen within the designs of current and future programs.

This Insight Brief is funded by National Community Lottery Fund through the Livelihood Improvement Challenge Project, under the Make 12.4 % Work Initiative. The Initiative brings together key stakeholders to create enabling conditions for inclusive economic growth and allowing persons with disabilities to fully access the job market. For more information, visit www.wecanwork.ug, or contact: a.maarse@light-for-the-world.org

