

## REPORT ON ACTIVITIES BEING DONE/WERE DONE DURING THIS PERIOD.

The covid-19 pandemic has affected many aspects of the lives of our clients. One of the most affected areas has been the education system; schools have been closed for long and some students haven't studied in almost two years especially the young ones in Nursery and lower primary. The first lock down was implemented in Uganda in March 2020, all students stopped going to school because they were closed. Later on, that year in September, schools were only opened for the candidates (P.7, S.4 and S.6). In March 2021; schools were opened for the other classes as well (P.3-P.6 and S.1, S.2, S.3, S.5). They studied for a few months then in May 2021, schools were closed again as there was the second wave of the corona virus which saw a sharp increase in the number of those infected than in the first wave.

However, though schools were closed, leaving the children alone, we would have lost some of them to different things i.e., some of them would have preferred to work, start families or enter gangs etc. Because of these, we carried out a number of activities with them especially through the Luigi Giussani schools. The teachers of the high school have been providing the students with self-study materials; they have been doing this from the beginning of the first lock down and they are still at it even now. They didn't stop at that because the students had started losing hope in going back to school, some of them were not doing the work well and didn't have interest for it anymore because of the prolonged time and distractions at home. For these reasons, the teachers are doing home visits twice a week at the homes of the students to find out how they are doing, why they are not doing the work given to them and to re-establishing a relationship with them. The visits have helped them to rekindle the relationship they had, established one with their parents as well and got to know generally more about the backgrounds of their students which is very important for teaching them. Besides the activities with the students, the teachers are involved in various trainings like deep learning (*method of teaching where students are engaged in competency learning like critical learning rather than being given knowledge as per the new curriculum in the country*) that is being done by Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE) to help the teachers prepare materials they are currently distributing to their students and also for preparations of lessons for when schools will be opened. LGIHE is an innovative learning space responding to educational gaps through a human encounter that starts with the discovery of one's heart inherent dignity and gradually unlocking the human full potential in the educational journey towards self-awareness. One of the ways they respond to educational gaps is through a number of activities like research and trainings etc. LGHS being interrelated with LGIHE has engaged its expertise in training its teachers on better ways towards the educational journey of its students.

The primary school is providing self-study materials and they started to do the home visits as well for the same reasons as the high school. But furthermore, for the young ones, it is very crucial to have the physical presence of a teacher to help them study better as they can't have the drive to study alone. Generally, for both the primary and high school, for them the students being human

beings meant that they are facing human problems just like everyone else; for example, most of them are coming from vulnerable families where they have to look for all ways of surviving and some lack the presence of an adult so they are taking care of their siblings. Besides the problems, the students having been home for some time without going to school had already moved on to do different activities like sports and working to earn some money hence their interest in doing the school work diminishing. Seeing the faces of their teachers was reminding them of school and giving them hope as well. For the teachers, seeing the faces of the students was hope for them too therefore they belonged to each other and the experiences each one of them was living was for each person regardless a student or teacher.

Generally, for both the Luigi Schools, they also provided self-study materials to the MPI students who were from other schools because they didn't want to leave them alone as their schools were not involving them in any kind of learning from home.



*A photo of a student and a teacher having a dialogue during one of the home visits*

The other schools like Mivule Primary School and Clever's Origin Junior School are also doing a number of activities with their students. They are providing self-study materials, providing pre-recorded lessons, having online lessons and remedial classes for the weak students. Some Universities like Makerere University had online lessons as well of which one of the students was attending it.

For all these activities that the schools were doing when there was the lock down from March 2020 i.e., provision of self-study materials, home visits, trainings, online classes and the others explained above, we paid school fees for them. For the time the candidates and other students were at school last year and this year, we also paid school fees for them too.

At the moment only Universities and Institutes of higher learning (*i.e., institutes apart from universities where students can go to learn when they have finished ordinary or advanced level of secondary school*) have resumed school; they started studying on 1<sup>st</sup> November; one of the requirements for them to enter school now is that they should have vaccinated.

The other classes will possibly resume school in 2022 January on condition that the teachers have vaccinated. However, the school calendar will not be normal; the terms might be more as the Ministry of Sports and Education is trying to catch up with the lost time.

Besides education, the social workers and nurses did a number of activities with the children and their families;

- We resumed home visits to find out how the families are doing. We found out that the families have been affected by the pandemic especially financially. Some families lost the jobs they were doing which consequently led some of them to be thrown out of the houses for defaulting paying rent. Some children are doing casual jobs to support their families as well and some of them are involved in undesirable activities like joining gangs that are bad. During the visits, we counselled the families that faced challenges and we referred the complicated ones to Rose. We didn't only do counselling but other forms of psycho-social activities like singing and dancing especially when the women could meet.
- We were meeting the women in groups of 10-20 whereby we could have community dialogues, child protection dialogues, sensitization meetings on different topics like health; Rose educated the women so much on topics like covid, blood pressure, diabetes and importance of proper medication etc. Meeting them in small numbers during the lock down has been very therapeutic as they can easily express what they are facing which has helped us know them better. Now that the lock down has been eased a bit and more people are vaccinating, we have resumed meeting them in larger numbers at Naguru and Kireka as it was before.
- Besides the sensitization meetings on health, the nurses continued to treat patients from the MPI family even when the lock down was there. For those with complicated cases that the nurses couldn't manage, MPI referred them to bigger hospitals like Benedict Medical Centre and St. Francis Hospital, Nsambya.

The covid-19 virus might have come with a lot of challenges but there has been beauty that has been witnessed in it as well. i.e., The women are helping and caring for one another; they are welcoming those that have been thrown out of the houses and sharing food amongst themselves which is very beautiful. The children staying home has been an opportunity for some parents to



get to know them better. Some children have involved themselves in learning different skills like tailoring, hair dressing, some are keeping rabbits and birds like chicken.

Though there are a lot of challenges being faced by the women and their families at this time, for those who have really discovered themselves, they are facing them without being reduced, they are still happy amidst the challenges. This has been possible through the journey they have been making with MPI where they are constantly being reminded of their value, helped to discover and rediscover themselves. This has been through the different activities that Rose (MPI director) does with them like the community dialogues, sensitization meetings, counselling etc. In fact, the activities done at MPI are instruments used to communicate to the women that they have a value and that they cannot be reduced by what they face. Some of the women have grasped this so much and living it. After the first lock down was imposed, we could not meet them for a long time. When the lock down was eased, we were able to meet them again; they were dancing, singing and making a lot of fun, they were happy! They were asked why they are like this and one of them called Odida Joyce said *“you have to weigh yourself and the problem and find out which one is of more value.”* This shows a kind of self-awareness they are gaining through a relationship that we have with them.



A photo of the women singing, dancing and having fun the first time we met with them after the first lockdown was eased. In a grey suit is Odida Joyce.

To live alone is impossible and for this period of the pandemic, this was even more evident. We have been journeying with our women and families in this new reality through different methods tailored to what we are facing. We are grateful for all the support you are giving and for the journey that you are also making with us.

Report by ***Adoch Mary Clare***

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