

VOICE OF MIFUMI

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The MIFUMI National Domestic Violence Helpline Targets millions



Some Members of Kirewa women's forum

In this month's issue

National Domestic Violence helpline

Karate

The Domestic Violence advisor's story

Surviving Rejection

Mifumi National Domestic Helpline:

0800 200 250

Call now for confidential advice

MIFUMI recently opened the first helpline in Uganda dedicated to offer counselling to those experiencing domestic violence. Based in Tororo, many calls can be handled at one time. The MIFUMI Helpline will enable women to contact someone more easily in case of emergency, urgent need of information to link them to immediate help in her community and counselling.

Grace Lwanga who heads the helpline says; we are expecting calls from all over the country, from women and children experiencing or who have experienced domestic violence. We are also expecting calls from their friends, family, community leaders, duty bearers, sympathizers and professionals seeking to support women and children in their communities.

She adds that the helpline will be available 24 hours a day with fully trained female helpline advisors and volunteers and all calls will be confidential. The helpline will refer women and children to relevant services and justice centres, carry out online crisis and safety planning, and offer emotional support and counselling. Ms Lwanga also hopes that through advertising, the helpline will reach over 15 million women across the country regardless of class and social status considering the fact that all the calls will be free and highly confidential. The aim of the helpline is to ensure the protection and the safety of women and children.

Karate, sporting with a difference

by Helen Esaete



Five months ago, our school was introduced to the most wonderful sport-karate. Right from day one, the training kicked off with excitement as we stretched and counted down the punches and kicks in Japanese. Our trainer told us at the beginning that karate was going to offer us a lot more than other sports can offer. Today we enjoy the benefits from this sport.

My first realisation was how I had become mentally and physically fit. Karate was providing us with all round exercise that made me strong and flexible. On days when I felt blue and lazy, I looked forward to my karate class to make me better and it did.

Our trainer also once said karate focuses on the development of human character. It was not long that I realised that my character had transformed. I unconsciously started to respect fellow pupils, my teachers, parents and other people. Our trainer also said we had to take an oath at the end of every training promising that we do our best in all our personal undertakings and to aim for excellence of bodies and character.

One of the most important things I have learned from my karate class is that self defence does not mean being confrontational and aggressive towards your threat and attacker. It means doing everything possible to avoid fighting.

Because of the confidence the sport had instilled in us, we were very happy when we were called upon to demonstrate for the congregation during commemoration of the 2010 16 days of activism. It was the first time we were demonstrating our newly acquired skills in public. The crowd was both awed and excited at our abilities.

My name is Esaete Helen and on behalf of my school St. Jude Malaba Karate club, I take this opportunity to send votes of thanks to MIFUMI for introducing Sure Start project to us the young girls of tomorrow. We shall always have it in mind that we will share with other girls and the community about girls having self esteem, self confidence and staying long in school. Also, as girls we can make it to our dreams. 'If you believe it, you can achieve it'

A price we are ready to pay for the women

by Jane Rose Ondur



HAPPY:IDVA Immaculate Akello (L) with survivor

Domestic Violence is an evil hundreds of women have detested but lived with. We wanted to make it stop but did not know how to bring it about. That was over ten years ago, now many of us are proud of what we see in our communities today, knowing we are part of the team that brought about this change in behaviour.

With the training and support from MIFUMI, women in different communities organised and established themselves as independent domestic violence advisors working under community safety forums and other CBOs in creating awareness of some of the social injustices against women and in our communities through support, counselling and as links to justice points both at community and district levels.

Today we are about 42 IDVAs in the 22 sub-counties of Tororo district trying to create awareness and address the many forms of abuse of women and children in our communities. Our driving force is ensuring families live in harmony with each other; respecting the rights and freedoms of other members of the community. We act as community watch dogs. Our centres provide services like counseling, referrals, case follow ups, case handling, network and advocacy on behalf of Mifumi.

We are also proud of our achievements over the years across the many communities we have worked. The cases of physical violence have drastically dropped.

A Positive strategy that has worked for us with the communities has been simple; be part of the community by establishing good, clear communication with families, community leaders and duty bearers and perpetrators of violence. This has earned us some respect in our communities as we each have the opportunity to listen to our varied views, recognise each others efforts and strengths and make it clear what is required of each party in addressing issues affecting us.

The community members play a vital role in many forms of conflict resolutions as they are the only ones that can cause behavioural change in their specific communities which are bound by culture, some of whose practices are biased or of particular groups of people.

Although working in rural communities that are still strongly bound by some inhumane cultural practices present a few challenges, we have registered a good number of cases depicting behavioural change and acceptance.

Many times we have been faced with resistance such as when the communities or the family of the victim get hostile or defensive, we are forced to devise other strategies to address the problem.

We have also noted that there has been a shift from physical to verbal and emotional abuse and very few people in our communities view these non-physical forms of abuse as abuse. While the number of cases of physical abuse has reduced, we still fear that there are hundreds of women who silently suffer verbal and emotional abuse.

In working with survivors of domestic violence, we ensure that the victims realise what has happened to them and are the sole decision makers in what course of action to take pertaining their cases.

We also give in our best in terms of time manpower and resources to ensure that women and children get support, counselling, justice and protection from any form of abuse.

Jane Rose Ondur is a survivor of domestic violence, IDVA and chair, Kirewa women's forum(KWF)

Surviving Rejection

I was ten when mother fell ill, we immediately rushed her to the witchdoctor, the neighbours said her enemies had cast an evil spell her. She was going to die if we did not do anything. However, several days later at the witchdoctor's, my mother's condition had not improved. She begged us to take her to the hospital. The medical tests revealed she was HIV positive. My mother was devastated.

She immediately started receiving treatment and counselling but I knew then that life would never be the same again.

Mother became the talk of the community; everybody looked at us like aliens. Mother went into serious depression because she had nowhere to run away to.

When father could not stand this stigma anymore, he abandoned us and moved to another village and got married to another woman a few months later.

Mother's health quickly deteriorated and she passed on. None of her relatives were willing to live with me. Some suspected me to be HIV Positive; others thought I would bring my family's bad luck to their homes.

When nobody would take me on, my father eventually took me to his new home. Due to the intentional starvation my stepmother subjected me to, I started losing weight. I caught chronic malaria and was taken to hospital. After the tests, it was confirmed that I was indeed HIV-positive. I had seen my mother suffering and I did not want to suffer like her. So I decided to run away from all my troubles; from this bad disease and from the people who were mistreating me. I started walking along the road to nowhere.

Days later, I realised I was lost and a good Samaritan took me to the police station in Tororo. A counsellor from MIFUMI came to meet with me. Because I was too sick and needed immediate medical attention, she took me to the hospital. When I recovered she took me to a nice place with many nice people. She called it The Haven. I was introduced to The Aids Support Organisation (TASO) and I started taking my treatment and receiving counselling. At The Haven, everybody treats me like a normal child. I play all the games I like with other children and attend the classes we have with teacher Laura.

Grace Lwanga the special services manager says; Jane* is a strong-willed, beautiful girl. Many of us thought she would not make it. Now on seeing her running around and readily helping out, I believe she will live to see her dreams come true. MIFUMI, TASO and Child and Family Protection Unit will be travelling to meet with her relatives and see how to settle her back in with her family.

Jane* Not her real name.

MIFUMI envisions a world where women and children are free from violence and all forms of oppression and everyone has the opportunity to realize their full potential.

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