

AND A CHILD WENT HOME...



By

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CRANE network is all about children and ensuring they are well and thriving in God's plan. As a network, we believe the safest place for any child to grow and thrive is family. Looking at the two past years, we would like to acknowledge that they have been rough on everyone especially children. COVID'19 was and still remains a huge challenge for many people. The disease created such fear and anxiety amongst the young and old alike. Children were out of school for nearly two years and social distancing left them feeling isolated, vulnerable and bored as is the story of two cousins, Mark and Peter. The two boys strolled away from home unnoticed only to get lost. They were picked up by a motorist hours later and taken to the nearest police station for further assistance. The police got in touch with CRANE and through our social workers was able to trace the family and had the boys reunited (<https://www.viva.org/2020/11/09/a-heart-warming-reunion/>).

Street connected children were terribly affected as well. Following the president's directives on total lockdown, streets of Kampala were once again left empty with the children living on the streets stranded with no place to stay and subjected to severe hunger due to the starvation since

they mostly ate food remains from the garbage bins at the restaurants that were now closed due to the lockdown. Since Health insecurity was still a big threat in the country and the entire Globe, the lives of these children were at more risk because of their vulnerability and exposure on the streets. Street children generally do odd jobs to sustain themselves. They beg, sell small items and collect garbage. Sexual abuse and addiction are rampant among them. Their vulnerability often lands them in the net of addiction and criminalisation.

In Response to the above situation, CRANE with its members and government partner Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) team headed by the Deputy Director for Gender at KCCA, in collaboration with the non-governmental child focused organizations working with street connected children like Uganda Child Rights NGO Network-UCRNN, Dwelling Places Uganda, Hope For Justice/Retrak, ABAANA Ministries Uganda, Rescue Foundation, Mengo Youth Development Link -MYDEL, Kawempe Youth Development Association- KAYDA among others collectively gathered over 180 children from Kisenyi a Kampala slum and the neighbouring areas to ensure that the children were kept safe by placing them under Quarantine. As CRANE, we believe children are the key to a country's prosperity and should not be allowed to be wasted.

While in quarantine, the children received free COVID testing, emotional, psychosocial support and the team used that opportunity to prepare them for reintegration. Over 50 children were placed in alternative care and 50 more reunited with their families and later reintegrated back into mainstream and vocational schools.

Nakiru is one such a story among the many children that were reunited with families. At only 12 years old, Nakiru was trafficked and brought on the streets of Kampala to beg for a living. Her family had been lied to and empty promises made. Being underage and undocumented meant she was particularly

vulnerable. She was subjected to sexual harassment by men on the streets. Through CRANE's collective action, Nakiru was rescued from the streets, reunited with her family and reintegrated back into mainstream school. Nakiru is happy to be back in school and has big dreams for the future (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqJAVN4Bm0w>).

For Nakiru and many other children, returning home allows them to return to a stable, environment, with routines they know and understand. A large part of a child's self-esteem comes from feeling that they have a place in the world where they belong to and matter to others. Children who feel like they belong have a source of emotional support, warmth and nurturing, protection, help and security and in turn become better adults.

CRANE continues to do this by engaging with other members of the network and has provided a forum where members can share learning, pray and plan together. The desire is to make a bigger impact in the city as we work together than we would have been able to do by working in isolation and to ensure every child belongs to a family.

CRANE would like to thank all its members working tirelessly to ensure children are kept safe, so that they are able to thrive and be fulfilled, according to God's plan for them.