

16<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Dear Advantage Africa Supporter,

## **Another difficult year**

I hope you're well and staying safe as we approach another Christmas with COVID-19 still very much around. It's been a difficult year for everyone, and I'm conscious that where we work in East Africa less than 10% of the population have been able to access vaccinations. The pandemic continues to wreak havoc with livelihoods, food supplies and education. For example in Uganda, schools have been closed since March 2020 and it's estimated that 30% of learners who should do won't return.

## **Supporting the most vulnerable people**

Advantage Africa is helping vulnerable people to get through this crisis and build their future resilience; people with disabilities, albinism or HIV, single parent families and survivors of sexual violence; children, women and men who feel the impact of disasters most of all but often get left behind. That's why in 2021 we supported them with food, hygiene items and essential healthcare, and provided vulnerable children with solar-powered radios to hear broadcast lessons while schools were closed.

I'm writing today to ask for your support to make work like this possible, and outline how you can help transform the lives of vulnerable people - through the example of one community with which I work:

In the village of Ddwaniro, Uganda, I kept hearing about the fear and superstitions surrounding epilepsy, and of the tragic death of a young girl called Regina. Our social worker Sarah told me that *'Regina was preparing tea for her mother when she got a serious [epileptic] attack and hit her head on a stone and that was the end of her life'*.

Sarah said: *'People believe epileptic attacks are sent by witchcraft to make them suffer the whole of their lives'*. She was determined to do something about it. So we worked together with specialists from a local hospital to dispel such myths and enable people affected to understand and manage their condition with a three-day training course and appropriate medication.

## **Leaving no-one behind**

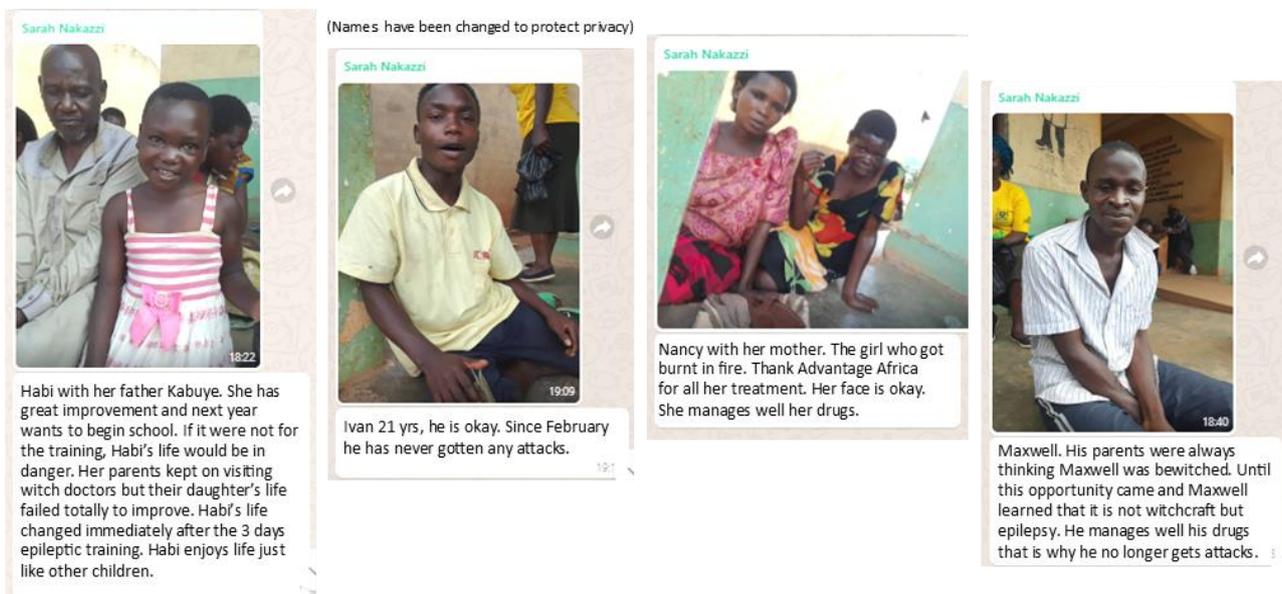
It was challenging to manage the training and keep everyone COVID-safe when 79 children and adults with epilepsy turned up together with their caregivers! Only four had ever received medical advice about epilepsy before and none had ever accessed regular drugs to control their seizures, including one gentleman who was 80 years old. Sarah said they all shared stories of their seizures, which *'caused them to have accidents like falling in the fire while cooking or have fits while alone fetching water'*.

The training demystified the causes of epilepsy and improved the participants' knowledge and skills to safely manage seizures and challenge discrimination. Single parent Alice, who'd been in despair about her son's daily seizures said: *'I've learnt a lot about epilepsy and nobody will ever confuse me again'*.

Sarah and the hospital team assessed everyone individually and developed personal care plans to make sure that every single person in the community with epilepsy had a regular supply of the right medication to prevent or reduce their seizures. That's my brilliant, compassionate and hard-working colleague Sarah for you - making sure that no-one is left behind!

### Lives transformed

The impact of this project has been life-changing. Sarah often sends me feedback from families whose experience and outlook have been completely transformed, as fear and confusion have been replaced by hope for the future. I've copied some of her WhatsApp messages from just last week below:



Most people with epilepsy report that they've not had a single seizure since the project began. They're now living full lives and taking part in all their families' activities. The support of people like you has also enabled Advantage Africa to help 40 of these families so far to start income-generating enterprises to overcome poverty. Furthermore, as people with epilepsy become more visible and ignorance around the condition is eroded, Ddwaniro is becoming a better informed, inclusive and caring community - especially important while the challenges of COVID-19 continue.

### How you can help

This Christmas, please will you help vulnerable people like Habi, Ivan, Nancy and Maxwell to improve their lives so that they don't get left behind? Your donation to Advantage Africa of:

**£30** - could empower a person affected by epilepsy or other disability to manage their condition.

**£60** - could help a vulnerable family to start a small enterprise to meet their basic needs.

**£20 per month** - could help a social worker like Sarah to support families in communities like Ddwaniro.

Thank you so much for your support and interest in our work. We simply couldn't do it without you!

With our warmest wishes for Christmas and the New Year from all of us at Advantage Africa,

Jane Betts  
Uganda Programme Manager

**Make a Donation**

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