Special Report

The following report is a true story extracted and edited from an article in New Vision, a Uganda daily newspaper. It gives an idea of how vocational education can change a child’s life.

Evelyn Oyungrwoth’s dream had always been to become a professional designer. The first step she took to fulfil this ambition was learning tailoring. An opportunity presented itself in 2007 through a charity called Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD). She never looked back. They took her on a six month training course at Ocko Vocational Centre.

“At Ocko, Evelyn learnt tailoring skills well enough to be able to make 200,000 Uganda Shillings (UGsh) a month (about £50) out of it and to pay her school fees. Her Father, a peasant farmer, could not afford to pay for her secondary education. Evelyn says the training helped her to develop the talent she already had.

How she started the business

In 2006, Evelyn was a pupil at Akanyu Primary School, where she passed exams for Secondary. However there were no secondary schools in her area so she dropped out.

It was while she was at home in 2007 that she got the opportunity to go to the Vocational Training course at Ocko for the tailoring course. A week after she completed her course, she hired a sewing machine at 50,000 UGsh (£12.50) per month and went straight to work. Her father sold two goats and raised 200,000 UGsh for her as capital. She carried out her tailoring business from her parent’s home for the first month.

She was fortunate, in that one month after she started out, CEFORD delivered her a start up kit, including a brand new sewing machine. As her business prospered, she joined a savings scheme in her village where she started earning interest from members who borrowed from the scheme for their own businesses.

During this time, she also trained eight other girls from her village, who in turn paid for her services. This training boosted her savings, which in turn boosted her income.

At the beginning of 2008, her Primary teacher, Solomon Keral, convinced her to resit her primary exams, to give another opportunity to attend secondary. Evelyn used part of her savings to study and increased her pass mark. Evelyn says she could have done even better had it not been for her lack of time for revision, due to her work. She did not get enough time to revise since she had customers to
serve. "I only attended a few weeks in the second term and concentrated on finishing my customers clothes", she says.

A year later, with savings in the bank, she could try again. She needed 150,000 UGsh for her school fees per term. Evelyn joined the first form in Angal Secondary School, Kebbi.

As Evelyn continues to study whilst working, she is worried about juggling tailoring and studies, especially when she reaches 4th form. Her dream after completing 6th form is to join a missionary institution in Gulu which trains designers.

Evelyn attributes her ability to pay her school fees to her joining the village savings scheme. "The more I save in the scheme the more interest I get. It is the interest that helps me to get school requirements", she says. Evelyn deposits any spare money she has after paying her fees.

Acknowledging her hard work and determination to study, members of her community give her clothes to sew so that she can make the extra income she needs to finish school. "I am happy that most of my former teachers in primary school and the friends I studied with bring their clothes to me".

Challenges for Evelyn
Currently, Evelyn works only during holidays as she is in a boarding school, completing 3rd form. She says the holiday working schedule is very tight as she gets just two to three weeks holiday time to earn enough money for her fees. This leaves her no time for revision as she has to work around the clock to clear the clothes before the holiday ends.

The Vocational Training Centre, Lubanyi
Evelyn’s story gives an idea of how a vocational education can change a child's life. Evelyn's parents were not able to fund her primary or secondary education. However, through her enterprise she has been able to complete a vocational course, and then used this to undertake her academic studies. Evelyn is twenty, but is still striving to complete her education, whilst also paying her own way.

Children who worked with us last summer whilst we were constructing the centre have already found employment in the construction industry. It would, of course, be better if these children could complete what we consider a 'conventional education', but life is not like that yet in Uganda. Our centre has the potential to give children that first step they need to achieve independent success, just like Evelyn.

Challenges for us
Our children face the same challenges as Evelyn. Education is always a balance of time, available resources, fees and the loss of income a child could provide to the family. Most of the children at our centre could be working with their family on cutting sugar cane, or subsistence farming. It is hard to balance the long term good of education against the very real needs of ‘today’.

We may be able to help. If we can support school fees (just £45 per child at our centre), uniform (a T shirt will cost just £3), books (a few pounds) or food at just a few pence per day, we will make it easier for a child to attend.

Perhaps you would consider sponsoring a child like Evelyn. We can keep you informed of their progress as they study with us, move into mainstream education or move onto employment.

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