

# Mentoring East African Disability Advocates: Our Experiences in Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia

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Poster presented at the 2023 Annual Conference of the AUCD, Washington, D.C.

## Advocating for Inclusion of Children With Epilepsy and Other Disabilities in Public School.

**Professional Fellow:** Fides Uiso, Tanzania

**Outbound Fellow:** Megan Roberts

### Purpose:

To improve inclusion of children with epilepsy and other disabilities in their schools and communities through increasing awareness and knowledge around management of seizures and to decrease stigma through training of special education teachers and disability organization leaders.

### Description:

Assess and refine efforts to train special education teachers, develop policies for schools, and engage parents in social support networks to improve inclusive practices for children with epilepsy and other developmental disabilities.

### Activities:

Megan and Fides met with Special Education teachers in Ukombozi Primary School, a public school in Ubungo district to talk about the impact of Fides' training activities and discuss their current needs. Megan and Fides shared books with the teachers and students that were created for children to better understand epilepsy. They also met with families in the community to learn how the project has impacted them and to learn what barriers they are still encountering to school and community participation. Additionally, Megan and Fides met with leaders of several non-governmental organizations that work to promote human rights and promote inclusion.



Megan Roberts (left) and Fides Uiso (right).

### Impact:

The outbound activities improved collaboration across organizations, fostering a collective impact around rights of persons with epilepsy and other disabilities. Megan and Fides successfully developed a model for teacher training and a framework for integrating this topic into training for a wider audience of teachers and school administrators.

### Challenges:

Travelling within the country was challenging and took more time than anticipated. It was also difficult to coordinate meeting times because appointments frequently shifted.

### Lessons Learned:

Presence of the U.S. Outbound Fellow can serve as a catalyst for engaging with agency and organizational leaders. This enhances the work of the East African Fellow by providing opportunities to engage and collaborate with other organizations. The U.S. Outbound Fellow gains cultural awareness and sensitivity to differences that exist beyond the borders of the United States. The outbound visit can also support collaboration across PFP program alumni.

## Enhanced Self-Advocacy for Increased Employability and Community Participation by University Students with Disability

**Professional Fellow:** Emebet Lema, Ethiopia

**Outbound Fellow:** Jerry Alliston

### Purpose:

To improve employability and advocacy skills of university students with disabilities through increasing general awareness and knowledge around pre-employment skills and the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities

### Description:

Develop, modify, and include cultural practices for a train-the-trainer curriculum for non-government organizations to improve employability skills of university students and promote equal and equitable hiring practices of persons with disabilities

### Activities:

Jerry's outbound trip has been rescheduled to December 4, 2023. He and Emebet will meet with members of the project advisory council consisting of representatives from various non-government organizations, university faculty/staff and university students for project planning and implementing. A train-the-trainer event will be held for all interested council partners and then Jerry will provide a direct training with a group of university students.

## Promoting Employment in Uganda

**Professional Fellow:** Harunah Damba, Uganda

**Outbound Fellow:** Wendy Parent-Johnson

### Purpose:

To establish a Savings and Credit Co-Operative Societies (SACCOs) and employability training for university graduates with disabilities to increase their employment and entrepreneurship outcomes.

### Description:

Implement a hybrid model focused on supporting infrastructure, skill development, and capacity building through train-the-trainer approaches, strategic planning, resource mobilization, partnership engagement, and service delivery practices.

### Activities:

Outbound Training Series with 14 sessions, guest speakers, and a landing page for recordings, handouts, and tools. Presentations were also conducted by people with disabilities who had either started their own businesses or obtained employment, and they shared their personal employment experiences. Meetings were held with university professors to explore collaborative partnerships and support opportunities. University certificates of attendance were awarded indicating hours completed. Monthly follow-up meetings are held with the team to address any issues and identify areas for assistance; and celebrate successes.

### Impact:

The virtual platform opened up opportunities for greater numbers of people to participate. The networking and sharing among participants were invaluable and led to the richness and application of content shared. Emphasis was placed on enhancing team cohesiveness and support across multiple roles of leadership, training, fiscal management, administration, and employment services.

### Lessons Learned:

Initial meetings and relationship building prior to beginning outbound activities is helpful preparation. Periodic check ins are important to schedule for gathering feedback and new topic ideas. It is essential to dedicate regular times to integrate knowledge into the framework of the participants and their culture both during sessions and new ones. A Champion such as the Professional Fellow is important to bridge translation and function as the liaison to ensure information is covered and understood on both sides. The experience provides a valuable opportunity for the Outbound Fellow to learn new strategies for engaging and partnering with marginalized communities and enhancing employment supports that have application to their organization and people with disabilities in the U.S.



Harunah Damba and his team at United Persons with Disabilities (UPWD) in Uganda.

## Encouraging Parent Civic Engagement Using a Parent Advocacy Resource Kit (PARK) for Increased Financing of Inclusive Education

**Professional Fellow:** Priscilla Kisakye, Uganda

**Outbound Fellow:** Evan Borisinkoff

### Purpose:

Priscilla's follow-on project aimed to improve learning outcomes for children and promote active citizen engagement in planning, monitoring public expenditure, and strong political leadership to influence equitable resource allocation through budget input, parent support groups, and accountability mechanisms. The outbound project goal was to increase parent advocacy efforts towards financing for inclusive education.

### Description:

The outbound effort focused on helping parents learn more about their child's disability as well as their strengths, needs and how to develop their family's story of how their child's disability has impacted them to policymakers to advocate for increased financing for inclusive education. Bringing attention and awareness on how the US has used parent advocacy as a mechanism to support inclusive education efforts was also a success. The networking across several non-government as well as government agencies was a positive outcome in terms of promoting the PARK resource kit and sustaining its use in the future.

### Activities:

Development of a resource kit on disability inclusion and how to advocate for increased financing. Training parents in writing and telling their stories coupled with action planning for policy level parent engagement. Carrying out dialogues between parents, community members and decision makers to advocate for increased financing towards inclusive education.

### Impact:

The outbound project included an all-day training at the Kampala Parents of Children with Disabilities Association-Makindye (KAPCDAM) with 15 parents of children with disabilities as well as three parent leaders using the PARK resource kit to aid advocacy efforts for parents. At the end of the training the parents expressed great appreciation for learning new advocacy skills and increasing their knowledge regarding their child's disability. Some parents were overcome with raw emotion during the training and appeared relieved of guilt when factual information was provided regarding the suspected etiology of their child's disability. The parent leaders have committed to implement the training to 200 members in the other parent support groups across Makindye.

### Lessons Learned:

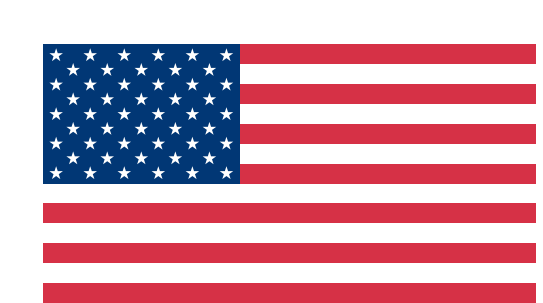
The word inclusion in Uganda may have a different meaning than what constitutes inclusion in the US. In Uganda inclusion may mean students with and without disabilities are included in the same classroom or that students with disabilities are included at school at all.

I also learned that in Kampala there are model schools for students with physical handicaps as well as schools that serve students with and without disabilities in the same classroom. The schools I saw know how to meet the needs of students with intensive and pervasive support needs and teachers know how to differentiate instruction to challenge students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The problem that exists is that more funding is needed from the government in order to allow all students with disabilities to attend school in the least restrictive environment.

Currently secondary education is not compulsory in Uganda and parents have to private pay to send their children to a private school. The reality is not all parents can afford to send their children to school. All children deserve to be in school as a basic human right. This fellowship has made me realize that in the US we often take this basic human right for granted and are often critical of the educational supports that are provided. This Fellowship has also improved my global view of special needs inclusive education and the goals that still need to be accomplished around the world. Priscilla added, "The Fellowship has given me the knowledge, skills, and partnership to succeed with my follow-on project."



Evan Borisinkoff (a white man wearing a black T-shirt) and Priscilla Kisakye Mugume (an African woman wearing a yellow T-shirt) posing with parent leaders from the Kampala Parents of Children with Disabilities Association-Makindye who participated in the PARK training.



The Professional Fellows Program on Inclusive Civic Engagement is a program of the US Department of State, administered by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston in partnership with Humanity & Inclusion (HI). The contents of this presentation do not reflect the opinion of the United States, the US Department of State, or its offices or employees.

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