

LIFE IN TANZANIA

OPERATION UPENDO®, INC.

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O' COME, EMMANUEL!

Last month I visited the Awani Center in Morogoro and eventually the Abdula household in the faraway village of Makuyu in the Mvomero district. The Awani Center provides services to challenged and disabled young adults and children that include physiotherapy and education that helps to empower and build their capacity to maintain themselves. But like most Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) centers throughout Tanzania, the Awani Center is experiencing a shortage of qualified staff and financial resources.

My host, the director of the center, invited me to join him on a visit to a family living in Makuyu. As we traveled on the road to the village I wondered what was so special about the Abdula family that prompted my host to want to take me to meet them. I was certainly unprepared for the experience which would not only humble me but would also momentarily render me speechless. When we arrived at the home of the Abdula family we walked to a structure behind the main house. I immediately observed three young men crawling on the ground, a young man sitting in a wheel

chair, and a young woman sitting on the ground propped against a wall. The young men who were crawling on the ground quickly made their way over and kindly greeted us. I noted their inability to speak or to rise off the ground. All five—Charles, Severine, Joseph, Violet, and Emmanuel whose ages range from 17 to 27 years—were like infants, dependent and vulnerable. One of the young men recognized my host Fr. Sewando and babbled “baba, baba.”

The family includes father, mother, and eight siblings of whom five are severely handicapped. Even though all five have been to medical facilities, none have been properly diagnosed. Nevertheless, symptoms of cerebral palsy were apparent. Cerebral palsy is very common in poor communities where there is no (or minimal) prenatal and perinatal care. The availability of good midwifery is essential to the prevention of cerebral palsy which is often caused by trauma during birth.

I noted that the Abdula family's home is too small to accommodate beds necessary to get particularly the disabled members off the

floor. The family is very poor which is certainly not uncommon; however, this family is unique in that five of their children are severely disabled. That means that six family members—the five disabled siblings plus their caretaker brother—are unable to work to help support the family. Furthermore, it precludes the young caretaker brother from attending school, another unfortunate consequence.

Needless to say, I was heartbroken and speechless about the family's unfortunate circumstances and wondered what could be done to make a significant impact for this humble family. My main concern is for the five disabled members who are unable to help themselves. All have been provided wheelchairs but once they get out of them their caretaker is unable to lift them back into their chairs, and that is why upon arrival we found them crawling on the ground. If the family was able to pay for therapy, The Awani Center would be able to help them.

**“Blessed are the merciful
for they shall receive
mercy.”**

Matthew 5:7

**YOU have the power to
make a difference!**

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