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FINGERS ARE NOT EQUAL

Women and girls living with disability

[T.A.F.I.]

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The background

Many African children with autism are hidden away at home – sometimes chained up, almost always undiagnosed. Efforts to bring the condition into the open are only just beginning. Women who mostly double up as their mothers and care givers face myriad of challenges. Some are chased away from the marital homes and often end up as single mothers with little or no income to care for these children living with autism. Some who have heard about TAFI come to inquire on what support we could offer.

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Njeri Kahi Rogers is a proud mum of two girls Sandra 26 and Tanya 18. Happily married to the love of her life, one Rogers T.

At age six, she was affected by polio and the doctors sent them home telling her mother that she would never walk. Today she walks confidently albeit the polio virus... Twenty years

later, she was dumfounded when she found herself in a doctor's office, with her then 2 year old daughter, hearing those same words again.

"May never walk or talk..." Am sorry Njeri, but your daughter has autism and she may never learn proper speech or even lead a normal life." She refused to let these words stop her. Today she is a lady with a career she takes care of more than 85 mothers with special children in Ongata Rongai, Kajiado North. She is Rotarian and a member of Action for Child with Disability (ACD). We do birthdays for every child, sing for them buy a tiny gift and share edibles with friends to encourage them to love the special.

Raising a special needs child teaches you a lot. It teaches you to grow tough skin to protect yourself from the rude stares and nasty remarks of strangers, to have faith in all instances because you will need to be the hope for your child.

TAFI (The Autism Foundation International) is an organization inspired by love and out of a dire need to belong.

ABOUT US

The Autism Foundation International (T.A.F.I) was established in 2016 as a community based organization (C.B.O) with an aim of creating a necessary awareness concerning the plight of children suffering from autism spectrum disorders. We enable such children cope and lead fulfilling lives by accessing educational, recreational, spiritual, intellectual growth and development. We also provide care, and psycho-social support to parents of children affected by Autism who are often stigmatized by society. The Centre currently hosts between 30-50 Children per day during week days and 15-25 children living with Autism during the weekend and on School holidays.

VISION

To herald a bright future for children suffering autism by setting up a Centre (home) where they can live happily and healthily like other children in the world.

MISSION

To ensure that children suffering from autism receive reasonable quality care by providing a home away from home environment to enable them actualize their talents, and sensitize the community on the need to love, care, nurture, tend and feed them.

Specific objectives

1. To create awareness concerning the plight of children suffering from Autism and thus shift public perception, opinion, and stigma that society attaches to children suffering from autism.
2. To provide care and basic needs i.e food (special food without wheat (gluten) and without milk (casein), clothing and shelter to children suffering from Autism from impoverished, poor families. establishing a center to care for their needs.
3. To establish a Centre that offers psycho-social and spiritual care and support to children suffering from Autism by networking with individuals and organizations with similar objectives
4. To support the wellbeing of parents with children suffering from Autism by initiating projects that can improve the standards living by providing them with reliable income through economic empowerment strategies and programs.
5. To fundraise for the purpose of supporting the objectives identified above.
6. To establish an endowment fund to receive grants, donations, gifts and to help children living with autism spectrum disorder.

Autism in Kenya.

Autism is a devastating and complex developmental disorder affecting approximately 4% of the Kenyan population. (Autism Society of Kenya, 2007).

Due to prevalence of Autism in Kenya, there are certain societies that have been founded in the recent times. For instance, one such organization is. Autism Society of Kenya. This organization came into being in September 2003 when a group of parents who had autistic children decided to form a society that could advocate for theirs and their children's needs. The Society offers diagnosis and assessment, produces literature about autism and provides counseling services and run autism awareness workshops all over Kenya. In order to protect the rights of the disabled, more especially those who are mentally challenged (as in the case of autistic persons), the Government of Kenya passed a disability Act in 2003 under which it is an offence to conceal or imprison the mentally ill or disabled person.

The two main objectives for this project are; to Increase integration and inclusion of disability issues in policy, legal and program formulation and implementation by the various national and county agencies in Kajiado county and Increase understanding of national and devolved structures by leaders of national and county level DPOs and other key stakeholders involved in disability mainstreaming. The upcoming 2019 national Census in Kenya, and Ministry of Education to review and finalize the National Policy on Provision of Education and Training for Learners with Disabilities and Implementation Guidelines. Hold regional forums to enhance capacities of national and county level DPOs officials to participate in devolved level and governance processes to participate in county level budgeting and planning cycles.

1. Problems faced by women and girls living with disability

Lack of prescribed medication which are often very expensive to afford, leaves the parents with no options but leave the children living with Autism at home.

Living as a pwd has made me appreciate life more. To add salt to. Injury my second born daughter has mild autism. Now fathom that. Living as a dwp in an developed country is a thorn in the fresh .

Dietary intervention is one of the therapies which has shown positive consistent results in management of autism spectrum disorder. Children with Autism require a special diet of foods without wheat (Gluten) and milk products (Casein). When fed with ordinary meals they regress in growth and behavior making life unbearable for their parents and siblings and the community.

Take for example myself when I was born those years when kids from certain communities would kill any child born with a defect Am happy my parents were literate enough not to throw me away. *Children's rights are a special case because many of the rights laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child have to be provided by adults or the state.*

As a girl child who is disabled ,its a double challenge .First the African society already looks down on you as the lesser being, now add disability, its a duplicated problem.

Lack of prescribed medication which are often very expensive to afford, leaves the parents with no options but leave the children living with Autism at home.

As a mother with polio, I must admit I have gone thru thick and thin to be where I am. Happily married with two beautiful daughters and now a grandma, it has not been easy. It is a very tall order to get a man to marry me, the glances and stares almost make me cave in! I mean no one expects a sane man to marry a disabled woman...I always wonder what's the connection between love and disability! Giving birth and seen pregnant can draw a larger crowd than a wedding, people want to see who has married this " funny looking "woman.

When a young girl has intellectual or physical disability, the society deems you a spinster...they " think' you are an alien from Planet Mars!

Disabled girls have issues with love. No young man wants to get 'embarrassed " and ridiculed dating a girl on a wheel chair or walking in a gait holding crutches! Teenage disabled girls have same feeling as the other girls out there. Matters of the heart has nothing to do with legs, hands eyes voice of ears! Love is love.

A woman produces offspring whether lame, blind autistic. why does the society brand disability like a curse? *Article 23 of Children rights states "Children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support, so that they can lead full and independent lives.*

I remember when I was pregnant with my first born daughter who will 27 this August, some weird curious ladies in an antenatal clinic were so quizzical as to how I, am disabled lady was carrying a pregnancy! That is how naive the society is....I told them off !

What has pregnancy got to do with my legs! Lol.

Whilst the importance of reproductive health has been acknowledged in international agreements, many countries do not consider sexual health as a legitimate health issue. Women with disabilities face major challenges in realizing their Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) due to the challenges they face in hospitals.

The services sought included family planning, voluntary counseling and testing, maternity related services and also treatments related to their impairments. The findings further revealed that despite the hospital potential to offer gender sensitive SRH services, women with disabilities face a myriad of challenges in accessing the services. These include difficulties in access to the facilities, negative attitude of medical personnel towards SRH of women with disabilities and lack of measures to make the services friendly to women with various forms of disabilities. As a result, disabled women have not fully benefited from the SRH services offered in the health facilities. Rather than empowering them, to enjoy their SRH and rights, the prevailing situation has served to not only marginalize them but also deny them access to these services. The study suggests that in order for women with disabilities to enjoy their rights, there is need for certain measures to be put in place. They include awareness on SRH and disability, improving physical access to medical facilities, staff development among medical personnel, and adapting materials to fit persons with disabilities.

Accessing washrooms grooming, some of the hospitals and public

For example a most teenage girls changing pads, disposing the down. As TAFI or organizations considered for grants and funds for Menstrual hygiene management in

Rape is a challenge for pwd places far from reach. Most girls are often raped by close disability.

Married disabled mothers are traumatized by their spouses who cheat on them and dump them with children and homeless! Fathom that scenario.

People with disabilities in Kajiado County face many obstacles in their struggle for equality. Although men and women with disabilities are subject to discrimination because of their disabilities, women with disabilities are at a further disadvantage because of the combined discrimination based on gender and discrimination based on disability. This paper examines the lives of women with disabilities and explores the effects of this double discrimination. It demonstrates how women with disabilities have been neglected by the disability field and the feminist movement alike and reviews the existing literature on women with disabilities, most of which has been written within the last decade. The paper will also examine three major areas of life and how women with disabilities fare within these areas, compared to women without

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beauty and work is a challenge in places .

find it hard to go to and from sanitary towel, maneuver up and dealing with PWDs should be safe, dignified and inclusive emergencies.

especially in disserted allays or disabled /intellectually impaired relatives or strangers due to

disabilities and men with disabilities. These three areas are (1) the traditional female sphere of reproduction and nurturing; (2) education; and (3) employment.

Fingers Are Unequal Right: Am one lucky lady living with polio Paralysis at six months. Well educated ,retired career banker and now the Director of TAFI Autism school, I would recommend Creating Awareness on the plight of disabled girl child and women living with disability, enlighten the society that thinks our parents were bewitched to sire such creatures Engage the Apdk unit for the pwd to get registered trained and learn life skills like computer programming, IT, engineers, pilots ,teachers nurses to earn a decent life that leads to independent life.

Most teenage girls find it hard to go to and from changing pads, disposing the sanitary towel, maneuver up and down as TAFI or organizations dealing with PWDs should be considered for grants and funds for safe, dignified and inclusive Menstrual hygiene management in emergencies

Encourage disabled persons to marry and settle and get families like everyone else in the society

Enroll in full inclusive competency curriculum graduate and join units of higher education and get degrees to set up large Entrepreneurship's and create employment and becomes bosses and Directors !

I totally discourage the pwd to desist from begging or joining charitable organizations fro free handouts...let the mothers work make homes and young girls with disabilities learn life skill to sustain themselves.

The government should allocate resources for these persons to engage in huge businesses like owning supermarkets. Gas stations, being CEOs large firms.

CSOs to lobby for accessible structures in terms of work places fitted with ramps for wheelchairs, or escalators to enable them enjoy working comfortably.

Government to pay in place machinery used by pwd like hearing aids, braille machines, therapy and audio visuals for autism persons .

Provide accessible beds in hospitals, ,toilets with custom made gadgets adjustable by such people.

Allocate enough money for these women and girls living with disability for generating income for their families like cereal shops, train them as paraplegic drivers for uber taxi, SGR, Government vehicles etc other than giving the disabled women and girls "small funny jobs " like kiosks, weaving mats, Hawking etc .

I strongly request the CSOs to Jail and prosecute stalkers, predators who lure young disabled girls to dens Rapists molesting the disabled women and girls who are too weak to defend themselves.

Finally am making an appeal to the CSOs to lobby on the Kenya Government to Declare 100% exemption on all taxes for pwd. This is the cadre of people with meager earnings, hardly feeding themselves with a less than a dollar daily, why does the government tax such vulnerable citizens?

With Tax free salaries, and running large businesses ,enables the women and girls even to buy good homes ,adds to decent shelter ,promotes healthy living Conditions for their families and better admirable lifestyles too ,which in return builds a strong working economy.

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According to Stokes (2010) the child with Asperger's will need to be directly taught various

social skills (recognition, comprehension and application) in one-to-one and/or small group

settings. Social skills training will also be needed to generalize previously learned social skills

from highly structured supportive contexts to less structured settings and, eventually, real-life

situations. It is important to emphasize that children with Asperger's Syndrome will not learn

social relations by watching other people, or by participating in various social situations. They

tend to have great difficulty even recognizing the essential information of a social situation, let

alone processing / interpreting it appropriately. Tools for teaching social skills is the best

intervention to child with