



## Mobilizing the Community toward Inclusion of the Disabled HOLY TRINITY PEACE VILLAGE

### IMPACTS – CHALLENGES

*“Why was this one born blind? Was it because of their own sins or their parents’ sins? It was not because of their sins or their parents’ sins,” ..... This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.” John 9:2-4*

Every culture has their taboos and superstitions. Included in these deep cultural beliefs are biases against the handicapped and disabled. It is often known in Toposa Culture that when a child is born with some defect they would be abandoned in the bush far from the village. The thinking is that if this child dies close to the village others will be infected with this disease. It is rare for a family to accept and love a person who has some disability. Kuron Peace Village addresses this issue from a Christian perspective that all lives matter.

St. John Paul II nursery school actively searches for those young learners who have, by no fault of their own, been born with some small disability. In this demanding Toposa culture, life is difficult enough and the belief is that these innocent souls are born like this due to the Devil living in them. Peace Village staff work hard to disavow that notion.

The Matara Nursery has also integrated several disabled children into their program. Currently, there are two young ones with slight mental disabilities and one has a speech impediment. Another has eyes which cannot focus and a fourth has one eye which doesn’t work. A girl is mute yet has learned to use sign to communicate with her family and peers. One small child has a huge growth on the side of the neck which doesn’t impede their studies or progress in school.



*Figure 1 Working with disabled takes patience and devotion*



*Figure 2 No HTPVK staff are specifically trained for disabled*

Twice each year the Nursery School staff at the three sites will travel to the far away villages in their area and talk with the people about their children. In a year, that would mean six total visits which would include several villages in each visit. The purpose is to see if they are keeping any at home who might otherwise benefit from interaction with other children. At times, it is a hard sell to get parents to look at their disabled children as a blessing from God.

The Primary Health Care Center of Matara are also carrying out village visits throughout the year walking up to an hour and a half to some distant villages. Primarily they are doing health extension for vaccination, education and checkups of those unable to come to the clinic. Also part of

the visit is to search out those who are disabled or neglected in their own community. The Health Team frequently finds adults as well as children who are born with some disability and are ostracized by their own families. Many mute, blind, or deaf come to the clinic for health treatment. In many cases, it is the first time the staff are made aware of their existence. Follow-up on such people is always done.

So far, in their weekly outreach the health staff have found many elderly in need of care. To date, there are those who have lost limbs in several villages, two are deaf in Katyna and Moruoi Villages, two others are mute. HTPVK does not have the facilities or expertise to really work with and help rehabilitate such people but by giving some small food, kind words and simple smiles, there is a big change in the people.

## IMPACTS

Many of the parents feel quite relieved that there is someone to talk to them about their children. They may also look down on their child but after discussions they become more aware of the Christian image of all lives are sacred.

To date there are numerous disabled children participating in the three nursery schools of Kuron Peace Village. There are three more children enrolled in the primary school. At the moment, there are no disabled in the Secondary School or the Vocational Training Centre.

Health Teams who go out into the villages have found various disabled persons per village who are “hidden” away and kept out of sight. The villagers are very superstitious of these types of diseases or handicaps and don’t want to be “infected” themselves.

It is a great tribute to Hon. Titus Lokochuma, who is a HTPVK Board member, that he has taken in a young boy by the name of Lolutea Joseph. This boy has a mental disability. Three times, in the hopes that the water would take him away, family members threw the boy into the river. Miraculously, he has survived each time. Upon becoming aware of the plight of this young child, Hon. Titus rescued the boy and is caring for him in his own household in Kapoeta. Lolutea has become a regular and loved member of the family and is quite active in many ways. Certainly, Hon. Titus has set a Christian example of love and mercy for all lives.



Figure 3 Walking through the mud to visit villages



Figure 4 Hon. Mr. Titus Lokochuma ( RT) has adapted one disabled boy from Kuron area.

## CHALLENGES

Cultural beliefs, ingrained since an early age, are difficult to change in a short time. There needs to be persistent and constant attention paid to the inclusion of disabled in order to slowly change the mentality of the people. The health teams have also found that neglected elderly are all around but not mentioned by their own family members. They don’t see the use of working with someone who cannot contribute to the family good. Again, one needs to meet the problem as it is and begin a dialogue to get the family thinking in a more acceptable manner.

Sometimes due to the lack of resources and vehicles the staff have to walk up to 1 ½ hours to get to or return from a village. They have to carry all their supplies and materials on their backs or heads. In the dry season it is very hot and in the rainy season mud is everywhere. The staff are dedicated and resourceful teachers and health professionals. The HTPVK staff care about the students and patients but sometimes feel helpless to assist them in this very remote area where no services for disabled can be offered.

## LESSONS LEARNED

One needs to be determined and patient with the parents. Each staff member needs to continuously discuss the virtues of these precious children. All lives matter and it is a message that requires constant reinforcing. As the teachers and health personnel continuously re-enforce each other the message takes time to root itself in the peoples minds. If the family members hear the message from several different people at different times, it has much more impact.



*Figure 5 Most villages are isolated and difficult to reach easily.*

One needs to have a good idea of how to approach the parents and make the case for putting them in school. They will resist even to the point of arguing. However, if one is gentle and patient enough to take time to explain all the benefits and the graces of God, the parents usually come around.

As the people are Christian and as they understand the words and means of Jesus Christ, it is a good strategy to use the life of Jesus as an example of someone who reached out to the disadvantaged and included them in His Kingdom.

*( Sources: Holy Trinity Staff interviews, local Toposa interviews, and documents; edited by Gabe Hurrish 20.Nov.2021 )*