



Break the poverty cycle: send vulnerable children to school

Nakaweesi Ruth (29) recently started Love and support for children Uganda (LSCU). Having had a difficult childhood herself, she now wants to help vulnerable, needy children so they can go to school. “We want to break the poverty cycle in communities because we believe that educated people are empowered to live a self-reliant life and as a good citizen.” Dutch journalist Tefke van Dijk interviewed her about her mission.

Why did you start LSCU?
To fight for the survival and development of the community’s mostneedy and vulnerable children. LSCU is a non-profit organization that ensures orphans and other vulnerable, needy children access quality education services and quality health services. I want the needy and vulnerable children to attain their right to education, protection, development and are able to break the poverty cycle. For that, we need people who are able to sponsor for the children’s educa-

tion such that they get their right to education. We also need donors, volunteers and partners. Enrolled needy and vulnerable children after their education will be self-reliant and successful in life.

Like you? You did not have an easy childhood.
My father and mother divorced when I was not yet born. My mother re-married when I was still in her womb. When I was born my step father had no interest in me, and told my mother to take me

back to my biological father when I was only six months old. I stayed with him and my step mother until I was one and a half years old. The situation was not good because I was being mistreated by my step mother. My paternal aunt came and took me to her home in Masaka when I had jiggers in my feet and even in the hands. When I was four years old, my cousin took me to help her and do house hold duties including babysitting, cooking, fetching water and even looking after animals.

INTERVIEW *Nakaweesi Ruth*

I stayed there until I was seven.

You did not go to school?
Another cousin of mine was a teacher. She sympathized with me and took me to school. As she was a primary teacher, I was with her up to P7. Had it not been for her kindness, I wouldn’t have acquired primary education.

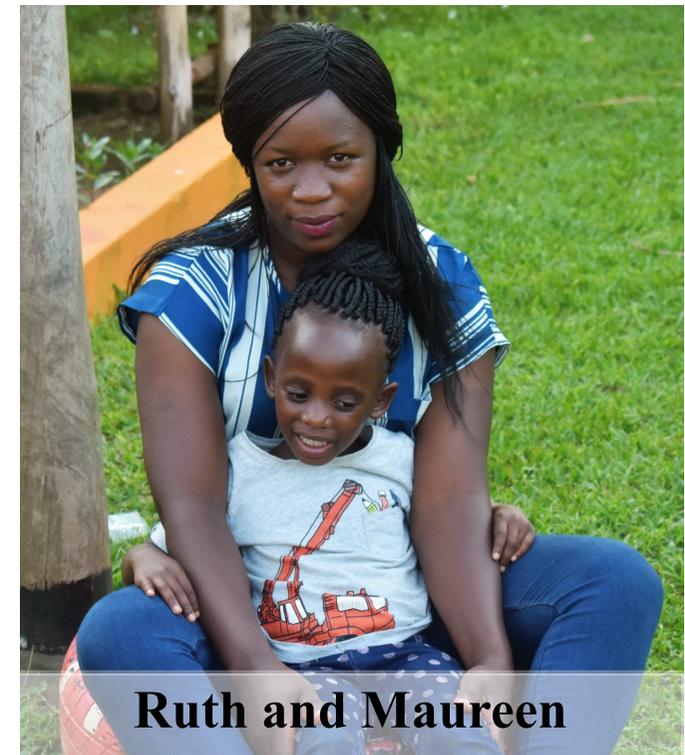
How about secondary education?
She had a family of six children and could not afford my secondary education. I passed primary seven very well but I could not continue with my studies then. I decided to go to Kampala to look for a job. I was employed as a house girl to be paid 15,000 shillings per month. By then I was fourteen years old and I tried to save money for school fees.

Were you able to go back to school?
After two years, I came back to my aunt. While I was there, I heard that there was a school in Kiwangala, Masaka District that was helping the needy in paying school fees. I decided to go back to school though my family members remarked that I was fighting a losing battle. I was enrolled in senior one in that school, which did not have a boarding section. I used the money I had saved to pay for

house rent, buy food, clothes and other basic needs. Within a year, all the money was used up.

You had to leave school again?
The situation became worse and I was forced to go to the village to work for money and food so I could pay for house rent and meet other expenses. One day, while I was in class, I thought of giving up studying because my shoes had worn out and my fellow students were laughing at me.

You wanted to give up?
Almost. My English language teacher was a volunteer from United Kingdom and she asked me what was wrong with me. Instead of replying, I shed tears. She was so concerned that she took me out of the class room so that I could explain everything to her secretly. I told her my trouble and she cheered me up and promised me that my problem was going to be solved. She comforted me and told me she was going to talk to her parents to sponsor me. From >



Ruth and Maureen

that day, my suffering came to an end.

Sponsorship saved you.

The sponsor started paying school fees for me up to university. The family cared for me so much that I did not lack anything. They loved me and treated me as if I was their own child. I forgot the plight in which I had been and I passed well and graduated.

So, now you want the same for other needy children?

I know what poverty means and I feel that there are a lot of children who are in the situation similar to the one I was in, need help, not only money but also love, moral support and encouragement. Based on my background, my husband and I decided to start the nonprofit organization "Love and Support for Children Uganda". I want to give back on what I was given by helping the needy and make a difference in communities.

How do you hope to help children?

We work with child sponsorship. When we are in the community we find out the vulnerable children and families, assess the degree of vulnerability basing on the challenges being faced and then profile them. After that we start searching for people to sponsor these children to schools. The child sponsorship includes paying of school dues (tuition) and other scholastic requirements (fees, beddings, meals, uni-

forms). As an organization, we do due diligence of linking these children to available best education facilities in and around Masaka District. With donations we want to make sure children have access to health services and pay modest medical bills for some of the children who are disturbed with some diseases. We also mobilize parents or guardians to take the children for free government services like immunizations and we train them in succession planning, land rights, handling cases of child rights violations. It is important the know their responsibilities on parentage.

What do you want to accomplish?

I want the needy and vulnerable children to attain their right to education, protection, development and are able to break the poverty cycle. We provide guidance, psychosocial support and counseling services to traumatized children. It is important to empower children with lifelong practical skills and provide family support to vulnerable families by developing their capacities to start income generating activities. We empower the community and families by sensitizing them on the rights of the children. We reach out to schools to educate, inspire and guide the young gener-

ation how to live responsibly. We carryout health outreaches in communities so it is more than an organization for orphans. The values we cherish are the key to success which include love, care, compassion, accountability, confidentiality and equity.

Did you already help a child?

So far we have had success with three children, including Maureen. Her mother separated from her father because of drunkardness and she left the children with their father who was always in bars drinking. Maureen is the last born in her family and she has five siblings. These five children were all taken care of by the oldest sister. At the age of fourteen she had to look after her siblings. By the time we met Maureen she wasn't well but we are happy that we managed to take care of her by giving her the love and support she needed. She is now a happy girl, healthy and studying in one of the good schools in our area. We also succeeded in helping her family with food and also helping her father by taking him to the rehabilitation center so that he can become a responsible dad and we are seeing some improvement because he no longer drinks.

Do you have big plans with LSCU?

Of course! I am also thinking about starting a nursery and a primary school to provide affordable education services to the community. With some land we can start a commercial farm with different enterprises such as poultry farming, cattle and goat rearing, banana production and coffee farming to produce food that feeds the children and the community and sell the products for sustainability of the organization. <



'I know what poverty means and I feel that there are a lot of children who are in the situation similar to the one I was in'

Want to help LSCU?

Love and Support for Children Uganda (LSCU) is a non-profit organization working to transform the lives of orphans, other vulnerable children and their communities in Uganda. You are welcome to support by volunteering, sponsoring or donating.



For more information:
loveandsupportforchildren.org