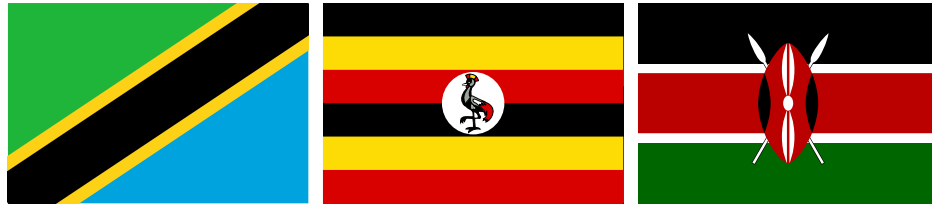


The Professional Fellows Program on Inclusive Civic Engagement



Fall 2025 Professional Fellow



Mai Nambooze National Coordinator, Association of Care Leavers Uganda (ACLU) Uganda

Mai is a founding member and the National Coordinator of the Association of Care Leavers Uganda (ACLU), an organization that supports children, youth, and adults who have spent their childhood in institutional care, such as residential facilities, childcare facilities, and orphanages. She leads initiatives to support care leavers—youth who have transitioned out of institutional care—in contributing to improvements in childcare systems.

Mai organizes workshops for care leavers to help them build networks, access counselling services, and receive support for their transition to independent living. She has engaged over 1,000 care leavers in initiatives that promote community reintegration and improve accessibility for individuals with disabilities. In addition, she has spearheaded research efforts to identify and address systemic challenges within institutionalized care systems.

Mai holds a degree in community development and a certificate in child protection from Makerere University as well as a certificate in alternative care from the International Institute of Social Studies.

Follow-on Project

Transitioning Children and Young Adults with Disabilities from Institutional Care to Family and Community Care in Uganda

Issue: Children with disabilities are three times more likely to remain in institutional care compared to children without disabilities due to inadequate family support, inaccessible community infrastructure, and limited community resources (Browne, 2009). Additionally, children with disabilities often experience longer stays in institutional settings, making reintegration into family and community care more challenging (Ddumba-Nyanzi et al., 2019). Prolonged institutionalization has negative effects, including development delays, attachment disorders, poor mental health, and social isolation (Berens & Nelson, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of individualized care and stimulation in institutional settings impedes cognitive and physical development (McCall, 2013).

According to the Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD, 2012), 80% of children in institutional care have at least one living parent, highlighting that reintegration is possible with adequate support. Reintegration into families and communities provides stability, emotional



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security, and a sense of belonging. It strengthens cultural identity, fosters family bonds, and builds community support, ensuring better long-term outcomes for the child's development and well-being (Moro Visconti, 2024).

Project Objective: The project aims to understand the challenges and successes in transitioning children and young adults with disabilities from institutional care to family and community-based settings in Uganda. This will be achieved through a combination of literature reviews and individual and small group interviews with various stakeholders.

Building on Mai's experience and expertise as the National Coordinator for the Association of Care Leavers Uganda, the project will extend her work in family reintegration to specifically support children and young adults with disabilities in care.

Project Description: Mai will begin the project with a literature review to understand the existing frameworks. She will collect relevant documents, both published and unpublished (grey literature), related to the topic. Then, she will review the documents and summarize key findings.

Next, she will collaborate with one childcare institution to gain insights into situations and examine the perspectives of various stakeholders on children and young adults with disabilities in institutional care. Specifically, she will conduct individual and small group interviews with institutional leadership and staff, care leavers with disabilities (adult care leavers are adults who have spent time in foster or residential care or in other arrangements outside their immediate or extended family before the age of 18), families of children and young adults with disabilities (either currently or previously in institutional care), community members, and others to better understand the challenges and successes of transitioning children and young adults with disabilities from institutional care to family and community-based settings.

Mai will analyze the collected data with guidance from her US host mentor and summarize the findings, including recommendations to improve the reintegration process, focusing on resources, support systems, care reform, and community engagement. She will share the draft summary with the individuals who participated in her interviews for input and to validate her findings, incorporating their feedback to finalize the summary. The summary will serve as a tool to advocate for accessible systems and support further research.

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