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5th Class Chairperson

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***Deaf and hearing youth interact during Fundraising Partnership Events.***

*What is a deaf person? The Oxford Dictionary gives a rather unclear definition: Someone who cannot hear. That is all I knew about the deaf, from a dictionary – had never met or interacted with one.*

I recall when I first met deaf youth of Deaf Link Uganda, it was a Friday and we had been told to expect special guests who would be coming to join us during the Movie Night programme at KiBO Foundation, where I was a student. The special guests were deaf youth from Deaf Link Uganda. When they arrived, I remember I was looking for people who **'looked'** deaf, but there was no difference between them and us! This proved how ignorant I was when it came to matters concerning The Deaf; and I was not alone here, my fellow 5<sup>th</sup> Class KiBO students also had the same level of ignorance. How we perceived and imagined the deaf would look like and what we saw in reality were two extremely different experiences! None of us ever thought that the exceptionally beautiful and handsome guests in front of us were actually Deaf!

As the KiBO Foundation 5<sup>th</sup> Class, we were to work together with Deaf Link Uganda to raise awareness about the plight of the deaf here in Uganda, and also fund raise for the purchase of basic educational requirements for their Community Educational Project.

I have never worked with a deaf person before but I was amazed at how good the deaf were at performing any task assigned to them. During the **Awareness and Fundraising Project**, we did a Car Wash and then performed a Drama Concert. Both events were implemented by both hearing and deaf youth. I have to admit that the deaf youth from Deaf Link Uganda out- performed me in almost all tasks! When it came to washing the cars, they were far better; and in acting at the drama concert, they were actually the ones teaching us how to Act! Everything they did was original, creative and excellent. While the hearing youth (us), were busy blabbering about *how this and that should be done*, the deaf youth were actually concentrating on accomplishing the task. I vividly remember a deaf youth getting angry with us and stating in Sign Language (through Nassozi - the interpreter: *You hearing people talk too much and do little – instead of getting on with a task, you waste a lot of time in the process!* The message was clear to all of us - one very important lesson was learnt: *When you say less and do more, you save time and progress faster.* The deaf youth became our Leaders and Mentors!

The car wash and the drama concert were successful, we were able to raise the amount of money we had targeted and in addition, our message about the plight of the deaf was explicitly communicated. Our hearing audience at both events couldn't believe that some amongst us were deaf people - especially during the Drama Concert: *How can a hearing and deaf person act in the same play?* But it happened and everything went smoothly. The audience only believed at the end of the play that some of us were actually deaf, who were the Best Actors and Actresses.

Despite the fact that the deaf are just like any other person: competent, hardworking and talented, they are still looked down upon in our societies. People take advantage of them, exploit and sexually assault deaf females! Most of the cases of sexual, physical, emotional abuse remain unreported because of the neglect, discriminatory practices and communication barriers. The deaf person finds it hard to get help in places such as, hospitals and police stations where without an interpreter; they are denied services which are available to hearing people.

The deaf are human beings like everyone else and have the right to be treated with respect and as equals. They are our brothers and our sisters and most especially, they are brilliant and exceptionally talented individuals who can contribute enormously to the nation and our world. Just like you and I, they need love, care and understanding – ***NOT PITY!***

### Sandra Kyeyune

5th Class Vice-Chairperson

**KiBO Foundation**



### ***Car Wash Fundraising by KiBO Foundation & Deaf Link Uganda Youth***

While working with deaf youth at Deaf Link Uganda, I learnt that these unique individuals were experiencing particular challenges that are predominately a result of social ignorance and lack of awareness from hearing people. Some of the challenges they shared with us included, social prejudices and discrimination, sexual assault by employers, communication barriers and lack of economic and educational opportunities. I realised that there is a great need to support deaf youth in Uganda by providing life opportunities to enable them lead productive and meaningful lives. They also need counselors and social workers who can communicate with them to encourage them develop life skills, necessary to empower them achieve their life ambitions.

Having interacted with deaf youth during our Fundraising activities (Car Wash and Drama Concert) I realized for the first time that they are highly competent, intelligent, creative, hardworking, talented and friendly: the only difference is that we can hear and they are deaf. Unfortunately, we hearing people are terribly ignorant about People with Disabilities because our attitudes remain dangerously prejudiced that we fail to discover the enormous potentials of deaf people. The only difference is that they are deaf and cannot hear; but they can do exactly what the hearing people do! We all need to work together to support deaf youth and enable them have a platform to showcase their skills and abilities.

I call upon the Ugandan Government and fellow citizens to fight against discrimination towards the deaf at all levels of society. We should all endeavor to learn Sign Language so as to bridge communication gaps and facilitate unity. Sign Language is easy to learn: I had lots of fun learning the basic signs. I would like to thank Ms Nassozi who has been a great inspiration to the deaf and hearing youth and also for the great work she had done improving the lives of deaf people in Uganda. It was a worthwhile experience visiting Deaf Link Uganda and interacting with dynamic deaf youth. The experience totally changed my perceptions about the deaf. I now believe that it is hearing people who are disabled because of negative attitudes. The Deaf are OK, except for the challenges they face – which are created by social prejudices and discrimination.

