

Report to Allan and Nesta Ferguson Foundation

Disability Africa



This is a report for trustees on the third year of their grant to Disability Africa – in particular our work in Kenya at the *Malanga Inclusion Project*. Thank you for your generous support and interest in our work. The foundation has supported our work with three significant grants since 2015.

Background to the report and our work

The Disability Africa approach and model works to end the exclusion of extremely vulnerable disabled children in low-income African communities. So to do this we...

- Understand and sensitively challenge negative attitudinal and physical barriers which prevent the inclusion of disabled children in homes, schools and their community.
- Use playschemes as hubs to deliver essential medical, education and family support services for disabled children so that they are safe, fed, cared for, happy, learning through play and protected from significant harm or even death.
- Something as simple as playschemes in the heart of communities visibly (joyously) demonstrates what disabled children can do and changes attitudes through play.
- Create sustainable changes because we work with local people and organisations – our Project Partners – so services are relevant and change is led from within a community.

Since 2011 we have used this model to deliver more than 87,800 visits to 676 disabled children in Kenya, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Zambia. By 2029 we aim to double this.

FUNDS ALLOCATED AND WHAT WE WERE ABLE TO DO WITH YOUR SUPPORT

Your support (for the third time) meant that we were able to sustain and continue to deliver a playscheme on 4 sites in rural Kenya. The trust donated £15,000 in December 2021 to support the costs of delivery at the Malanga Inclusion Project (North East Kenya) over three years (2022, 2023 and 2024). Here are some examples of what the grant paid for in 2024 (the third year of the grant).

- 1,576 visits for disabled children across the 4 playscheme sites in Bahati, Malanga, Ngamani and Yembe.
- Delivery of playschemes for 10 months – the playscheme is at the heart of what we do – where 202 disabled children registered to the project can come to a safe and caring place.
- Meals for children at playschemes for nearly all the year – this is a practical response to the rising costs of food for the community who are exposed to drought and rising costs making an already vulnerable child more vulnerable. In 2024 the team delivered 15,996 meals to disabled children at playschemes.
- 6 months salaries for the team in Kenya – from Play Workers to the project coordinator.

Why we do it

Disabled children experience daily neglect in low-income communities. They are hidden in their homes or sent to dangerous institutions (*orphanages*) and subject to extreme negative attitudes that sometimes result in the child's death – infanticide.¹ Attitudes and poverty mean that disabled children

In 2024 Disability Africa delivered 16,971 visits to disabled children...

15,133 visits to playschemes.
1,221 medical support visits and contacts.
617 parent support and meetings.
29,220 meals.
550 disabled children registered.

Our approach uses playschemes which instantaneously end a disabled child's isolation and reduce the risk of harm.



¹ Disability Rights International (2018) *Infanticide and Abuse: Killing and confinement of children with disabilities in Kenya*. Available at <https://www.driadvocacy.org/reports/infanticide-and-abuse-killing-and-confinement-children-disabilities-kenya>. (Accessed 2024.)

are especially vulnerable to harm in the absence of any *social safety nets*. Project staff have reported fears expressed by the community that disabled children – for example those with epilepsy, cerebral Palsy and autism are being ‘*affected by devils*’. UNICEF agree that ‘*When marginalized from society, ...[disabled] children’s chances to survive and thrive are diminished...*’²

The Malanga Inclusion Project, Kenya

In 2024 the team delivered playschemes at 4 sites for disabled children living in the Malanga area. In 2022 the project increased delivery significantly from 3 days/week to 5 days/week. The team is made up of a core management team of a Project Coordinator (John), Community and Parent Support Officers (Florence and Japhet) and a Medical Support Officer (Grace). This team support the Leaders at each playscheme who are responsible for delivering a busy and safe service to 202 disabled children registered to the project.



The team in Kenya delivered 9,779 visits to disabled children in 2024.

What’s going well?

Using local schools as a base and partner

The playschemes run from government schools. This means that the playscheme staff can establish real day-to-day working relationships with school staff. Not least this means that the local community has invested in the project by giving space that we would otherwise have to pay for. Increasingly the school staff make referrals to the playscheme – also demonstrating a trust and recognition of what the Malanga Inclusion Project has achieved and the real service the team deliver. Without this easy referral route disabled children would miss out on the structured adult lead activity and essential Early Childhood Development that the playscheme delivers. You could say that the playscheme is the *de facto* inclusion department of the school (in the absence of an organised *Special Educational Support* service).

Inclusive community development

Towards the end of 2024 the local Chief visited a parent meeting encouraging and promoting the registration and issuing of ‘national identity cards’ and making sure that disabled children are registered. That the Chief visited it significant but to also to encourage the registration of disabled children is an important step to tracking and recognising the population of disabled children. Part of the team’s work is to collect an accurate picture of the local population of disabled children so that – when the opportunity is there – they can be referred to the agencies and government systems that the rest of the population benefit from. Services maybe scarce but the collection (or lack of it) of good data about disabled children is the start of the journey to establishing inclusive services. The collection of good data is crucial to understanding our impact as well knowing that the lack of local data on the experience of disabled children is another form of exclusion.³

Medical Support Programme delivered at playschemes

Grace – the Medical Support Officer – oversees the welfare and health of disabled children registered at the playscheme. Grace is also a trained physio so gives physio to children every day at playschemes.

Medical support in action...

‘W’ had difficulty through the year with digestion and chronic constipation. Grace worked with W and his family as well as accompanying him to hospital when he was admitted. By the end of the year W is much improved but

² UNICEF (2023) *Children with Disabilities in Eastern and Southern Africa: A statistical overview of their well-being*. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-in-eastern-and-southern-africa-a-statistical-overview-of-their-well-being/>. Accessed 2023.

³ UNICEF (2022) *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>. (Accessed: 2023.)

Grace worked with the family to monitor the medication used and look critically at his diet so that the condition was managed safely and improved.

Grace – our very own physio – delivered 538 physio sessions in 2024

One piece of work Grace has overseen in 2024 is making sure girls and young women registered at the project get sanitary products and shown how to use them.

Parent support

Florence visits family homes every week which gives the team a chance to check on the home environment, offer advice and to follow up concerns. It is also obviously a chance to chat and offer support – Florence often attends with other parents of disabled children so a feeling of belonging and community is fostered. This is especially important as we receive reports of mothers and their disabled child being rejected by the father. One report from grandparents of 'CT' told how CT had started to use some verbal sounds and words (although not clear yet) since attending playscheme and said that 'this is something they never would thought would happen'. This is significant because parents and carers might sometimes be sceptical about the importance of the playscheme and the benefits of play.

Florence's visits are also crucial to follow up on absenteeism which is often reported by the team. Florence can check that all is ok at the home and of course encourage the family to send their child to the playscheme and reassure the family about all the benefits.

Playscheme development

Zuleika – Disability Africa Project Development Officer – worked with the team in Kenya on quality of play. As well as sending funds to get new play equipment for children the team looked at examples of good playwork from other Project Partners and creative play ideas with Zuleika (online).



Challenges

Tracking 5

In 2023 we introduced this piece of work to project partners – tracking a sample of children at projects to understand changes in the child's life over time. Progress has been slower than we thought. Although project partners keep in regular contact with the UK with lots of information about the development of children and the project in general it has been difficult for partners to use the 'Tracking 5' format. We will continue to think whether it is a methodology that project partners and Disability Africa need and/or find useful.

Yembe playscheme site

In 2023 three out of the four playschemes increased capacity and opened 5 days/week. Yembe site was not included in this because the team only have use of the site (part of a school) 3 days/week. We had considered proposing a plan to build a new site at Yembe however we do not think this is best use of funds at the moment. So for now the Yembe site remains open 3 days/week.

Delivery and growth – DA2029

We have not been able to achieve the jump in growth that achieved in 2022 at the Malanga Inclusion Project (part of our application to the foundation was to grow the playscheme). Delivery has stayed around 10,000 visits each year since 2022 – which we think is impressive in itself in such a poor and rural environment. However parent support contacts have increased by more than 50% in 2024. The team in Kenya deliver the largest project in terms of delivery and use a model of delivery (basing the playscheme at schools) that we would aim to use as we grow and replicate the model in new countries over the next 5 years. 'DA2029' is a plan to double our delivery by 2029 and work with at least 3 new project partners. What the team achieve is remarkable – the protection of more than 200 disabled children and engaging a local community in protecting the rights of disabled children.

Safeguarding

Disability Africa policy and procedure

There have been no safeguarding reports or incidents involving Disability Africa staff. In 2024 safeguarding policy was reviewed by Deputy Chair (Andy Novak – headteacher at a school for children with autism).

Monitoring and evaluation

Disability Africa staff are in day-to-day contact project partners – using messaging and calls to share advice, respond to incidents, discuss attendance and finance. Alongside delivery is the collection of data which allows Disability Africa and project partners to reflect on procedure, impact, keep accurate history of work done (*making sure we do what we say we do*) and be able to share data on local populations of disabled children with local authorities to support planning (when possible). Project partners submit monthly data on delivery which allows challenge and provokes useful conversations about quality and case studies – for example tracking the experience of children at the Malanga Inclusion Project who receive extra food support and help with costs of medicines. Although we are a small service we know that the collection of good data is crucial to understanding our impact as well knowing that the lack of local data – data invisibility – on the experience of disabled children is another form of exclusion. In 2023 we made one trip to The Gambia.



Thank you for your support in 2024

Your support and continued interest in our work is very important to us – thank you. We hope that it will appropriate to seek advice from The Allan and Nesta Ferguson Foundation about how and when to reapply in 2025.

All our annual reports are on our [website](https://www.disability-africa.org) but if you ever have any questions or need detail please email Jonathan Dobson – jonathan@disability-africa.org or call 07902 923 192.



Florence (Parent Support Officer) dancing with parents and play staff at an end of year celebration of the project.