



Jipange Special Needs Center, Newsletter - 1st Quarter 2020

Dear friends and partners of Jipange Special Needs Center,

A note from the Founder – Mark Sabwami.



Looking back to when the thought of social change was just a thought and a dream, it is quite exciting to see that, that dream has actually become a reality. My journey has not been a bed of roses, to say the least. Due to my vision impairment, lack of information and resources, I have endured a lot of frustration, discouragement and depression. However, that adversity allowed me the opportunity to find out what I am capable of, to develop my strengths, and to access aspects of myself that I did not know existed and inner resources I didn't know I had.

After attending a 12- months, leadership program at Kanthari in Trivandrum, Kerala, South of India, I was fully equipped with tools to start and run a social enterprise that would produce positive impact in the community. Just to paint a picture of how much I was determined to put into practice what I had learnt at Kanthari, immediately I arrived in my country Kenya on the 9th of December, 2019, I coordinated an awareness meeting on December 16, 2019. Many potential beneficiaries, local residents and other individuals interested in the project were in attendance. After that meeting, Jipange as we know it was born and is on its way to uplift many lives of the blind and visually impaired individuals.

Jipange's Birthday – December 12, 2019

On Monday, December 16, December 2019, Jipange conducted an awareness meeting at Trans Nzoia County in Kitale. The meeting was held at Kitale Youth Empowerment Hall. There were 35 people in attendance some of whom came from as far as Eldoret and West Pokot which is approximately 71 km from Kitale. The main purpose of the event was to introduce Jipange's vision, mission and approach to the general public. Those in

attendance were reassured of the measures Jipange has taken to set up beneficiaries on a sure path to career development, entrepreneurship orientation and self-reliance. Economic independence, bettering living standards and access to education of the rural blind people were the major key highlights of the event. At the event, white canes received from our donor were presented to some beneficiaries. A safety accessory known as a sensor was also introduced to the blind and the general public to sensitize them on the need of having such a safety feature attached on their white canes. It is a detector that alerts the blind person of an obstacle ahead as he or she moves around. Beneficiaries also were awarded promotional Jipange t-shirts that will sensitize the general public about Jipange's activities.



Some of the beneficiaries who received a white cane and a Jipange T-shirt

1st Official Day of Class – January 13, 2020

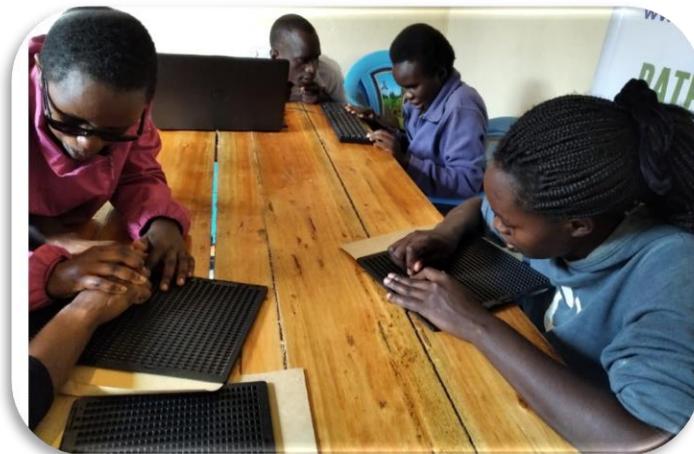
Jipange, is the Swahili word for "Prepare Yourself. At Jipange we strive to prepare rural blind people through a six months empowerment training program which includes braille, assistive computer technology, daily living skills focusing on independence, specialized orientation mobility and entrepreneurship skills empowerment. The idea of this empowerment workshop is to enable the blind people from rural areas in Kitale and other surrounding areas to jump back to their respective education aspirations and career options. January 13,2020 was the day we welcomed our very first beneficiaries. Some of them came to Jipange illiterate i.e. they had never learnt how to read or write in Braille. However, everyone was very happy about the prospects of bettering their lives through the training offered at Jipange. To make Jipange a reality, we had to rent a room to serve as the classroom/dinning. We rented a few other rooms to provide sleeping quarters and kitchen so as to allow the blind beneficiaries to board at the center rather commute.



Assistive Computer Technology students



Lunch time! – Beneficiaries enjoying a meal of Ugali (cornmeal) and collard greens



Braille students

Jipange's immediate goal is to eliminate the gap between blind learners and assistive devices, ensuring that each blind learner who attends Jipange has access to a braille assistive device including adaptive computer technology. By doing this, we shall meet the immediate need of the blind/visually impaired people of Kitale and surrounding areas. In brief, for its assistive technology training, Jipange uses JAWS software, which is a screen reader for computers to teach different computer skills. Since not every student is automatically tech savvy having the skills to self-teach or move rapidly through a few JAWS lessons, most students need to start with basic concepts and bite-sized activities and commands. For example, we teach the participants;

1. The correct terminology for basic components of a computer system (e.g. monitor, keyboard, disk, printer, mouse), and developing understanding of their basic functions.
2. How to press keys
3. How to listen to the commands in stages
4. How to navigate and edit in Microsoft Word.
5. How to surf the internet.
6. How to Send and receive emails etc.

Regarding Braille, which is a system for tactile reading and writing, the training empowers students to be able to read and write. Literacy—the ability to read and write—is vital to a successful education, career, and quality of life in today's world. Whether in the form of curling up with a good book, jotting down a phone number, making a shopping list, or using a computer to write a report, being literate means participating effectively at home and in society. Jipange realizes that braille is an irreplaceable and modern method for literacy for the blind. It is exciting to note that, by the end of the six months programs, our current six blind participants and many more in the future will be empowered to pursue whatever goals they have whether it is in education, career or any others community related activities.

In the long run, Jipange's approach is to enable rural blind people to become steppers, jumpers and runners. Steppers are blind people who will have gained entrepreneurial skills and are now able to step up and become economically independent. Jumpers are people who had lost sight at a later age and are now rehabilitated and are able to jump back to their work. Runners are blind people who will have gained communication and mobility skills and are now able to run by themselves, access education and achieve their own goals.

Staff and Volunteers

We currently have one paid staff, who is our cook. He also helps in others areas as needed such as running errands, being a guide etc. The Braille trainer is a volunteer just like the Founder who receives no pay.



Eric Ombiro – Cook – Paid staff



Edna Kwamboka – Braille Trainer - Volunteer

COVID-19 Obstacle - March 2020

As we were cruising along, together with the rest of the world, we were hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, we were forced to temporarily close the center as a result of a government directive. Unfortunately, we had to stop all learning until the pandemic is under control. All students returned home but we will definitely be back when it is safe to do so.

Good News despite COVID-19

A very generous donor, donated a brand-new motorbike to help with our transportation needs. This gift was very timely because social distancing was creating a major challenge in using public transportation. Our sighted cook is able to ride the motorbike, therefore he is able transport us to and from as needed instead of using other modes of transport where there are large groups of people.



It is all smiles as Mark Sabwami – Founder receives the key to the brand new motorbike

Advocacy work

Jipange is still operating in the background. To keep in line with our goal, we have been working to promote the social inclusion of persons with visual impairments in rural Kitale and surrounding areas. We are doing this through local media interviews in an effort to advocate for their rights, as well as highlight the challenges they are going through especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. Just like many blind and visually impaired individuals all over rural areas in the country, our students have been sitting at home waiting for divine intervention. With the stay-at-home order from the government, they have no way of accessing information, continuing with their program at Jipange or even making a living. These challenges propelled me to go to Citizen TV Kenya to raise these issues. The translation of the issues I brought up can be found at <https://www.jipange.org/happenings/>

I have also been able to take part in an Interview that was aired by Imani TV which basically was highlighting the fact that, disability is not inability. The main idea was to show the public that even blind or visually impaired individuals can positively impact the society.

Hope For The Future

Our prayer and hope is that COVID-19 will finally be under control and that a cure can be found. Just like everyone around the world, we would like for life to go back to normal so that Jipange can resume its efforts of impacting the lives of the blind in rural Kitale and other surrounding areas. Lives that had otherwise been viewed as “immaterial” by the rest of the society.

On a positive note, we have been receiving many inquiries from potential students who would like to join Jipange after COVID-19 subsides. This is quite exciting and has necessitated the need to buy more beds and create more space to accommodate these new students. While this is very exciting news, we are at full capacity in the rooms we are currently renting. Our greatest desire is to acquire a piece of land where we can build own spacious administrative office, classrooms, dining room and hostels. This will eliminate the need to pay rent which will allow us to redirect those funds to other operational costs and activities.

A word of Thank You to Our Donor and Partners

Thank you for your generous gift to Jipange. We are thrilled to have your support. Through your donation we have been able to accomplish the goals mentioned above and continue working towards bringing about positive social change in the lives of the blind and visually impaired individuals in rural Kitale and surrounding areas. You truly make the difference for us, and we are extremely grateful! Please consider being a monthly donor to help Jipange continue with its work. To donate, please visit <https://www.jipange.org/make-a-donation/>