

A victim of alcoholism, turned team leader.

In Lukuri Village, Itula Sub County of Obongi District harmful substance (drug) consumption is the last resolution for majority of the youth. The high unemployment rates in the entire country have the highest contribution to the vice. Mr. Muni Anthony, 22-year-old every morning wakes up to the question; 'what will I do today'? The answers to him were obvious – 'drink alcohol'.

Living with both his parents whose primary source of income is farming, Muni and his two siblings (brother and sister) insufficiently met their basic needs. In 2019 Anthony was forced to drop out of school after completing his Uganda Certificate of Education at Itula Secondary School in Itula sub county. ***"When I asked my parents for school fees to join A 'level they told me there was no money for me to continue with school."*** This broke his heart more after seeing his former classmates proceeding to S5 while he had to remain home because of not having school fees.

An idle mind is the devil's workshop. Waking up to doing nothing, he got familiar with friends of whom most were drop outs with similar financial challenge to continue with education. Little did he know that he was joining a bad peer group. According to Muni he sorts solace in the bottle after to drown his frustrations and disappointments. ***"I started to stay with some friends who were always drinking so I ended up drinking. After sometime, me and my friends were known as alcoholics in the village."*** The drinking continued even after joining the CVST center at Bongilo.

Anthony first heard about RICE West Nile and the PACES program in April during the enrollment of adolescents for the Bonga program in Lukuri village. ***"At first I wanted to join Bonga but I was told that am now old that Bonga is for the adolescents."*** When he was turned away, he thought all hopes were lost and it was hard for him to take it all in. What made it even painful was the fact that the Bonga center was near his home. He would see the togetherness of the boys enrolled for Bonga at New Golden Bonga center and also the topics being taught and it made him feel worse that such an opportunity was passing by a whisker. When Muni couldn't take it anymore, he decided to speak directly to Ghost (Bonga name) the animator in charge of New Golden Bonga center. From the discussion with the Bonga animator, he was informed that there was another program coming for youths within his age group.

The CVST program advert calling for youths to apply was finally pinned at the office of the RWC 2 in Zone 3 East and the Bonga animator encouraged Muni to apply. He applied in June and fortunately for him he was enrolled at Bongilo CVST center. CVST is a program among the five programs of 'Programme for Adolescents and Children's Education and Social Empowerment' (PACES) implemented by Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment West Nile with support from Stromme Foundation in Zone 3, of Palorinya refugee settlement for a period of three (3) years aimed at ensuring *'Children in primary school and out of school adolescents in Uganda have access to formal and non-formal education'*.



Photo showing Muni Anthony in his small-scale shop.

A lot changed for Muni after joining the CVST center at Bongilo. The previous disappointments of being left out of the Bonga program because of his age all disappeared but one vice still lingered around Muni. The vice of Alcoholism stuck with the desperate gentle man even after joining CVST life skills training. ***"I would come and attend sessions and immediately after that I would join my crew for some late evening drinking before going home"*** Muni says.

The drinking about to come to a sudden stop for Muni. When quizzed about what stood out most for him, Muni recalls the group discussions at the center on the dangers of alcoholism while the class was being taught about drug and substance abuse by the animator Aba Jesca Waran. After the life skills session, the gentle man made the resolute decision to stop drinking alcohol. Having stopped drinking, Muni made some new friends from the center and stopped staying with his former drinking partners. He dedicated more time to concentrate on his farming and small-scale business. The businesses that he presumably had no time for.



Photo showing Muni Anthony in his tomato garden.

At the center the members elected him as the Team Leader due to the visible transformations.

Anthony is thankful for the CVST program because he says it not only helped him over the vice of alcoholism but it also built his personal confidence and self-esteem as a youth because of his role as team leader.

According to Muni, many of the youth in his community have been absorbed by alcoholism and drug abuse. He says this is because many youths are idle and don't have much to do to keep them busy. The alternative for them is to join bad peer groups that lead many astray.

He recommends that such initiatives by RICE West Nile and Stromme Foundation should be continued to help the youths. Sharing his story will bring hope for many youths and when they are educated about the dangers of drug abuse, many could stop like he did.

Secondly, Muni believes that if his story is shared, it will be an encouragement for youths to stay in school if they have the opportunity to do so but also for those that dropped out it will be an eye opener that dropping out isn't the end of their dreams.

Muni selected Bakery and Confectionery as his trade of choice and soon he will be trained to become a professional baker, something that he says he is eagerly looking forward to.