

Senior Four (S4) Drop out Turned Baker.

“When I look at my life now, I am filled with joy at how well my situation has changed” - The words of Muni Anthony, a 23-year-old youth living in Lukuri village, Dengwele Parish, Itula S/C Obongi district.

Muni Anthony was among the 120 youths enrolled for the first cohort of the Technical Vocational Education Training project in 2021 with support from Stromme Foundation East Africa and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway. During the 3 months of life skills training at Bongilo center in Zone 3 East, Anthony started to experience positive changes in his life. In his own words Anthony said; ***“I dropped out of school after completing my S4 exams because my mother and grandmother couldn’t afford to continue paying my school fees. By then my father had many homes and would pay school fees in shifts.”*** Having dropped out of school, I resorted to taking drugs and alcohol use to help me cope with the stress I was experiencing.

“It was hard and painful for me to see my former classmates continue to S5 while I stayed at home doing nothing productive.” The decision to start taking alcohol Anthony recalls wasn’t entirely his own to start with. Due to idleness he decided to join a group of friends within the village. It was through these friends that he was

introduced to taking alcohol and chewing mairungi (*commonly known as miraa*). As a result of the negative peer pressure Anthony’s life changed for the worse. Before long, Anthony was hooked onto the vice of alcoholism and chewing mairungi.

Fast forward to 2021, one of Anthony’s brother was enrolled into the Bonga project at Golden Boys Bonga center in Lukuri village. Much as he later dropped out, it was through his brother that Anthony got information about the TVET project. ***‘At first, I wanted to join Bonga but I was referred to apply for TVET by the Animator Mr. Ghost’***. He later on picked the TVET project applicants’ form from the RWC 2’s office at Bongilo and he was later shortlisted a few months into the training.

Anthony joined Bongilo center where he was taken through a series of topics by the Animator. Among all the topics however, one particular one had the greatest impact on Anthony. ***‘During the discussions about the dangers of drug abuse and alcohol use, I learnt more about the problems***



I would face if I didn't stop drinking alcohol and chewing mairungi. That day when we finished the session, I went home and decided to quit immediately." The friends Anthony used to drink with still tried to drag him back to his former vices but he was determined to not go back. Anthony recalls multiple occasions where his friends invited him to spend time with them but he turned down all the invitations. He instead invited them to join the TVET project but all efforts went to waste.



After successfully completing the life skills sessions, Anthony chose baking as his trade of choice for vocational skilling. Asked why he chose baking, a trade predominating thought to be for ladies, Anthony said; *'I looked around our village and there was no one making any baking products. I saw this as an opportunity and decided to take it up'* He later proceeded to complete the 3 months vocational training using the apprenticeship model with local artisans and graduated. He and a group of fellow trainees received an assorted package of start up materials which included 40 liters of cooking oil, 2 cartons of baking flour, blue band, 2 portable ovens, 2 sacks of charcoal, baking trays, baking cups among many others.

Left: Mr Anthony Muni mixing ingredients for baking.

Through the support received from RICE West Nile, Anthony and his colleagues set up a bakery at Kinyiba market in Zone 3 West to enable them earn a living from the skills acquired. However, Anthony was forced to move back to Zone 3 East after a short while because the distance he was covering on a daily basis to reach the bakery was far. *'I decided to start working from home instead of moving to Kinyiba market'*. Anthony now bakes queen cakes, doughnuts and mandazi among others. His major product out of all these is the doughnuts because many people enjoy them in Lukuri where he mostly operates.

From his baking business, Anthony has been able to contribute financially to the household needs for example buying food, contributing to his sister's school fees and his grandmother's medical expenses. *'My savings have also increased. Before starting my baking business, I used to save only 2,000/= but now I save 5,000/= every week. I have the capacity to save even more but the group limit is 5,000/= weekly'*. The young man saves with God's Love Saving Group in Lukuri and he is the Secretary of the group. He also plans on accumulating more money so that he can get back to complete his education. During his free time, the young ambitious man does farm, he likes farming sim sim because of the ready market it has within the district.

From Anthony's financial records, he earns 30,000/= as profit on average per week. Out of his earnings, he has been able to buy 1 basin and bucket and 40 liters of cooking oil to add to what he already had before.

Anthony aspires to be a trainer of baking in the future in addition to expanding his business to reach more places within and beyond the district.

The TVET project has positively contributed to the way his family perceives him. His mother is very proud of him and the community members are supportive of him as well. At home, Anthony has trained his younger sister how to mix the dough before making the doughnuts. He plans to acquire a baking table in the near future and other items to facilitate his business. ***“2 of my former friends with whom I used to drink now want me to train them to also be like me”***. Through the successes achieved by Anthony, many of his friends and community members have picked interest in joining a vocational skilling project.

Right: Anthony weeding his sim sim plantation.

