

Tuesday November 2, 2021

Photo caption: Sifa Esther at her vegetable stall in konyo-konyo market in Palorinya refugee settlement.

Turning adversity into victory.



Esther Sifa comes from South Sudanese, a Kakwa by tribe born on 16th June, 2004 is the 3rd born out of 11 children of her parents. Esther completed her primary eight level

from South Sudan before the civil war broke out in 2017 where they were forced to flee to Uganda for refugee in Palorinya refugee Settlement. She came with her father and her step mum since her biological mother separated with the father because of alcoholism and domestic violence. For girl child, education on body changes is important from the parents but it becomes a sad reality when none of the parents owns up to that responsibility. Esther was no exception to these horrors unveiling upon the girl child.

In a new environment, new friends, life was hard for Esther. The support she received from UNHCR to settle her and the family was one off. Furthermore, what the family was offering her was so minimal overweighing the basic demands. Through advice from one of the well-wishers, she enrolled for secondary education at Idiwa Secondary but later the school fees became too expensive that neither her nor the parents could afford which led to her dropping off before finishing a term.

The pressing needs as growth takes course opened on her every morning of a dark new day. Ranging from difficulty meeting her personal needs, unstable (healthy) relationship with the step mum and inadequate food in the family. With little hope, Esther decided to get married in 2019 to a man who met her needs in the beginning but later, all the support stopped after bearing her first child in the marriage. Life worsened and she eventually lost hope in the marriage but could not return to the parents since she left because of the difficulties she encountered.

In March, 2021 Esther Sifa joined the bonga program under Faith bonga center. Bonga 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'.

Esther started attending life skills sessions from Faith Bonga center where the opportunity to learn many things opened through but she got more interested in the saving component at the center upon reflecting on the financial challenges encountered right from the day they arrived in Uganda as refugees.

"I heard about this program from my block leader, I went to RWC 1 and later applied for it ...I thought I could make it ..."

- Sifa Esther

To Esther the life skills sessions on family planning, food and nutrition made her realize there is light at the end of the tunnel. The sessions are conducted to prepare the program beneficiaries for life challenges and forthcoming vocational training designed in the project.

Esther started saving the little monies she gets after meeting the family needs. After saving 54,500 Ugandan shillings, she picked a loan of Ugshs. 50,000 to start a vegetable vending business. The little business has enabled her to support her family needs and focused on growth to ensure that she pays back the loan and starts saving for her child's education since she missed the chance of going for higher education. Esther has progressed gradually with her business up to an extend of earning at least Ugshs. 3,000 on daily basis.

Very excited to RICE West Nile and the funding partner for the life changing opportunity, Esther appeals to fellow adolescents in her walk of life to desist from the fear of making losses when they start operating their own business and take up positive challenges and turn them into opportunities.