

MALIMU

Ignite your child's passion this holiday

Keep them occupied

The third term holidays are here and in many homes, children are doing nothing, which is risky. To avoid falling in this trap, parents should enrol children in various productive ventures to keep the occupied, writes **RITAH MUKASA**

It is holiday time, a period when children are supposed to be home, but at Grace Villa home in Kabale district, the compound is teeming with children of different age groups and classes; from kindergarten to university. The home accommodates 200 children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Girls do chores, after which they engage in activities such as tailoring, sports and in film, which has taken them places under their brand Grace Villa Wood.

At the home, the youngsters are honing their creativity in music, dance and drama. Besides, girls as young as 10 years have become fashion designers. The home teams have won many trophies in football, golf and tennis.

Ruth Kendegye Ndyabahika, the home's founder, says the children also engage in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) activities, debates, mentorships, farming, weaving, baking and catering.

When it comes to film-making, she says the children do most of the work: writing scripts, editing, directing, camera work, acting, producing and designing costumes.

They have so far produced six films; five short ones and one of full length. Ndyabahika, a child psychologist,



Esther Murungi devotes most of her time to reading in her library. She authored three books

says film is transforming the girls' lives as international filmmakers have visited the home and hired some of the youngsters for roles.

In 2023, 24-year-old Desire Kirabo, an actress, visited the Netflix headquarters in Los Gatos, California, where she met the chief executive officer, Reed Hastings.

"We discussed my future in film and my desire to see more movies from

Grace Villa Wood showcased on Netflix," she says.

James Bagyenzi, a filmmaker, implores parents to enrol children in film, saying it has immense opportunities.

"Just one film can employ hundreds of people: directors to actors, costume designers to runners who keep the wheels turning. Besides, film boosts confidence, enhances leadership, listening and decision making skills."

However, he urges parents to be cautious on safety.

"Ensure your child is in the right hands and keep a keen eye on them," he says.

Away from Grace home, parents are planning different activities for their children.

SKILLING A VACIST

Zahara Namanda, the team lead at Africa Education and Leadership Initiative, a non-governmental organisation, has a sister, Yvonne, who has just completed Senior Six. She loves fashion and Namanda plans to enrol her in driving school and also

fly her to Nairobi, where she will visit different fashion schools.

Namanda says it is important for a parent to consider the child's passion and needs before enrolling them in any skills programme.

She says when Yvonne was young, she loved crocheting. She would then spend her free time on YouTube, learning to crochet different items.

So, Namanda bought for her all the materials she needed and also got her a mentor.

"I could facilitate her to meet her mentor in Bukoto, Kampala every Saturday," she says.

This is not the first holiday activity for Yvonne. She has also been in several boot camps, including *Ekisaakate* of Buganda kingdom, which have boosted her confidence and helped her to find her identity.

Rian Bogere, the founder of Women of Worth, a non-governmental organisation, advises busy parents to enrol their children in mentorship programmes.

Yvonne Muhairwe, a mother of two, agrees, saying she is grateful for the impact mentorships have had on her daughters' lives. They have taken on



Madeleine Ddembe, a pupil at Sir Apollo Kaggwa Primary School, is growing vegetables this holiday. Such activities build resilience among children

PHOTOS BY RITAH MUKASA

KARAMOJA Schools produce food champions

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PARENTING HOW ONLINE PREDATORS TRAP YOUR CHILDREN

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leadership roles and have become confident.

Charity Abadhi, a mentor with Engender Girls Mentorship in Kira, Wakiso district, says through mentorship, children learn to believe in themselves, navigate social media pressure and are guided along the career path they want to take in life.

They also learn to discern between good and bad friendships, all the while focusing on building confidence, resilience and good character.

However, Bogere warns that, "Not all camps are good. Some introduce values that conflict with the family beliefs. This is why I select camps for my children with great care. I ask a lot of questions: What is the camp's purpose? What values do they teach? What activities are planned?"

Samalie Batusa, another mentor, cautions parents to be careful.

"Don't just enrol your children because your friend or relative recommended," she says.

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"First find out who the organisers are, their mission and ideologies. Are they church-based or business-oriented?" she says.

APPRENTICESHIP

Another good activity for children, especially those whose parents own workshops and other businesses, is an apprenticeship programme. They will learn an art, trade, or job while still in school.

It can be hands-on training at a carpentry, garage, bakery, graphics design hub or tailoring workshop and law firm. They can also join a civil engineering firm and gradually learn to draw plans, build, do plumbing and wiring, according to Muhammad Nsereko, an architect who runs a holiday programme that equips children with construction skills.

To him, the earlier children gain skills, the better professionals they become when they grow up.

During that course, the trainer will instil discipline, responsibility, and a strong work ethic in the child. They will also learn time management, improve self-esteem and independence; traits they need in future.

Grace Nafuna, a marketer, swears by the apprenticeships, saying they have shaped her into the professional she is.

Children reading at one of the community libraries in Kampala. Such activities keep children engaged and enhance their creativity



PHOTO BY RITAH MUKASA

She is creative and has innovated her own skincare products. By keeping children busy, she says, they discover their passions and stay productive.

Also, for years, Edith Nayera, a counsellor, has been equipping children with handcraft and cooking skills to keep them busy.

She says: "This training keeps children away from bad company. They also earn and learn to socialise with others as well."

Bogere echoes Namanda's opinion, saying: "Apprenticeship is not only about getting children into formal workplaces. You have to first identify what excites your child. Is it art, technology, or beauty? Also, ensure the programme is not overly

demanding. That child must have time to relax and also be able to do other holiday activities."

Similarly, these programmes are also important for children with special needs as they prepare them for independence.

Veronica Matinyi, a special needs specialist, recommends tailoring and fashion design, computer programming, handicrafts skills such as knitting, bead work plus film production.

"But also, you can find them something to do in the family business like in your shop, restaurant or farm. Do not confine them at home. With those skills, the children will become more disciplined, confident and responsible."

Bernard Mujuni, the

commissioner for equity and rights at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, says skills such as shoe making and tailoring are convenient for special needs children, especially those with mobility problems. They just sit in one place.

LIBRARY

Libraries are some of the best places where children can keep busy.

Lilian Tibasiima and her husband are intentional about raising their 11-year-old daughter, Esther Murungi, off the Internet.

They engage her more in chores and reading. And for that, they turned their garage into a well-equipped library for her.

After chores and breakfast,

TEACH ROBOTICS, CODING

Arinaitwe Rugyendo, the founder of the Young Engineers STEM Education Programme, says teaching coding or robotics to young people, including four-year-olds, nurtures their capacity to absorb new concepts.

"The training stimulates their cognitive development, enhances their creativity, and fosters a sense of curiosity and innovation," he explains.

Rugyendo says children engaged in such activities gain resilience, confidence, high order thinking, and learn essential problem-solving skills.

"We must also remember the consequences of the industrial revolutions in which many professions vanished very quickly from the labour market. Similarly now, as we enter the 4th and 5th industrial revolutions or the engineering era, the effect is going to be much stronger. As time passes by, there are fewer and fewer tasks and services that a robot cannot do better than us human beings," he says.

Rugyendo says robots are doing everything with precision. "They can work for many hours, for many shifts, they never get tired, they never complain, they never ask for a salary increase. If they get broken, it's not so bad they can easily get duplicated or repaired. What this means is that soon, we will see less and less from current occupations that exist today."

Murungi is in her library where she reads, colours and enjoys card games with her 15-year-old cousin.

"We have plenty of books, games and puzzles," Tibasiima says.

The couple also plans to open the library to the community so that other children can also benefit.

"I engage her in spelling exercises, Bible puzzles or colouring. We compete and I put the drawings on my status and people choose the winner, but Esther always wins," Tibasiima says.

Murungi has also authored three books and she recently won the national Bible Quiz competition, where she was crowned Bible Queen. Tibasiima attributes this milestone to the activities

Murungi engages in while inside her library.

When she gets bored of the puzzles and readers, she switches to cards that have mathematics, English and science content.

Last week, Tibasiima bought her five Christmas activity books which Murungi is using to create Christmas recipes and decorations.

Last year, she used such books to prepare meals for the family. She also decorated the Christmas tree using own decorations. Every Wednesday, the couple buys a copy of *New Vision* partly to get *Toto* magazine for Murungi, an ardent reader.

"She participates in all the activities therein; the puzzles, paintings and quiz," she says.