

Learners with spina bifida register improvement in PLE

By John Masaba

The strong performance of learners with spina bifida in the recently released Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results demonstrates that children with disabilities can excel when supported, persons with disability stakeholders have said. They made the remarks last week in Rubaga division, Kampala, during a meeting to celebrate the PLE performance of learners living with spina bifida.

Spina bifida is a permanent birth defect in which the spine fails to close properly, often resulting in paralysis, limited mobility and bladder and bowel control challenges.

Winifred Nabikolo, a project officer at the Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association Uganda (SHAU), said stakeholders felt encouraged by the children's performance.

"For many years, they have shown great potential, and some schools are making an effort to include them and

cater for their needs," Nabikolo said.

THE STARS

Among the learners who excelled was Amos Carlton Kituuka of Kawemba Preparatory School-Ggangu, who scored aggregate 12 and Pauline Atusabira of Wakiso Classic Primary School who passed with aggregate 13. Gerald Nyanzi sat from Munyonyo Parents School and got aggregates 12.

GAPS

Nabikolo said despite the achievements, gaps remain in school infrastructure, particularly facilities that support learners with continence (inability to control movement of bowels and bladder) challenges. She explained that many children with spina bifida require clean and private spaces to use catheters.

"These children have no control over continence and need safe places to manage themselves, but such facilities are lacking in many schools," she said.

According to a recent report, an



Winifred Nabikolo

estimated 1,400 children are born with spina bifida every year in Uganda, although many cases go undetected.

SECONDARY SCHOOL GAPS

Nabikolo said while inclusive education has improved at primary level, the situation in secondary schools remains challenging. She said many learners move from primary schools with ramps and disability-friendly facilities to secondary

schools that lack basic accessibility infrastructure.

She also cited limited sensitisation in secondary schools, which often leads to stigma and misunderstanding among peers, especially when learners frequently leave class due to medical needs.

SHAU urged the Ministry of Education and Sports to strengthen guidance for learners with disabilities, particularly during registration for national examinations.

"We appreciate the system for registering candidates with disabilities, but many teachers do not guide these learners properly. Some are registered as normal candidates and miss out on support they are entitled to," Nabikolo said.

She appealed for stronger collaboration between the ministry and disability organisations to improve data collection and targeted interventions.

"If performance data captured different forms of disability, it would help identify gaps and inform better

support for these learners," she said.

Nabikolo also questioned why UNEB only publishes results for three or four disability categories, noting that this often fails to capture the unique needs of learners with spina bifida, thereby limiting the level of support provided to them during examinations.

UNEB RESPONDS

Jennifer Kalule, the spokesperson of the Uganda National Examinations Board, advised disability associations to write to the board executive director, clearly outlining learners' needs to enable the board to review their classification.

LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES

Amos Kituuka Carlton, a learner with spina bifida at Boston High School in Entebbe, said his transition to secondary school was eased by support from school administrators who understood his condition and made special examination arrangements.