

A turn to learn

Educate a deaf child in Zimbabwe



A deaf baby looks just like any other child, and many deaf children develop like any other child in the first few years of life. But when the family expect the child to start to talk, and he doesn't, families are thrown into confusion.

Mai Eddie (Eddie's mum) explains what happened to her:

"I knew there was something wrong, so we went to his paternal Grandparents, and they took us around traditional healers and prophets, but to no avail. We just went from place to place wasting time, because there was no improvement. The family would not accept that even though Eddie had special needs he still needed to go to school."

Widespread stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities still exists in Zimbabwe. Mothers often find themselves alone with the problem of finding appropriate help for their child with a disability.

Mai Eddie persevered: "I registered him at a preschool but when the teacher saw him, she told me about Nzeve Deaf Centre, and advised me to go there. At Nzeve they did a hearing test and found Eddie was deaf. I explained the services at Nzeve to Eddie's father, but he was not interested. He would not accept that it would be worthwhile educating Eddie. However, we started attending the preschool classes. I felt joy in my heart as I began to see a change in my child! His behaviour improved as we learnt to communicate with each other. I understood he was frustrated- he had something to say but no way to communicate before this. I was helped by talking to other mothers in a similar situation, I started to learn sign language."

The preschool programme at Nzeve includes mothers and their deaf children. The mother- child pairs are taught by both hearing and deaf teachers and learn in a common accessible language - sign language.

Mai Eddie continues, "I learnt sign language and then I taught my relatives to use sign language. I knew it would be important for Eddie to go to my parents in school holidays with his siblings, so I wanted my family to be able to communicate with him even when I was not there. In addition, I have learnt so many skills at Nzeve which are helping me support my child and family. I learnt to make drinks, detergents and to rear chickens and rabbits. I want to provide for my children and my parents are committed to help him too."

When Eddie graduated from preschool, his father was interested and wanted to know what his son could do. He could not believe that a deaf child could go to school! Eddie has done well and was making good progress in school before the lockdown shut all schools and stopped him learning more in a classroom where sign language made the lessons accessible.

Eddie and his classmates have been out of school for 10 weeks. Due to the lockdown, their parents have not been able to trade and there is no help from the government in Zimbabwe. 90% people in Zimbabwe are unemployed and become informal traders. They survive through small income generating activities. Many deaf children have not been able to communicate with their families during this time. Many deaf children in Manicaland Province live so far away from the school they are forced to board -an expense which most families cannot afford. Children in Zimbabwe must pay school fees, buy uniforms, textbooks, stationery and sometimes pay something to the teacher. Imagine the isolation they are feeling now and the challenge of convincing their parents to send them back to school once they open!

Milestones:

 <p>Identify deaf children out of school.</p>	 <p>Provide home learning materials</p>	 <p>Train parents of deaf children in business skills.</p>	 <p>Identify income generating activities</p>	 <p>Provide inputs for improved income generating activities.</p>	 <p>Pay school fees - get the children back to school!</p>
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EDUCATE A DEAF CHILD IN ZIMBABWE

Education for deaf children opens opportunity for life. Families start to understand the capabilities of their deaf child. Parents develop acceptance, gain financial stability through better business practise and then their confidence in parenting grows. Nzeve parents, deaf staff and volunteers work together to support families who are new to the deaf experience; keeping the impact cycle going.

So many fathers are like Eddie's- they find it hard to understand how important it is to send deaf children to school. But Eddie's mother is standing up for Eddie.

Will you join her in helping deaf children get back to school?



