

## **“FAL”, A SPARK OF HOPE IN OGOOMA.**

**Slogan: *Transforming communities through education.***

Well, we wouldn't let the year pass by without talking about this amazing program



that TOUCH Ministries started around December 2018. Well it's been a year and a few months since then and it's time to see how far the program has grown and impacted the lives of community members. In this article, we are going to talk about the program and its activities, the challenges faced by it and some of the

recommended solutions. We shall also talk about the way of life of the learners and how the program looks forward to attracting other community members to it and improve their lives. We shall also mention visions of 2020 and how to make the



program even better next year. And not forgetting the amazing testimonies of the learners.

***Some of us may be wondering what FAL is.***

**FAL.** Is an abbreviation for Functional Adult Literacy. It is a set of practical numeracy and literacy skills taught to adults that did not get the chance to learn how to read

write and even count. The study program in TOUCH Ministries is divided into two categories depending on the learners' level of knowledge: Class one and two. The learners in class one, are completely ignorant of how to read, write and count. So, special attention is given to them. Class two is comprised of learners who are fairly knowledgeable of how to read, write and count. Generally, students are given

lessons on entrepreneurship, sanitation and hygiene, HIV/AIDS awareness, improved farming methods, family planning and importance of child spacing, how to fight poverty and many more. On top of these are special bible study classes led by the reverends in TOUCH Ministries.

***The birth of FAL in TOUCH and how it is meant to improve lives of caretakers of the children, and community in general.***



Following the mission and vision statement of TOUCH Ministries, FAL was introduced in order to **equip people** with reading skills so that they could be able to read and understand the word of God. It was also meant to provide the support staff of TOUCH Ministries with literacy and numeracy skills in order to **improve their efficiency** as well as **their standards of living**.



The program is meant to **aid evangelism** and simplify the work of the preachers since **cell leaders would learn to read** and also preach to their neighbors. This program is a clear path towards **achieving** the *mission* and *vision* statement of the organization. And on top of that, provide **general knowledge** that can be used in the daily lives of the community members.



With the nursery and primary school around, parents can learn and even help their children out with homework and **good mentorship**.

Other aims of this program may include: **reduction on the high levels of illiteracy** in the community. **Kill the dependence syndrome** and its dangerous effects. **Creation of awareness on HIV/AIDS** and

how to solve certain issues in the community: poverty, domestic violence, famine, family neglect, child marriages and early child pregnancies. Provision of knowledge to adults on how to build and improve their income generating activities. Creation of an education culture in the community. To increase the ability of adults to make informed decisions. To build Christian values in people by creating the ability of community members to read and understand the bible on their own.

### **About The Target group and their community.**

This program targets illiterate adult youth, People With Disabilities (PWD) and the elderly.

Ogooma is a parish in Ngero Sub County, Kumi district. The parish covers four villages: Ogooma village, Ominai village, Atekwa village and Okwi village. The area in general suffers with poverty and under development. The community has a very high population of illiterate adults, elders and people living with disabilities. FAL has students from Ogooma as well as the neighboring district and villages in NGORA. With more women participating in the program than men.

### ***The state of FAL in the community.***

***It is crucial to note that TOUCH Ministries is the only available centre for Adult literacy, and compared to the number of illiterate adults in the region, the program needs to be strengthened: strategies need to be made in order to reach out to the greater percentage of the beneficiaries that need to be enrolled in the FAL class of TOUCH.***

The students however, are active and eager to learn something new. They even put aside some activities and walk long distances just to get to class early. The pioneer FAL class will surely motivate the other population that is reluctant to join the program when they see the improvements in their lives. Already, some people are eagerly waiting for the following year in order to enroll for the program.



### ***The pioneers.***

The learners pay 20,000 ugx per term/semester. The fees are used to buy materials for class and to pay the facilitators.

**Table 1.**

<i><b>class</b></i>	<i><b>number</b></i>	<i><b>M</b></i>	<i><b>F</b></i>
<i><b>one</b></i>	<i><b>42</b></i>	<i><b>2</b></i>	<i><b>40</b></i>
<i><b>two</b></i>	<i><b>17</b></i>	<i><b>2</b></i>	<i><b>15</b></i>
<i><b>total</b></i>	<i><b>59</b></i>	<i><b>4</b></i>	<i><b>55</b></i>

Table 1 illustrates the total number of students still in the program. We only included the number of students who continued studying and excluded the 20 that enrolled and dropped out. The program does not have any student with a disability enrolled. However, most of them are adult youth and elderly. All the students are serious and have the great passion to learn. Later in the article, we shall see some of the amazing motivations of the students and why they make all the efforts to study and complete the program. They study despite having numerous problems and challenges.

### ***The teachers.***



There are four teachers running the program. They all had training in October 2018. Two teachers are assigned to each class. For class one, teacher Janet Apedel and Tr. Joseph Opolot. For class two, Tr. Among Sarah and Tr. Mwanik John. And Mr. Joseph Opolot as the team leader.



### ***FAL activities.***

So far, the program has few activities in place. The major activity is learning, awareness creation, bible study and home visits. All these activities are very important in changing the general wellness of the students. Each activity is planned for and carried out by the teachers and trained personnel to ensure that the program is effective and efficient. The classes are held every Saturday from 2pm to 5pm in TOUCH primary school. However, when the pupils are having holidays, the program runs at the same time from Monday to Friday.

### ***The observations from the home visits are amazing!***



This activity was set up in order to check the impact of the program in the families of the students as well as their neighbors. Here, the teachers are able to understand the various challenges and problems affecting students on their way to and back from school.

However, the students seem to pay less attention to the challenges they face at home or on their way to school. Most of them set their eyes on the future of their homes since they are already developing and living happier than they did before FAL.

This week, FAL team leader and TOUCH volunteer Peace set off to visit homes of all the FAL students. They were amazed at how changed and motivated the students are. From these observations, we'll see that most of the aims of the program have been achieved already. The pioneers are making a difference in their homes.



### ***Observation 1.***

99% of the FAL students have developed business mindsets and are fleeing from the dependence syndrome. Many of the students have started selling vegetables and fruits from their garden. Most of them couldn't do this because they were unable to count. Those who had small businesses often made losses due to the inability to count well. They have figured out ways to make money from resources available at home. Although, they struggle to climb up in profits but they surely testify that their lives have changed. Their levels of creativity have hoped up and they are not sleeping hungry anymore. Learners have been seen laying bricks, selling food items, making pots, making ropes from sisal, selling firewood and making charcoal.



### ***Observation 2.***

80% of the students have improved their farming methods and are preventing famine. In class, FAL students are taught how to farm better and utilize the limited land. In the homes, students have planted crops in the spaces available and no longer complain that they have no land for food. We have seen food grown as fences and home decorations. This has promoted balanced diets and prevents hunger or malnutrition.



### ***Observation 3***

Utilization of natural energy and technology. Some of the students actually have utilized solar energy and use radios to stay updated about what is going on around them. They also use their radios to listen to the teachings from the TOUCH Radio Ministry program every Saturday. It is crucial to note that some of the homes of the students are cell ministry points and this actually grows most of the neighbors and cell leaders spiritually.







*She loves to share what she learns with her husband. They are happy in their marriage.*



**Observation 4.** All students are putting what they learn to practice at home. All homes have Improvement of sanitation and hygiene. All homes now have toilets with a jerry can of water next to it. The students also have

beautiful stands set up for their utensils to dry in order to avoid diseases like typhoid. The students have beautified their compounds and homes with flowers and plants. Most of them have also planted trees to protect the natural environment.







### **Observation 5**

All the FAL students are **open minded and ready to learn**. Most of them said that they have learnt so many things they never imagined. For example, what makes a good home and how to escape poverty. The students have shown great interest in learning more. They have suggested that they be taught more on entrepreneurship

and language. They want to learn English as well in order to communicate freely with it being the official working language in Uganda.

### **Observation 6.**

The students have created an **exemplary image to their children**. Most of them guide their little ones who haven't started school yet and children



write on the compound showing interest in education. some of them are not able to pay for school fees to take their children or grand-children to school ,but teach them basics whenever they come back home. FAL students are making us proud and the changes they all have shown at home give us courage to support their process of education in this program since they have potential of changing and reducing the high rates of dependence in the village.

### **Observation 7.**

**Desire for saving has developed.** At the field, we asked the students what they needed the program to introduce. Most of the students requested for a savings group to be initiated. This is amazing because the savings group would solve various issues faced by students and actually fund interesting activities for them in the future.



This means that students will actually develop a developmental mindset since they can save up and be able to implement various ideas that they could be having.

There are so many more positive attitudes portrayed by the FAL students. ***However, the program and the learners are facing certain challenges.***

***Learners are stigmatized.*** Since adult education is new in the community, the



people are only familiar with children going to school. Seeing adults and the elderly rush to school is new and they imagine that it is a waste of time and resources. This factor contributed to the high number of learners who dropped out of the program. To solve this, the program has managed to improve the lives of the learners at home through teaching of

topics that have changed the homes of the students. However, this only proves to the neighbors of the students that the program is really productive. The stigma is still there and students are continuously mocked and discouraged on their way to school. The solution to this could be awarding of the best students in areas taught in order to motivate other learners and community members to seek knowledge.

***Lack of Ateso bibles.*** One of the major aims of the program was to promote bible reading. But



almost all the students lack bibles

and therefore cannot perfect their reading skills. We could provide more ateso bibles to the students as they graduate.







**Poor sight.** Most of the students complain of poor sight and they cannot afford reading glasses or even eye check-up. Most of them can only read from afar. Those with bibles claim that the words are too small for them. I believe other factors are responsible for this. For example, women mostly cook with firewood which produces a lot of smoke that

they inhale. This affects their health especially the sight. Solution to this could be to introduce classes that teach women affordable and healthier ways to cook. Touch will be in contact with the Lions club of Kumi Central which provides free services for eye check-up. However, acquisition of the spectacles will be upon the learners since they are costly.



**Distance to school.** Most learners complain about the distance from home to school. Since some of them come from neighboring villages, walking to school is very tiresome especially for their age. It discourages them from attending classes regularly as well as to continue with the program. To add on the distance, their **homes are inaccessible**. They are too narrow and bushy with thorns. It was even challenging for the field team to reach out to them because of this. However, we are glad that we managed to check on all the students.



**People expect a lot from the program.** On the first day of FAL, over 140 people enrolled for the program with high expectations. This is because the region faces the dependence syndrome. People came for the program

expecting gifts and donations which wasn't the case. And because of that, there was a dramatic drop in the number of students in the program. Well, thankfully, FAL is also showing signs that it can fight dependence by creating entrepreneurial mindsets in the people.

***Inadequate Funds for sustainability.*** The FAL program has kicked off successfully. But it struggles when it comes to finance. The only source of funding for the program so far is tuition fees from the students. **This can be solved by introducing other sources of funding and resource mobilization for the program.**



***What are the students saying?***

The students are very grateful for the initiation of such a program. They are now able to read and write. Students have certain requests. They desire to have a form of identification as FAL students. They are requesting to have T-shirts or any type of representation as a FAL class. The students

want to start a savings group in order to support each other and be able to get loans from it.



***Future plans.***

The program team has already set up goals and visions for the next year. **Introduction of other programs.** The students are requesting for the introduction of more programs for example, English language classes, modern farming methods, and more entrepreneurial skills. **Invitation of counselors and external facilitators.**

The students need to be exposed to various bright minds of the region. The program is looking at inviting external facilitators. **Introduction of field/site study**



tours. So that learners will visit model homes and be able to exchange knowledge and ideas.



***Ideas and points to consider.***

Most of the FAL learners are women and the elderly. Students should form an association where they can support each other's rights. The club/association will be owned and strengthened by the students. It will also have a local leader on their side so that they

are able to reach out to all the women and elderly suffering from various issues.

Following the issue where women and rights of the elderly in Ogooma are abused, this club or association can support and protect them emotionally.

With this said, I'll conclude by saying that the FAL program is a spark of hope. Within



a few years, this spark will become a flame or fire that consumes various problems in the community and promotes happiness in the village.

***We are actually doing it!  
One hut at a time.***

***Written with passion by Kaladi  
Peace Theresa.***