



St. Francis Health Care Services is an indigenous non-profit organization providing holistic human services in Eastern Uganda. In the last 25 years, St. Francis has grown from a reactive facility for fragmentary HIV& AIDS treatment to a holistic center where prevention, health management, spiritual healing, economic empowerment and family development are the hinges of the organization.

Their family development goals wisely focus on giving families the knowledge, confidence and skills to access available services.

St.-Francis Health Care Services and its program Omoana provide child friendly services for HIV positive youths. The challenges faced by young people with HIV differ significantly from those encountered by adults. They need special care and attention and have recently been identified as a group that has been neglected in the global response to HIV & AIDS. The supportive response by St. Francis teams when Uganda ended the world's longest COVID-19 lockdowns in January 2022 show the thoroughness and effectiveness of their version of care and attention.

On January 10, 2022, when millions of Ugandan children returned to school, St. Francis Health Care Services was ready. St. Francis staff ensured schools fees were paid, bought uniforms and books, and sent village health teams door-to-door to verify how many children were returning. While children in urban areas might have benefitted from government lessons provided through radio and newspapers during lockdown, the 300 rural primary students St. Francis supports had received no formal education in two years.

Lockdowns had taken a toll on the families, 30 per cent of whom are headed by subsistence farmers already struggling with food and financial insecurity. St. Francis' program teams feared that after two years away from school, and with a taste of the small income that comes from casual labour, some families would choose to keep their children at home to work. Others, headed by grandmothers caring for their orphaned grandchildren, sent them to live with other relatives for support.

For girls who missed two years of the security and meals that school provides there was another challenge: the lure of predatory older men who promised them a path out of poverty, and St. Francis health teams saw an increase in teenage pregnancies during lockdown. St. Francis monitored attendance records and worked with officials to create safe spaces for students who needed them, including girls who might need to breastfeed. Thanks to St. Francis' persistence, about 94% of students returned to school. After the world's longest COVID-19 shutdown, St. Francis laid the groundwork for a well-supported transition back to the classroom.

Abeja, Faith and Enock are three young people living with HIV. In this video they share with us their struggle, their challenges and their hope for the future. Mainly, they teach us that it is possible to live a normal life, even when you are born with HIV. <https://youtu.be/l5bpLzCcsbM>

Also check out or follow their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/stfrancishealthcareservicesuganda>

Information taken directly from: [St. Francis Health Care Services website](#) and [2022 Year in Review - Stephen Lewis Foundation](#)

