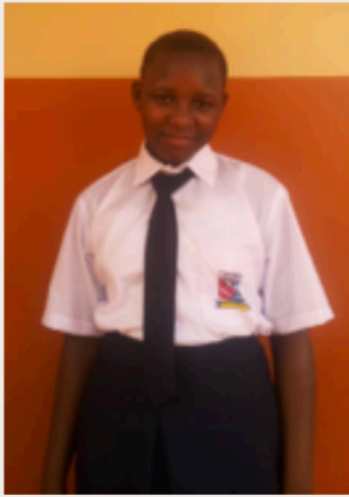


## SPOTLIGHT ON A STUDENT IN NEED OF A SPONSOR



**NAME:** Holiver Airiako

**AGE:** 15

**GRADE:** Senior Two

**ABOUT:** My name is Holiver Airiako. I was born on June 15, 2003. I am from a family of six children. My father died in 2005 when I was two-years-old. I live with my mother who is very sick with HIV/AIDS. She makes local brew to earn a living. My other four siblings didn't get a chance to finish school.

I would like to become a nurse in order to help my community. I hope to finish my secondary education and then join nursing school. I know I have to study hard and respect my teachers to achieve my goals. My favorite subjects in school are biology, agriculture, and chemistry. My most difficult subject is fine art because it is hard for me to draw. In my free time I like playing games, soccer, and volleyball. Thank you for your help.

## AWEGYS GRADUATES GIVE BACK

In Uganda, O.B. (Old Boy) and O.G. (Old Girl) refer to the nicknames former students use for one another once they have graduated from secondary school. During Awegys's ten-year anniversary celebration, a number of O.B.s and O.G.s returned to Awegys to celebrate and thank Mtaala and Awegys for their support.

Among those students was Ali, an Awegys graduate and furniture maker. Using the vocational skills acquired during his sponsored education at Awegys, Ali has opened a small furniture shop. He also makes furniture for the school and hopes to teach basic carpentry to the students.

Also giving back was a former Awegys student, Mary, who has returned to Awegys as a cook and teacher of catering. She prepared a Ugandan sweet snack for us called "Daddies," a treat made of fried dough and sweetened with sugar. They are addictive, especially fresh from a pot of oil sizzling over a charcoal fire, which is how we enjoyed them.



**Mary, an Awegys graduate and former sponsored student, now teaches catering at the school.**



**Former students return for Awegys ten-year reunion to celebrate, give testimony, and thanks.**

During the celebration, a number of Awegys graduates provided testimony to the community about the support they received from Awegys School and Mtaala. Included among them was Sharifah, pictured far left in the above photo. After graduating with Mtaala's help, Sharifah went on to become a primary school teacher. She said, "Leading Community Reading Day every Saturday at Awegys School inspired me to become a teacher." Her friend Gertrude, another sponsored student, also went on to become a primary school teacher.

Phillips, who studied nursing after graduating from Awegys, worked for a government clinic. When he found out an orphanage needed a nurse, Phillips transferred to the orphanage, citing that his experience at Awegys School taught him to give back to the community.

Mtaala means learning in Swahili. What more valuable lesson could we hope to learn than the importance of giving to others in need?

# A FORMER CHILD SOLDIER TELLS HIS STORY

## JIMMY'S STORY



Jimmy Odong, an orphan from Kitgum, Northern Uganda, was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group, in 2005. He was fourteen years old.

He was a porter for one week before being trained to fight: to use a machete in hand-to-hand combat, to load and shoot a machine gun, to fire a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, and to lay land mines. As soon

as his training was complete, he was ordered to fight on the frontline. In the words of his Commander, "Now the LRA has given you the power to kill someone; you must do it." And if Jimmy refused, he would be killed.

Jimmy went on to fight for many months, and killing quickly became routine. During this time he was wounded twice in combat, shot in the right leg and the left arm. Though his leg healed, his arm did not. He was not given adequate medical attention, and risked losing it. His platoon's surrender came just in time.

He and thirteen other young rebel soldiers were taken, first, to government barracks, where they were questioned for one week about their time in the bush, then, to a reception center in Gulu that cared for returnees – those recently escaped or freed. His arm was, at long last, treated. He was also fed well and encouraged to rest.

For the first few weeks there Jimmy barely spoke, other than to utter his name, and he never smiled. He was numb inside, and had been for a long time. However, as the weeks became months he started to feel more, receiving counseling and emotional support from those who worked at the center, and it was not long before his smile finally returned.

From there, Jimmy went back to live with his grandmother at an IDP camp (Internally Displaced People). Jimmy was unable to sleep unless there was a bible under his pillow and a crucifix around his neck. He suffered from nightmares, and each time he had one, he prayed he would not have another.

Eventually, a representative from Mtaala Foundation met Jimmy at his home in the camp. Jimmy shared his dream of attending school. Mtaala



Foundation enrolled Jimmy in Mtaala Foundation's partner school in Kigo, Uganda: Awegys Christian Secondary School. In school, Jimmy has emerged as a model student and dedicated leader. And these days, he is rarely seen without a smile.



Now in school, Jimmy participates in Awegys School's weekly Community Reading Day. Community Reading Day is the students' way of "paying it forward" by reading, singing, and dancing with the younger village children every Saturday.

To read more students' stories, visit our gallery page at [www.mtaala.org](http://www.mtaala.org).



# IN HER OWN WORDS

## BEATRICE'S STORY



Beatrice poses for a photograph at home in the IDP camp right after she found out she had a sponsor.

My name is Amyera Beatrice Cathy, a Ugandan by nationality, and by tribe, an Acholi. I am seventeen years old and I live in Gulu district found in Northern Uganda.

Life lost meaning to me when my parents passed on, leaving me lost in a vast world. The Kony war in Northern Uganda robbed many families of parents, brothers, sisters, and children. My dear parents did not escape it.

My mother was killed in 1997 together with her friends when they went to collect firewood in a nearby forest. It was a very painful experience for me. The world became very uncomfortable for me. My mother was murdered brutally, but first she was tortured. Her mouth was sliced off, then her arm was cut off from her body. She cried for help, but no one could help her.

Some of her friends were killed too, and some were taken by the soldiers to be their wives. My mother died a painful death. This account was narrated to me by my grandmother, because when it happened I was very young.

Life went on after this. The war did not end. It was a nightmare. We spent sleepless nights in the forests. I lived with my grandmother. She became my mother. We fled from the rebels almost everyday and took shelter under trees when it rained.

I wanted the war to end but it didn't. My father was an army man who was helping the government fight the Lord's Resistance Army. In one of the exchanges with Kony's soldiers, he was unfortunately shot dead. All my parents were now gone. I was left with my grandmother to live a life of sorrow and pain.

Having no where else to go, we went to stay in an Internally Displaced People camp, but the war still did not end. My grandmother registered for help from the World Food Program so as to get food and other forms of assistance from the government of Uganda.

"Live in the world but never allow the world to live in you." This saying resounded in my mind. I had lost all. I was eight years old when I began going to school and despite all the difficulties, I excelled in school. However, when I reached primary seven, my grandmother couldn't afford the amount of money needed at school. I sold pancakes when I was not at school to top up the money my grandmother paid and was able to pay the fees. I did my primary leaving exam and left for break.

Two months went by when my former teacher sent my uncle to our place to inform my grandmother about Mtaala Foundation and to prepare because the following day they were to come to interview us. I wasn't at home when this news came and when I came back, my grandmother told me about it.

I was dumfounded. I thank God for the miracle he performed. The following day officials from Mtaala Foundation came and interviewed my grandmother and I. My grandmother was overjoyed. She spoke to the director Mr. Wegoye in Kiswahili. They became close friends. He took photographs of us and told us I would be part of their Sponsorship Program. He encouraged me and promised me an education.

I was very grateful and even anxious when I heard the school was near Kampala. I was speechless and all I could do was thank him and give glory to God for such a wonderful opportunity.



Now at Awegys Secondary School, Beatrice reads to local village children every Saturday at Community Reading Day.

Beatrice wrote this story on her own. The editor of this newsletter made a few changes, including: adding commas, dividing paragraphs, and clarifying.

