

Once Vulnerable, Now Hopeful and Empowered



"I had lost hope and was doing nothing but roaming around the village," said 16-year-old Joyce from Luwero, Uganda. The second child of the three siblings, Joyce said, "My mother died when I was six years old then I lived with my father, a butcher who never provided any basic needs for us including school fees. He was drunk all the time, mistreated and beat us." Joyce and her siblings left school and went to live with their 100-year-old grandmother who could not support them." Joyce collected mangoes by the road to feed her grandmother and siblings.

Selected to participate in the Children's AIDS Fund International's Smart Girls program offering vulnerable girls vocational and life skills, Joyce attended knitting school where she learned skills like tailoring, knitting sweaters, skirts and blouses. After graduating she now works at the school and also got a job with a company in the nearby town.

"It never occurred to me that I would become an important person,"

"There are many people who aspire to do this but don't get the opportunity. I am now a responsible person and save some money each week. I am not sure what would have become of me, especially without no education and nothing to do. I would be pregnant or worse still infected with HIV. I am working very hard so that I can take care of my siblings and my grandmother. In the future, I want to have machines of my own, start up a personal business and also give a chance to help

other vulnerable girls in my area to learn what I have been given a chance to learn," Joyce reflected.

Madame Nansasi, director of the knitting school commended Joyce for her good and hardworking character. "Joyce is going to be a great woman of intelligence with a good future. Despite her poor family background, she is a very dedicated and hopeful girl. She listens to advice and sets goals for herself which I am sure she will achieve."

Joyce was recommended to the CAFI Smart Girls program by a neighbor who commented, "I used to see that girl and what I had for her was pity. She was showing responsibilities to her two siblings even when she did not know how. When I heard about the CAFI vulnerable girls support program, I knew right away that Joyce was the girl that deserved the opportunity. Living with a helpless grandmother yet with needs as a youth made her very vulnerable." Only an opportunity like the training offered by CAFI could open a new life for a girl like Joyce.