

Ray of hope. Scholarships by bank enable needy bright learners to continue with lessons

How grants kept students in class as pandemic swept

▶ One of the beneficiaries has had to learn online despite being bedridden over an illness, but is still hopeful for a bright future.

By Peter Theuri
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Dennis Ndung'u has been determined to hold onto the joys that life offers, but the past three years have given him little to celebrate.

He was born with a spinal injury that robbed him of the ability to walk. A pressure wound that develops time and again due to prolonged sitting on his wheelchair has also meant that the Form Three student has never completed a school year since joining Salvation Army Joytown Secondary School.

Bedsore are injuries to skin and underlying tissue resulting from prolonged pressure on the skin.

He reckons that things would have been worse had he not been enrolled in Equity Bank's Wings to Fly Scholarship Programme, a signature initiative of Equity Group Foundation's Education and Leadership Development pillar that sponsors bright needy students through high school.

"I scored 370 marks in KCPE. Having heard about Wings to Fly from past beneficiaries, I prayed that I would be picked," says Ndung'u, from Endarasha in Nyeri County.

The burden of school fees would be eased from his mother if Equity came through for him.

But a series of lengthy hospitalisation spells have meant that he has never been a regular in school.

"In Form One, the pressure wounds were so bad that I was ordered to take a bed rest. I missed all of the third term," he says.

He reported late in the first term of Form Two. But another wound consumed his entire third term.

That was in 2020. Further, he was to go to clinic every two weeks.

"The doctor had prescribed pressure cushions for my wheelchair to ease the strain on my back," he says.

Equity paid his hospital bills and bought him two pressure cushions.

As schools remained closed in 2020, Equity Group sent him a solar lamp and a radio through which he could follow classes on *KBC radio*.

"The bank also sent me Sh5,000 every month. I used part of this money to buy data that I used to download videos for my learning. I was playing catch-up," he says.

During the pandemic, Equity Group Foundation and the Mastercard Foundation partnered to support more than 14,600 students in the Wings to Fly and Elimu scholarship programmes so they could access education at home.



Lapit Barbara



Omar Omara.

370

MARKS ONE of the beneficiaries under the Wings to Fly programme scored in KCPE.

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Dennis Ndung'u, beneficiary

Lapit Barbara has just completed her undergraduate course at the Coast National Polytechnic.

The 26-year-old is also a beneficiary of the Wings to Fly Scholarship Programme through her secondary school and tertiary education in a TVET programme.

She scored 336 marks in KCPE and was admitted to Enoomata-siani Girls Secondary School in Kajiado.

"I applied for the Wings to Fly Scholarship Programme because my parents were unable to pay my fees," she says.

She later joined the Coast Polytechnic to pursue a diploma in beauty therapy and hairdressing. Equity paid her school fees and in the final year even funded her food and accommodation.

Further, Equity sent her money that she invested in a goat selling business in her Kajiado home. The business is still keeping her busy.

"I had started a salon here, but it did not do well," she says.

When Omar Omara Abae's mother insisted on him going to a boarding school so he could avoid some of his peers, he did not envisage the success that awaited.

He was told by his teachers that students who did well would be taken through secondary school free of charge by Equity Group.

"I scored 358 marks in KCPE and was among the students selected in our sub-county," he says.

With the other beneficiaries, he was brought to Nairobi for an induction ceremony into the programme. It was his first time in the city.

Omara went to Kenyatta High School Mwatate and scored a C- in KCSE. Again, he applied for a TVET scholarship to pursue a diploma in ICT at the Coast Institute of Technology.

Equity Group Foundation's TVET programme began in 2016 with the aim of ensuring 100 per cent transition of Wings to Fly scholars into tertiary education. It absorbs beneficiaries who did not qualify for university.

During the pandemic, Omara felt a bit hopeless about his education prospects.

Equity Bank sent him a monthly stipend of Sh3,500, which the family used to boost their maize and green grams farming.

He was also able to buy a battery for the lighting system in their thatched house and charge his phone. That enabled him to attend online classes during the pandemic.

Barbra Achieng' is in Form One at Alliance Girls, her dream school.

Her father died before she was born and the burden of bringing her up, alongside her three older siblings, was left to her mother, who does odd jobs in Dandora.

During her primary education at Ofafa Jericho Primary School, the head teacher informed her of the opportunities that Equity offered. After scoring 408 marks in KCPE she successfully applied for The Wings to Fly scholarship. She also got a spot in her dream school.

Applications for this year's intake are on.

NAIROBI

Reprieve for Westgate over Sh600 million tax dispute

The High Court in Nairobi has affirmed the decision by the Tax Appeal Tribunal that insurance disbursement of Sh600 million to Westgate Shopping Mall was not subject to tax.

Justice David Majanja last week dismissed an appeal by Kenya Revenue Authority against Sony Holdings Limited.

Sony Holdings is a company engaged in the business of developing, owning and letting real estate and its flagship project is the Westgate Shopping Mall from which it receives rental income.

The mall was on September 21, 2013 subjected to a terror attack that led to loss of lives and property, which greatly affected its operations. The company held a terrorism and political violence insurance cover for property damage and loss of rent receivable in the sum of Sh6 billion and Sh1.2 billion, respectively with Kenindia Assurance Company Limited.

After the attack, Sony Holdings claimed and accordingly received total compensation for loss of rent receivable of Sh1.2 billion and an amount of Sh3.1 billion for loss and damage of buildings and outbuildings.

Further, it sought exemption from withholding tax on rental income in a letter dated March 7, 2017, addressed to the Cabinet Secretary, National Treasury. In response, the Commissioner of Taxes in a letter dated March 16, 2017, requested supporting documents purportedly in consideration of the application. On December 19, 2017, the commissioner gave notice of its intention to make an additional assessment and in a letter dated May 18, 2018, issued an additional assessment for Income Tax, VAT and Withholding Tax. The commissioner assessed the company's tax liability as Sh380,388,596, being principal corporation tax, penalty and interest thereon.

Aggrieved by the decision, Sony Holdings formally objected by filing its Notice of Objection dated June 14, 2018. The Commissioner affirmed its decision by its letter dated August 10, 2018. In 2019, Sony Holdings lodged a complaint against the commissioner at the Tax Appeal Tribunal.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the tribunal held that the insurance compensation paid to Sony Holdings was not chargeable to corporation tax as there was evidence that the said sum was used for reconstruction of the damaged mall, thus it could neither qualify as gains nor profit.

The decision by the tribunal saw the commissioner lodge an appeal at the High Court. But Justice Majanja held there was sufficient evidence for the tribunal to find that the payment of Sh600 million was in respect of damages to the mall and was to be used in repairs and reinstatement of the mall and was therefore not subject to corporation tax. "From the totality of the facts and evidence, I cannot say that the decision was without any legal or factual basis to support the respondent's (Sony Holdings Limited) case that the commissioner's assessment was incorrect. I, therefore, affirm the tribunal's decision on this issue," ruled Majanja. [Julius Chepkwony]