

## **FROM A DIMMING START TO A HOPEFUL BRIGHTENING TOMORROW**

This is a story of **Nathan Kaberia** a 42-year-old man from Igembe Central sub-county, Meru County. Nathan is a father of 8 (3M, 5F) children where by from the total 2 sets are twins. Since his childhood, he has never enjoyed good eyesight because most of his years have been characterized by blindness. *"I have never attended any eye clinic/hospital since childhood and as a result, this interfered with my education"* narrates Nathan. Nathan's family is unique where most of his children have been blind at different stages of life. Apart from the two twin daughters whose story is narrated below, Nathan first born daughter and second-born boy were also diagnosed with developmental cataracts in both eyes and had cataract surgeries done.

Apart from visual impairments the young girls have another form of disabilities. **Fidelis** has physical disability while **Jackline** had her right eye eviscerated while she was a small child due to unknown causes.

Nathan together with his two children attended a screening outreach organized by the VIP project to celebrate World Sight Week where he was diagnosed with cataracts and nystagmus in both eyes, while his twin daughters who are fourth born in the family were diagnosed with developmental cataracts. The VIP project-Meru County had organized an array of activities to celebrate **World Sight Week**. Among the activities included; community eye screening outreaches, eye surgical camp road shows, and radio and television talk shows among other activities. The world sight week was celebrated in Igembe Central with a need to sensitize the community and also offer eye care services. Igembe Central was among the leading sub-counties with an increased prevalence in eye conditions as evidenced by (Rapid Assessment of avoidable blindness) RAAB study that was conducted in the year 2023

Immediately after the screening and diagnosis, Nathan and his two daughters were referred to Meru Teaching and Referral Hospital (MeTRH) for further assessment. The Ophthalmologist at MeTRH confirmed the diagnosis and later booked the 3 of them for cataract surgery. The cataract surgeries were conducted in January 2024 at MeTRH via a reverse referral mechanism where a pediatric eye surgeon from Kenyatta National Hospital operated on the 3 of them. Both Nathan

and his daughters underwent Visual Acuity (**VA**) test and all of them could only Perceive Light (**PL**) from both eyes.

**A cataract** is a cloudy area in the lens of your eye (the clear part of the eye that helps to focus light). Cataracts may be unilateral or bilateral and can vary widely in size, morphology and degree of opacity from a small white dot on the anterior capsule to total opacification of the lens.

### ***Education journey of Jackline Karendi and Fidelis Kathoni.***

Jackline and Fidelis are 10-year-old girls who were born in December 2013. As nursery school pupils, they started their schooling journey in Mwerene Primary School in 2018. In 2019, while they were in Grade 1, they developed visual impairment which caused them to be dismissed from school since they could not visualize what was written on the blackboard or the reading materials/ books. Due to financial strains in the family, the twins were not taken to the hospital for assessment and medical attention and as a result, their quest for furthering their education with a hope for a better future was cut short.

From the village came a God-sent angel, madam Kariru, a Special Need Education teacher from **Machungulu Primary School**. The teacher got concerned as to why the young girls were not going to school and it was after this conversation, the journey of hope for the two girls started.

*"I could see the young girls at home every time I was coming from work. Since I am a special needs teacher, I decided to enquire from their parent so that I can offer assistance. The parents informed me that the two girls were dismissed from school since they could not see. Even though it was almost the end of the 3rd term of 2022, I requested the guardian to bring the girls to Machungulu Primary School for enrollment". -Teacher Kariru narrated*

The week that followed, the two girls were taken to **Machungulu Primary School** where they were admitted to a class for children with **Special Needs**. As a result, the girls were able to get more attention and regular assessments. *"Both Jackline and Fidelis struggled a lot in class work but on the positive side, they were able to follow instructions. Though they had poor vision, they continued with their*

*studies until the end of the term. In 1st term of 2023, I integrated the two girls in Grade 1 to proceed with the standard curriculum” – **Tr Kariru stated**).*

At the beginning of the first term, 3rd January 2023, Jackline and Fidelis were among the students who joined grade one. They were not able to read books and visualize writing on the blackboard despite being positioned in the front seats.

On 27th January 2024, both Nathan and his twin daughters were taken to the theatre at Meru Teaching and Referral Hospital for cataract surgery during the pediatric surgical outreach. Before the surgery, the three of them had poor vision as evidenced by a visual acuity of P.L(**Perceiving Light**). For Nathan and Fidelis, operations were done on both eyes while for Jackline, it was only the left eye that was operated.

28<sup>th</sup> of January 2024, which was the first day post-operation, marked a new dawn for Nathan and his daughters. This was the day that the eye patches were removed. Nathan was able to see his daughter's face. Their visual Acuity post-operation was as follows:

- Nathan Kaberia: Right Eye =6/36, Left Eye =6/36.
- Jackline Karendi: Right Eye =Socket, Left Eye =6/36.
- Fidelis Kathoni: Right Eye =6/24, Left Eye =6/24

*"I am happy and thankful to God that I can see. At least I can perform my daily living activities without depending on others. Again, I am pleased to see my family members clearly after living in darkness for almost the entire of my life. With my improved vision, I can work and support my family by making sure that they can go to school with no struggle. May God bless the VIP program, the donors, and the doctors who have brought hope to me and my family” - **Nathan stated**.*

In February 2024 Jackline and Fidelis resumed back to school. From dim to a brightening vision, they now appreciate their studies and are comfortable when playing with others. At the end of the term, there was a noticeable improvement in terms of their academic performance. The class teacher reported increased socialization of the two girls with other students.

*"Things have been pretty good for Jackline and Fidelis from the time they got their eyes operated. I have witnessed a lot of transformation as their teacher. They are improving and striving to a higher level in terms of academic performance. They*

*are also attending school with no absenteeism compared to before. They are also flexible in terms of their seating arrangement and position in class as they can see the blackboard and study while seated in the middle of the class. They are also relating and socializing very well with others and can participate in school co-curricular activities. This year they are in grade 2, and I can still see the zeal they have in studying and how committed they are in their academics".* **Tr. Kawira Narrated**

Through the support accorded by CBM International via Vision Impact Program, vulnerable school going children with visual problems in Meru County are getting the support required. All paediatric Surgical cases such as Squints, Cataracts and other ocular conditions have been supported fully by the program, whereby the surgeries are being conducted at Meru Teaching and Referral Hospital (MeTRH).

Regained vision to the children brings new hope in life especially in school going children. As a result, these children can be able to study comfortably, socialize with other children without any fear or low self esteem and also builds the needed confidence to the learners. Many school going children like Fidelis and Jackline, are showing their unhidden smiles filled with unmeasurable joy as they fully dedicate themselves to studies. This could not be possible without the support from CBM International.



*Image 1: Nathan, his 2 daughters, and teachers from Machungulu Primary School*



*Image 2: Jackline and Fidelis together with their parents.*