



2025

CHANGE STORIES



***"I want to help my students see
that disability is not inability."***

ANTHONY PITIA JOSEPH
EDUCATOR & ALUMNUS OF THE REJAF SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, JUBA
SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH SUDAN PASTORAL CARE PROGRAM

The school children excitedly kick the football, and as they do, it sometimes rolls under an abandoned car parked in the compound. At times, they kick the ball under the bench where their teachers are seated, deep in conversation. To know where the ball is, they must keenly listen to the bell inside it. They are pupils at Rejaf School for the Blind in Juba, the capital city of South Sudan.

Anthony Pitia Joseph, 42, is a teacher at the same school. He too, was a student here.



Pupils of Anthony Pitia Joseph, Rejaf School for the Blind in Juba, the capital city of South Sudan.



Anthony Pitia Joseph, 42, is both an educator and alumnus of the Rejaf School for the Blind in Juba.

“I was not born blind. I lost my sight when I was around four or five years old. Two of my brothers and I are visually impaired. When a family has a person with disability, some family members utter harmful words to provoke anger. They’d say... ‘you are useless and not contributing to the family.’ Other times, harsh words come from the community and relatives.”

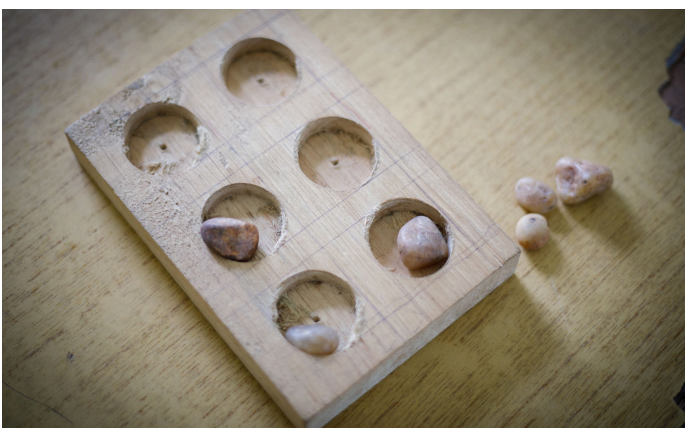
“When I was about 11, my father took us to Khartoum, Sudan, to seek treatment. The doctors said they could not help, and the only solution was to take us to Kenya or America, which my father could not afford. When we returned to Juba, we were brought to this school/centre for the blind. I was taught Braille, Orientation & Mobility, that is, how to move with the white cane, how to wash clothes & iron them, how to cook, how to do gardening, and much more. This is a very important centre for the visually impaired. If it were not for the centre, persons with disability would not have been given the opportunity to get educated and get jobs.”



“After rehabilitation, I was integrated into Buluk Primary School, Primary/Grade 1, where life was very difficult. The children had mean words. They’d say that I was pretending that I could not see. At times, I’d get angry and fight them. The great thing about primary school is that I was very smart and always competed with pupils who weren’t blind. I would perform better than them because I would always listen to the teacher in class and take notes in Braille. Afterwards, I joined secondary school, completed it, and

then joined the University of Juba, where I graduated with a Communications and Public Relations Degree. I proved that disability is not inability.”

“Before we received the trauma healing training from Solidarity with South Sudan, we were living with a lot of built up frustrations. Even something as simple as going to the shop to buy water can be frustrating. Sometimes, they give me money and send me away with the assumption that I am a beggar. Other times, I’d hear them talk about the superstitions behind why they think I cannot see. On the other hand, some of the pupils who attend this school also became blind when they were older - they have a lot of frustrations. Others even contemplate suicide. I remember the lady who hung herself with a rope out of frustration.”





“The training from Solidarity was great because they counselled us. They helped us deal with frustration and society’s negative attitudes and misconceptions. We now understand that blindness is not the end of the world. A person can be born OK but accidentally becomes blind. The important thing is that the brain is still functioning. Sometimes, during the night, sleeping can be difficult because the mind is still busy with so many thoughts. The training taught me how to deal with this - I learned to take one day at a time.”

As a teacher, the training helps me to handle the students better. It helps me be patient and dialogue with them whenever they are feeling down. I hope that they will continue training us.”



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THIS CHANGE STORY IS SIGNIFICANT because according to a 2023 report, “Protection risks facing persons with disabilities and older persons”, initial research indicates that the needs of individuals with disabilities are not prioritised in national plans, resulting in widespread discrimination that hinders their involvement in community activities and limits their access to income-generating opportunities, vocational training, and education, compared to those without disabilities. Overall, 84% of respondents with disabilities were found to be at risk of experiencing violence and abuse due to their marginalized status.

By attending the trauma healing sessions such as those offered by Solidarity with South Sudan, people with disability are better able to handle a myriad of issues affecting them, some from the time that they were children and into adulthood. These issues include misconceptions about the causes of disability including the belief that disability is a result of a bad thing that someone did, as a result of something bad that the parents did or as a result of witchcraft among other wrong misconceptions. By being able to handle these, individuals become much more productive members of society. This is especially important in a context where, alongside the challenges of disability, mental health needs are rising due to years of conflict and economic hardship, while access to services remains scarce or unaffordable.



STAY CONNECTED

Anthony's journey is a testament to the strength found in perseverance and education. Want to learn more about how we're making a difference? Stay connected with us! Follow our journey on social media, explore more stories, and discover how you can get involved. Together, we can continue creating stories of hope and opportunity.



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