## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABOUT US</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROJECT COORDINATOR’S FOREWORD</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 AND OUR WORK</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREAS OF OUR WORK</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HASHTAG GULU TEAM</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DONORS AND PARTNERS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who we are:
Hashtag Gulu is a community-based organisation (CBO) that cares for children and youths who live or live and work on the streets. Our work focuses on rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration. Hashtag Gulu takes on activities that aim at providing alternatives to crime and violence by teaching children who live and work on the streets to become productive citizens.

Our mission:
To empower children and youths who live or live and work on the streets to become productive citizens.

Our values:
Compassion/ Collectiveness/ Equity/ Transparency/ Integrity/ Respect/ Justice/ Courageous/ Learning.

Our vision:
A society where no child has to depend on the streets to survive.
It gives me great pleasure to share with you the results of our work in 2020 even though we are in a very unusual, but opportune, moment for Hashtag Gulu and the world. We are reflecting on 2020 while just coming to terms with the biggest global health crisis, and adjusting to the new normal. This does not make it easy to talk about our achievements, and yet we must be proud of what we have accomplished.

But first, let me tell you how the Hashtag Gulu story began.

“I hardly walk the streets in the night, but each time I do, I walk home sad. I just met about five kids aged between 6 and 12, they struggled to cover themselves with a torn tarpaulin on a concrete floor. My heart pained because at the moment I can’t do much about it considering my struggles. Please if you meet any of such kids and feel you can do something for them, please do because I know it is not their choice to be that way. I will talk to a few friends and find out how we can talk to them and do something.”

This post made by the late Ayella Collins Lacika, Hashtag Gulu’s first team leader, on his Facebook account triggered the formation of Hashtag Gulu in April 2017 after several people showed a willingness to come together and, in whatever way they could, help street-connected children and youths (SCCY) in Gulu to become better persons.

Until the end of March 2020, our team had probably the most exciting start to any year since our inception in 2017. This was admirable for an organisation that was just beginning to reap the fruits of its partnership with its first and major development partner, as well as the transition from an informal to a formal...
organisation, which was a dream come true, especially after losing our team leader and co-founder who had held the team together even in our informalty. Twenty-twenty was no doubt dubbed the year for us, the year where we would start a new journey and make a real, lasting and sustainable impact. Then Covid-19 hit us and, just like everyone else, we had to adhere to the standard operating procedures (SOPs), but still find ways of serving our beneficiaries.

As I write this, I still wonder how we made it through 2020 because it was one of the most challenging and yet most fulfilling years for Hashtag Gulu since its formation in 2017. I am, therefore, very proud of the dedication of all our teams which saw us manage to implement 90% of our activities planned for the year despite the disruption caused by Covid-19. In the same vein, I am truly grateful for the immense generosity of our friends, supporters, sponsors and partners, who helped us to not only face this difficult time but also guided us into the future as a leading and learning organisation focusing on the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of SCCY in the region.

The year 2020 saw us recruit and train over 60 SCCY in carpentry, construction and tailoring; provide shelter and full-time care to over 70 SCCY for four months during the lockdown; reintegrate 10 SCCY (five boy and five girls) with their families; link 17 youths to available job and apprenticeship opportunities as well as establish and equip a workshop for those who could not find work after completing their training; acquire our own property on the outskirts of Gulu, where we hope to establish a halfway home for proper care of SCCY who are committed to becoming better persons; support the district Covid-19 taskforce in a way that is not expected of a CBO, much less a new one; but perhaps the highlight of the year for us was being able to reach out to families, communities, local leaders and law enforcement agencies to advocate a shift in mindset on how we redress the challenges of SCCY because pretending that the problem does not exist and only being reactionary no longer works.

I wish to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude first to Eirene Suisse and Elephante Commons for agreeing to begin this journey with us, and then to every other partner for their ongoing support to Hashtag Gulu. We will need everyone’s support to continue our work in the coming months and years where our efforts to care for the most vulnerable children and youths are needed now more than before.

Ojok Michael, Project Coordinator
### SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRAINED 60 SCCY</td>
<td>in carpentry and joinery, bricklaying and concrete practice, and tailoring and garment-cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided shelter for 70 SCCY</td>
<td>during the Covid-19 lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REINTEGRATED 10 SCCY</td>
<td>(5 girls and 5 boys) during the lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROVIDED FOOD AND RELIEF AID TO 9 SCCY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINKED 17 TRAINED SCCY TO JOB OPPORTUNITIES</td>
<td>(2 in Bricklaying and Concrete Practice, 7 in Carpentry and Joinery and 8 with Takataka Plastics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANISED AND CARRIED OUT 17 ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS</td>
<td>(10 radio, 4 online, 2 school outreach and 1 public dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTABLISHED &amp; EQUIPPED TWO WORKSHOPS</td>
<td>for carpentry and tailoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARRIED OUT 1 SCCY SURVEY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACQUIRED 1 ACRE OF LAND</td>
<td>(soon to be extended to 3) in Paicho sub-county, Gulu district for own and permanent organisation facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided shelter for 70 SCCY</td>
<td>during the Covid-19 lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided food and relief aid to 9 SCCY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organised and carried out 17 advocacy campaigns</td>
<td>(10 radio, 4 online, 2 school outreach and 1 public dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted 1 SCCY survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquired 1 acre of land</td>
<td>(soon to be extended to 3) in Paicho sub-county, Gulu district for own and permanent organisation facility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Covid-19 has affected everyone. Young people who work or live and work on the streets of Gulu were hit harder. Previously, most of them used to find small and odd jobs to earn a little money to buy food each day, but with the outbreak of the virus, survival became tougher. Uganda’s 7 pm-to-dawn and later 9 pm-to-dawn curfew, which was strictly enforced by the police and soldiers, made life even harder for SCCY and with no place to stay, they were constantly chased and brutalised, and some were murdered by law enforcement officers and rowdy members of the community.

The Government of Uganda, through the various district taskforces, put in a concerted effort to fight the spread of the coronavirus. However, little attention was given to the plight of vulnerable groups such as SCCY. Thankfully, we sought authorisation and were able to secure a temporary shelter for the vulnerable young people during the lockdown. From April to August 2020, we provided over 70 vulnerable young people with a safe place to sleep, three meals a day, counselling and psychosocial support, medical services, and hands-on skills training in carpentry and joinery, bricklaying and concrete practice as well as tailoring and garment-cutting (which was part of our original organisational work plan) to help reintegrate them into society.

Ninety youths (28 from the shelter and 61 after the shelter closed) enrolled and actively participated in various hands-on skills training courses. Unfortunately, only 60 completed the training in both cohorts 1 and 2; 10 SCCY (5 boys and 5 girls, including 2 who were pregnant) were reunited with their families; 9 young people who were equally connected to the streets but had other responsibilities at home were supported with a package of beans, maize flour, salt, soap, cooking oil and sanitary pads; 8 were trained and engaged in work at Takataka Plastics producing several products out of plastic waste, including face shields to protect frontline medical workers in Uganda. The youths exhibited dedication to their work and were proud to play a part in helping fight Covid-19 in their community.

Operating and living with the SCCY at the temporary shelter offered our staff new opportunities to interact with and guide them every day. This way, Covid-19 enabled us to fulfil our mission of preparing SCCY to reintegrate into society even though the expense of running the shelter was outside our original budget.
If there is anything that this pandemic taught us, it is the need to live a life marked by generosity, volunteerism and selflessness because, right in the midst of the crisis, we witnessed friends and colleagues from near and far supporting to a degree that exceeded our expectations because. Left to our own devices, we would not have been able to maintain, let alone offer, the services we did at the shelter. Therefore, we are truly grateful to everyone who in one way or another supported our work with whatever they could give.
Hashtag Gulu’s work is informed by continuous engagement and feedback received from the young people we serve. It is further guided by a mission statement and strategic direction, all of which highlight Hashtag Gulu’s commitment to empowering young people to become productive members of society who are not looked at as nuisances but rather human beings capable of living their lives to the fullest by earning a living in a decent and legal way.

**Life skills empowerment**

Six training programmes in hands-on skills in carpentry and joinery, bricklaying and concrete practice, and tailoring and garment-cutting were organised focusing on street-connected children and youths between the ages of 14 and 25 and living or working within Gulu City. A total of 60 (female and male) out of the 97 who initially registered for the training completed it. The three-month hands-on skills training was geared towards offering basic knowledge in carpentry, construction and tailoring to the trainees to enable them to have introductory knowledge that can come in handy should they choose to earn a decent living and reintegrate into the community. The trainees reported that they felt the training had enabled them to reflect on their lifestyles and how to utilise the new skills they had acquired to transform their lives and behaviour. Before completion of the training, some of the trainees, especially in the carpentry class, were making money from sales of products such as office chairs, dining tables and beds which they made during their training. On the other hand, the construction class set up and constructed a one-room house from the foundation up to roofing level as part of their training. They were also contracted by Takataka Plastics to construct a fire-testing room for their plastic tiles. Others have since gone on to work at other commercial construction sites.

During graduation ceremonies, the successful trainees received a certificate and a Hashtag Gulu T-shirt. The ceremony was attended by representatives from Elephante Commons and Eirene Suisse in addition to Hashtag Gulu staff members and trainers.

Nine of the SCCY trained in cohort 1 (2 construction and 7 carpentry) got apprenticeship opportunities with carpentry workshops and construction companies, while 13 (5 girls and 8 boys) trained in cohort 2 have since started working at the newly established Hashtag Gulu workshop for carpentry and tailoring. They will equally be engaged to help construct the Hashtag Gulu piggery and horticulture farm in Paicho sub-county in 2021.

The trainees reported that they felt the training had enabled them to reflect on their lifestyles and how to utilise the new skills they had acquired to transform their lives and behaviour.
Opira was not coerced into going back home. He simply woke up one morning and told us he was tired of life on the streets and needed help to reach out to his family.

We supported Opira with a hoe, gumboots, seedlings and two piglets to enable him to start out in life again.

In Pader, we equally reunited Odonga (not real name) with his family. Here, our team met Odonga’s aunt who, together with his uncle, had taken care of him from the time his mother had passed on. No one from his family had a clue why he left home and chose street life but they had heard that he was living on the streets of Gulu. Odonga left home because he felt unwanted by his maternal relatives who constantly reminded him that a boy should grow up with his father if his father is still alive or with members of his grandfather said: “Thank you for taking care of my grandson during this difficult time. Had it not been for you people, we might have been called only to go and bring back his corpse for burial. You all don’t know how happy I am today.”

In Amuru, Akena (not real name) was reunited with his family and, according to them, they were in a dilemma for so long as a result of not knowing whether their child was alive or dead. One family member remarked: “I used to carry my radio everywhere I went so that I could not miss any news from Gulu. We had heard that young people who live on the streets were being killed through mob justice and it broke my heart because our son was one of them. Now that he is back home, I am relieved.”

Reintegration

In 2020, 10 (5 boys and 5 girls, including 2 who were pregnant) street-connected youths were reunited with their families, particularly during the lockdown. Our team moved throughout the Acholi sub-region, i.e. Lamwo, Kitgum, Pader, Amuru, Omoro and Nwoya, to mediate with family members and eventually reunite families with their children.

In Lamwo, Opira (not real name) was reunited with his mother. Before making this journey, Opira had already been returned home twice and, like on the previous occasions, his mother was not sure what to believe because her son had escaped from home twice before, even though he had been returned by well-wishers. Opira was not coerced into going back home. He simply woke up one morning and told us he was tired of life on the streets and needed help to reach out to his family. We supported Opira with a hoe, gumboots, seedlings and two piglets to enable him to start out in life again.

In Amuru, Akena (not real name) was reunited with his family and, according to them, they were in a dilemma for so long as a result of not knowing whether their child was alive or dead. One family member remarked: “I used to carry my radio everywhere I went so that I could not miss any news from Gulu. We had heard that young people who live on the streets were being killed through mob justice and it broke my heart because our son was one of them. Now that he is back home, I am relieved.”
father’s side of the family if the father is no more. To make their point, they constantly chased him away so he could go and live with his father. On the other hand, at his father’s home, he never got along with his stepmother whom he spent the most time with since his father left home at dawn and returned at dusk daily. With no option left for him, he chose to live on the streets with his peers where he was free to do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted and with whoever was near him.

Just like Odonga, Akena and Opira, many of the young people living in the same circumstances that we have interacted with have similar stories and backgrounds. One of the pregnant teenage girls we reunited with her family has since given birth to a bouncing baby girl. She is currently living with the grandmother of the street boy who fathered her child and is enrolled in our hands-on skills training programme learning hairdressing. The other girl aborted and got on with her life because her boyfriend had refused to take responsibility for the pregnancy. Three of the boys have also since returned to the streets, and one of them is serving a jail term for theft.

Before closing the temporary shelter that we operated during the lockdown, we provided 38 SSCY who remained at the shelter at the time with food aid, which included maize flour, beans, cooking oil, soap and salt, and also two months’ rent money or transportation back to their homes.
Psychosocial support

In 2020, Hashtag Gulu partnered with VIVO International, a non-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO) with experience in the field of trauma counselling and therapy, to provide therapy and capacity enhancement to her beneficiaries (SSCY) and staff members, respectively.

For three days in June and July, VIVO International trained four staff members of Hashtag Gulu on the following topics: Introduction to traumatic stress and its mental health consequences; Introduction to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); Children’s needs, attachment and developmental stages and effects of abuse, neglect, and traumatisation; Vulnerabilities and possible protective factors of growing children; Behaviour and communication skills when working with street-connected children and youth; and Basic counselling techniques. In delivering this training, a participatory, process-oriented approach, based on principles of adult learning, was applied.

Additionally, from June to August 2020, VIVO International counsellors conducted 23 psychological assessment interviews in the Hashtag Gulu temporary centre for street-connected children and youth who volunteered to be interviewed. Out of 23 interviewed participants, 8 were female and 15 males, with an age range of 14 up to 26 years. Issues ranging from PTSD to highly aggressive behaviours were discovered and treated. The children and youths received psychotherapeutic treatment with the trauma-focused approach of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) as well as anger management sessions.

Despite some of the expected and common suspicions of SSCY and the fact that not all youth who resided at the shelter at the time volunteered to be interviewed, those who received therapy were very much able to build trust and rapport with the counsellors and were motivated and appreciative of the need to work through their past experiences in the trauma-focused therapy. This imbued the counsellors with motivation to continue offering mental health rehabilitation services alongside the services offered by Hashtag Gulu.
Advocacy

Because most community members view SSCY as a nuisance and as perpetrators of violence in the community, we reach out to schools and the very communities where these young people live, and seek audience with people, including families, to prompt them to change their mindsets and fulfil their responsibilities as citizens.

SCHOOL OUTREACH

In collaboration with Takataka Plastics, outreach activities were conducted at Gulu Prison Primary School and Kasubi Army Primary School, respectively. These activities hinged on sensitising school-going pupils regarding life on the streets and the importance of staying in school under a campaign dubbed ‘Stay in School, School Is Cool’. A total of 455 pupils, including teachers, participated in these outreach activities in both schools. The issues discussed during these meetings were: Life on the streets in general; why children run away from home and take refuge on the streets; what can be done to reduce the number of street children; waste management, especially since most street children scavenge waste bins for plastics and scraps to sell for a living; and the dangers of life on the streets for a child, among others. This campaign was initiated after a mini-survey we carried out revealed that most children who came to live or work on the streets at a young age would have dropped out of school while in Primary Three to Primary Six, so we specifically target pupils that fall between those classes and reach out to them. These outreach activities were affected and stopped by the Covid-19 outbreak, which resulted in the temporary closure of schools in Uganda.
ONLINE CAMPAIGN

Four online campaigns were conducted to create awareness of the situation of SSCY in Gulu. The reactions and knowledge gained from these online engagements are enlightening and have helped us improve on our work as well as tell our story. In March, we ran a campaign calling on primary school proprietors who are willing to invite us to engage their pupils regarding life on the streets and how they can avoid it. Stories of Survival documented our work and why we do it. These two-series stories were published on their Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages. The Irish Times published on their website and all social media accounts a story featuring our work during the coronavirus crisis. It should be noted that both Stories of Survival and The Irish Times are global platforms with global followings. Finally, we held a Facebook Live session with the Public Relations Officer of Aswa River Region Police and the discussion centred on Covid-19 and how to safeguard vulnerable young people in a time of crisis, focusing on street children.

RADIO TALK SHOWS

Ten radio talk shows were held at 102.1 Mega FM, 89.5 Speak FM and Mega 100 to enable us not only to talk about our work and why we do it, but also to challenge the dangerous culture of stereotype and stigma regarding street-connected children and youths in Gulu perpetrated by community members, including local leaders. The talk shows centred on discussing child prostitution in Gulu and how to end; the plight of street connected-children in Gulu and how to support them to become productive members of society; commemorating the Day of the African Child; and International Youth Day; Gulu our city; determining who is a street child and why they are referred to as “Aguu” and Gulu youths for SDGs. As a result, we have been able to join several panels, including the well-known Kabake on Mega FM and Gulu City Waa on Speak FM, to discuss the situation of street children and youths in Gulu City and how to combat it. These talk shows engage and elicit useful feedback from listeners who often call in and share their stories on how they have either been affected by SSCY or how the problem can be addressed.
COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

One community dialogue was held in March at Taks Centre in Gulu City to reflect on the situation of child prostitutes and how to end it. It should be noted that the dialogue was held under an advocacy group known as Gulu Speaks, which is equally coordinated by the Project Coordinator of Hashtag Gulu. This dialogue brought together over 90 participants from different backgrounds, i.e. the National Youth Council, the Ministry of Gender and Social Development, Gulu University, Gulu District Local Government, Feed the Children, Emiliana Fashion School, the media and some concerned residents of Gulu.

COVID-19 TASKFORCE

Hashtag Gulu joined other civil society organisations (CSOs) working in Gulu to support the Gulu District Covid-19 taskforce in fighting the spread of Covid-19. Our participation in the district taskforce enabled us to play a crucial role in the formation of a taskforce to specifically look into the situation of SSCY during the crisis. It should be noted that little attention was paid to the plight of SSCY, who would be mentioned in passing or as part of a report on something that had gone wrong. However, owing to the high-mobility nature and homelessness of most SSCY, it was only appropriate that, just like any other vulnerable group, they, too, were supported. This involvement led to the establishment of four shelters for SSCY. One of these shelters was indeed operated by Hashtag Gulu at the former Gulu Support Children Organisation premises right in the middle of Gulu City. In addition to advocating the safety and sheltering of SSCY, we also supported the district taskforce to mobilise and distribute food items (beans and posho) to different disadvantaged and slum areas of Gulu City, i.e. Kanyagoga, Layibi Kolo Quarters, Limu, Kony Paco and Kasubi, among others.
CAPACITY BUILDING

In a bid to enhance the capacity of our young team, two capacity building trainings were organized in the areas of basic counselling techniques, behavior and communication skills, children’s needs; as well as sexual gender-based violence facilitated by Vivo International and Eirene Suisse respectively. While the former training focused only on the staff members of Hashtag Gulu, the latter was open and friends and partners of Hashtag Gulu including three representatives of its beneficiaries took part. The SGBV training helped participants to demystify stereotypes surrounding violence as well as understanding the various forms of violence especially those that are a contributing factor to the rise in number of streets connected children and youths. For a young organization employing a young team like Hashtag Gulu that transitioned into a formal entity recently, capacity building does not only enhance the individual staff members knowledge to enable them to do well in their respective positions, it also helps in the growth of the organization as well as staff retention and therefore we will continue to be deliberate about it as we grow.
Goods and services received in kind

In 2020, Hashtag Gulu received goods and services from well-wishers to support the smooth running of the temporary shelter for SSCY during the lockdown imposed by the government to fight the spread of Covid-19. The goods included sanitary pads, clothes, sports and entertainment equipment, foodstuffs and bedding valued at UGX 9,121,000. The services included therapy, counselling, clinical treatment, temporary office space, entrepreneurship training as well as training in liquid soap-making for a period ranging from one to four months, all offered at no cost.

Challenges

In 2020, we have met challenges that mainly arose as a result of the unforeseen outbreak of coronavirus, which increased commodity prices, as well as unplanned expenses related to shelter management. However, with networks established, we fundraised and met some of these expenses. We also managed to readjust where necessary to enable us to continue our work amid the pandemic. The other challenges were associated with service delivery amid the pandemic, especially since we had to observe the SOPs to fight the spread of Covid-19 while still delivering quality services to our beneficiaries. We particularly faced challenges in the movement of staff members, procurement of goods, family tracing, working 24 hours, and coping with the curfew, to mention but a few.
DONORS & PARTNERS

Our work in 2020 would not have been possible without the generous support of each of you who preferred to make positive changes in the lives of children and youths.

Insitutions

• Eirene Suisse
• Otino Waa
• Elephante Commons
• Rotary Club of Aigle
• Gulu UN staffs
• Gulu District Covid19 Taskforce

Individuals

• Brenda Laker
• Carol Otike
• Hannah McCandles
• Acen Bridget (Mc Twitch)
• Hagima and Family
• Maud Richard
• Lisa-Tanita Greminger
• Freja and Laura
• Shirley Crawford
• Deo Rackara
• OD Obwoya and Sons
• Payira Bonny
• Ajura Sharon
• Irene Akello and Family

• Paige Balcom
• Pyerina Achola
• Denis (Former Streetkid)
• Martha Labare
• Alice Akech Okullo

Probono Partners

• Elephante Commons
• The Recreation Project
• Childvoice International
• Youth Alive
• Katuku Gaming Center
• TakaTaka Plastics
• Gulu Community Football Academy
• YAVE Foundation
• Willow Schools
• VIVO International
• Antioch Church

Matching Gifts/Crowd Funding

• Giving Way
• GoFundMe