

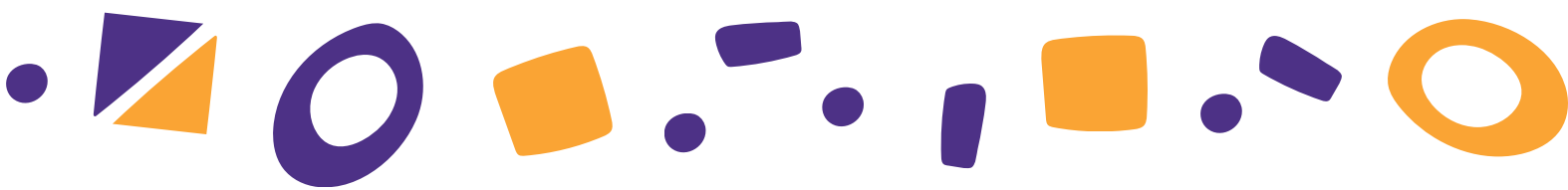


HASHTAG
Gulu

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

CONTENTS

ABOUT US	3
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD:	4
SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024	7
AREAS OF OUR WORK	8
WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT OUR WORK	18
FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE	20
DONORS AND PARTNERS	21



ABOUT US

Who we are:

Hashtag Gulu Initiative is a registered, youth-focused, and youth-led organisation that cares for children and youths who live and work on the streets. Our work focuses on rehabilitation, reformation, and reintegration. We envision a community where everyone is responsible for each other's well-being and contributes to its transformation by getting involved in creating an inclusive and peaceful society.

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.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD



As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude and hope. Together, we have made significant strides toward our long-term goal of ensuring that every child and youth living and working on the streets is empowered and mentored to become a productive citizen, living a life of dignity, independence, and purpose. Through our holistic approach, we are steadily addressing the root causes of the challenges facing young people in our community.

In 2024, we celebrated milestones that underscored progress toward sustainability and systemic impact.

The certification of 59 youth in agriculture by the Directorate of Industrial Training was a critical step in legitimising their skills and fostering economic independence. Our farm's transformation into a revenue-generating social enterprise, reinvesting profits into expanding land and infrastructure, reinforced our commitment to long-term self-reliance.

The powerful voices of our beneficiaries, amplified through forum theatre, challenged stigma and sparked community-wide dialogue—proving that sustainable change must be rooted in shifting mindsets and collective accountability.

Another key milestone was the successful completion of our transition from a Community-Based Organisation (CBO) to an Indigenous NGO—a tedious process that began in 2022 at the Uganda Registration Services Bureau. Along the way, we faced setbacks, including being scammed by someone we had engaged to support us, but ultimately chose to complete the process ourselves.



This achievement not only formalises our status but also positions us to pursue longer-term partnerships. As part of this shift, we are intentionally moving away from one-year grants and pilot projects toward multi-year funding and more sustainable programming. This transition strengthens our ability to deliver impact at scale, and we are confident that our dedicated team will continue putting in the work to make this vision a reality.

Still, our work is far from complete. Challenges such as stigma, environmental volatility, and systemic gaps remind us of the complexity of our mission. Yet these obstacles have refined our strategies and strengthened our resolve. We have responded by deepening partnerships, investing in resilient infrastructure, and developing innovative tools like the Youth Together and Family Together manuals to address root causes at both the family and community levels.

Looking ahead, our vision remains clear and ambitious. We will scale our proven models while pioneering new initiatives.

We will strengthen advocacy to influence policy and create a more enabling environment for reintegration. Above all, we remain committed to empowering youth not as beneficiaries, but as leaders of their own transformation.

None of this would be possible without the support of our donors, the expertise of our partners, and the courage of the youth we serve. Together, we are not just changing lives—we are reshaping futures. I invite you to continue walking this journey with us as we build a tomorrow where every young person in Gulu has the opportunity to thrive.

OJOK MICHAEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024



ESTABLISHED A FARM TRAINING INSTITUTE ACCREDITED BY DIT



CONSTRUCTED A NEW SANITARY FACILITY GIVING 735 SCCYS ACCESS TO HYGIENE SERVICES



REUNITED 76 SCCY'S WITH THEIR FAMILIES



PROVIDED HEALTHCARE SERVICES TO 130 SCCY'S



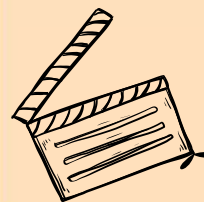
TRAINED 59 SCCY'S IN PIGGERY, POULTRY, HORTICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS



HELD 4 COMMUNITY DIALOGUES, PRODUCED 22 PODCASTS, AND CONDUCTED 33 RADIO TALKSHOWS



SUPPORTED 22 FARMERS WITH IMPROVED SEEDLINGS AND AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES



PRODUCED AND PERFORMED 10 FORUM THEATRE PLAYS



CONDUCTED POSITIVE PARENTING TRAINING FOR OVER 300 PARENTS



TRANSITIONED FROM CBO TO NGO

AREAS OF OUR WORK

At Hashtag Gulu, our work is rooted in a holistic approach to transforming the lives of Street-Connected Children and Youth (SCCYs) and their families. In 2024, we advanced this mission through five key pillars: Life Skills Empowerment, Health Initiatives, Reintegration, Psychosocial Support, Advocacy for Changed Systems and Mindsets, and Art Initiatives. Each of these areas not only addressed the immediate needs of vulnerable children but also tackled the underlying causes of street migration—poverty, stigma, neglect, and systemic gaps. From equipping youth with vocational skills and delivering critical healthcare to fostering family reconciliation, driving mindset change, and harnessing the power of art for healing and advocacy, our work reflects an unwavering commitment to restoring dignity, resilience, and hope. Together, these initiatives demonstrate that sustainable reintegration is possible when families, communities, and systems come together to support every child's right to thrive.

LIFESKILLS EMPOWERMENT

In 2024, we successfully trained 59 youths (38 males and 21 females) in vocational agricultural skills under the Dongo Anyimi project. The training, delivered in two cohorts, covered poultry keeping, piggery, horticulture, and agribusiness. It was formally assessed and approved by the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), which accredited both the facility and curriculum. While the term “employment” traditionally refers to formal wage work, this project deliberately prioritises self-employment and entrepreneurship.

By the end of the year, 20 graduates had already received start-up support in the form of piglets, poultry, seedlings, and farming tools to establish their own agricultural enterprises. Continuous mentoring and follow-up support extended into 2025 to ensure sustainability, with the remaining graduates set to receive similar assistance once ready.

The program yielded profound transformations for beneficiaries. One striking example is Jamila, whose mother reported a remarkable behavioural change after her daughter joined the training. Jamila became more respectful, proactive, and engaged—an inspiring turnaround for a young person with a street-connected background who initially struggled to adapt to structured environments.

Family reconciliation also emerged as a critical achievement. For many parents, especially those whose children had lived on the streets, accepting them back home required intensive tracing, counselling, and mediation. Reintegration was strengthened during a November 2024 mentorship session, where parents, local leaders, and successful farmers came together to celebrate progress and reaffirm their support.

Trainees also extended their skills through community service; vaccinating livestock, cleaning public spaces, and repairing roads. These efforts not only improved community welfare but also boosted the youths' self-esteem and social standing, transforming them from perceived burdens into respected contributors to local development.

In summary, the Dongo Anyimi project not only equipped 59 youths with practical agricultural skills but also catalysed personal transformation, family reconciliation, and community empowerment. Through a holistic approach, combining vocational training, psychosocial support, family engagement, and enterprise facilitation, the project has enabled young people to transition from dependency to dignity, and from marginalisation to meaningful participation in their communities.



HEALTH INITIATIVES

This year, 1,762 young people were reached and engaged through our physical, mental, and sexual reproductive health sensitisation services. Of these, 735 actively utilised health and hygiene services, including regular access to the newly constructed sanitary facility, which enabled daily practices such as bathing and washing clothes.

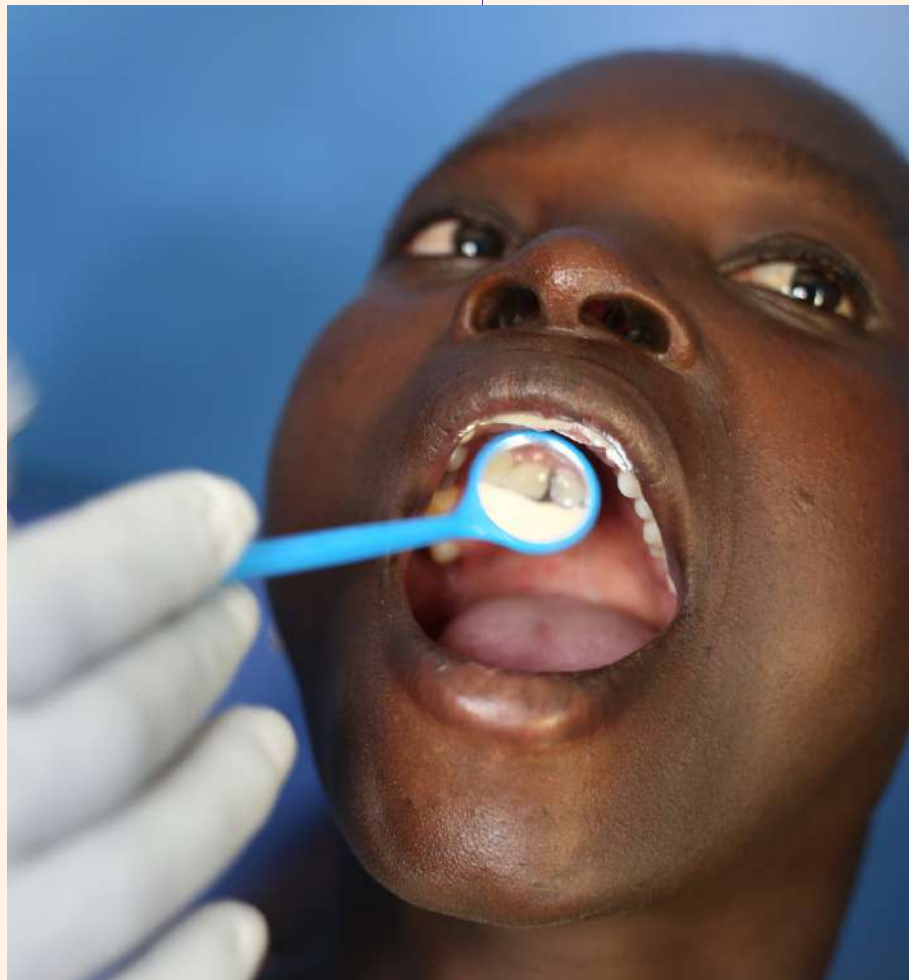
The clinic recorded 485 visits, resulting in 883 diagnoses and treatments for a wide range of conditions, including respiratory infections, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), malaria, wounds, fractures, dental issues, and skin diseases. In total, 130 street-connected children and youths (SCCYs) benefited from these services. This high volume of treatments highlights the critical demand for accessible, youth-friendly healthcare within this vulnerable group.

Beyond direct clinical interventions, the project prioritised health education and sensitisation. Sessions covered essential topics such as general health, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), and alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

The project also distributed essential hygiene materials, including sanitary pads, soap, and condoms. In addition, specialised support was provided, such as family planning injections for 59 females and dental check-ups for 65 individuals.

This impact was made possible through strong partnerships. Key collaborators included St. Phillips Health Centre (operated by the Health Department of the Diocese of Northern Uganda),

Vivo International, PACTA Uganda, Pi Wan Dental, Reproductive Health Uganda, The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), Marie Stopes, and the Centre for Victims of Torture (CVT). These partnerships significantly enhanced our capacity to deliver holistic and specialised care to SCCYs.



REINTEGRATION

In 2024, our teams carried out 164 family tracing visits and 109 mediation sessions across the Acholi sub-region and beyond. These emotionally charged engagements addressed issues such as poverty, parental abandonment, alcoholism, and land disputes. For children of former LRA fighters, mediation often involved connecting them with paternal families they had never known—an important step in identity and cultural belonging.

As a result, 76 SCCYs were successfully reintegrated, with 20 of them receiving start-up support in agriculture (poultry, piglets, seedlings, and animal vaccines). Eleven girls who trained in tailoring and three who trained in hairdressing were supported to establish small businesses, while two youths resumed formal education thanks to renewed family support.

However, reintegration remains fragile. Some families, already struggling with poverty, reacted with hostility, while other youth relapsed into street life, drawn back by its freedom. One grandmother in Omoro noted that her grandson would return home but leave again after only a few days.

To foster acceptance, the Art for Community Transformation project used forum theatre to engage over 2,900 community members. These performances humanised SCCYs, reduced stigma, and created empathy, strengthening community support for reintegration.

The reintegration journey is best reflected in stories like Walter, who now runs a goat enterprise; Davina, born in captivity, who is rebuilding her life through tailoring and farming; and Yasin, who returned home after a misunderstanding was resolved and has become a proud agri-preneur.

Ultimately, while 76 successful reintegrations demonstrate scale, the true impact lies in restored family bonds, dignified livelihoods, healed trauma, and communities that are more supportive of vulnerable children. With the right systems in place, reintegration becomes not just a return home, but a journey toward hope, dignity, and a future full of possibility.



"I am frustrated with this boy. Each time he comes home, I welcome him with open arms, but he never stays for long. After just a few days, he disappears again. I believe the negative influences in the trading center keep pulling him away. Still, my door will always remain open for him. He has a place with me whenever he chooses to change."

Grandmother in Omoro District



PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Hashtag Gulu Initiatives' psychosocial support services, delivered with partners (Vivo International, PACTA Uganda, and Watwero Dance Initiative), had a profound impact on Street-Connected Children and Youth (SCCYs) in Gulu. A total of 109 new clients were reached, with 62 diagnosed with PTSD and 53 completing therapy sessions, showing strong engagement.

Art-based group therapy reached 194 SCCYs, offering safe self-expression and culminating in Street Voices theatre productions and podcasts, performed for over 4,200 people to challenge stigma and advocate for SCCY rights.

Specialised substance abuse therapy engaged 75 SCCYs, with facilitators who had lived experiences serving as relatable role models for recovery.

The program was crucial in preparing SCCYs for reintegration by addressing trauma, building resilience, and supporting family mediation. Despite challenges like relapse, dropouts, and lack of parental support, the services created a foundation for SCCYs to benefit from other interventions (healthcare, vocational training, and reintegration).

Overall, the **Atek Ki Lwak – Towards Better Access to Psychosocial Health for Street Children and Youths in Gulu** project proved vital in healing psychological wounds, empowering youth, and enabling sustainable reintegration.



ADVOCACY

At Hashtag Gulu, we believe that the sustainable reintegration of Street-Connected Children and Youth (SCCYs) requires more than direct services—it demands systemic change and collective mindset shifts. In 2024, our advocacy efforts moved beyond immediate interventions to address the

root causes of street migration, challenge stigma, and influence policy. Through community dialogues, media engagement, research dissemination, and positive parenting training, we created spaces for communities, leaders, and parents to reflect on their roles, take responsibility, and commit to

building safer, more supportive environments for children. This multi-pronged approach not only amplified SCCY voices but also reshaped public perception, encouraged accountability among duty bearers, and laid the foundation for lasting structural change.



COMMUNITY DIALOGUES



Five community dialogues were held across Gulu City and District in Laroo-Wii Got, Awach, Patiko, Cuk Cenyjere, and Bardege Complex Market, engaging over 1,000 participants, including community members and local leaders such as LC1 chairpersons, religious leaders, and cultural figures. Conducted in public spaces like markets and trading centres, the dialogues explored the root causes of why children leave home, with parental negligence, child labour, gender-based violence, and absent fathers identified as key drivers.

A major outcome was a shift from blaming Street-Connected Children and Youth (often referred to as “Aguu”) to recognising communal responsibility. Participants also criticised leaders and security officials for excessive force and delayed responses to cases of neglect and violence. This feedback prompted commitments from leaders, including the Resident City Commissioner (RCC), to adopt more constructive and proactive approaches. All dialogues were recorded and broadcast on Radio Pacis, significantly extending their impact and reach.

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

Our advocacy efforts combined high-level engagement, media partnerships, and research dissemination to influence policy and public opinion. Hashtag Gulu Initiative engaged security organs to challenge militarised round-ups of youth, advocated for rights-based approaches, and presented a report to Justice, Law and Order actors at a High Court meeting convened by the Chief Magistrate. We also participated in sectoral working groups such as the District Chainlink, GBV Activist Group, and District Human Rights Watch CSO group to ensure SCCY voices were represented in policy discussions.



During the 16 Days of Activism, our team leader delivered remarks on behalf of CSOs in the Acholi sub-region, emphasising that ending violence against women and girls require collective action across all sectors of society.

To strengthen child-sensitive media reporting, we trained journalists in ethical approaches, which reduced stigma and led to our work being featured in 33 radio talk shows and 3 television programs on stations including Radio Pacis, Mega FM, Radio Rupiny, NBS TV, and Wan Luo TV. National recognition followed through features on Solutions Now and the Media Challenge Initiative.

In partnership with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), we hosted two Transition Talks in Gulu under the theme “Uganda Through the Eyes of its Young People.” The dialogues brought together 243 participants, including youth leaders, cultural and religious figures, and political representatives to discuss identity, governance, democracy, unemployment, and the marginalisation of street-connected children youth. The talks highlighted the need for youth participation, mindset change, and responsive policies, positioning Hashtag Gulu Initiative as a trusted convener of intergenerational and policy dialogues.



To make advocacy more accessible, we launched a Luo-language podcast series with 22 episodes (19 aired on Radio Pacis), and shared findings from a perception survey showing SCCYs are often viewed as a security threat. These findings, presented to the RCC’s Street Children Response Group and traditional leaders, strengthened data-driven advocacy, accountability, and reflection on whether existing interventions unintentionally incentivise street life.



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENTS

Hashtag Gulu Initiative recognises that intentional parenting is key to reducing street migration and ensuring children grow up in safe and supportive homes. Poverty, neglect, poor communication, and harsh discipline remain common drivers of children running away. In 2024, more than 300 parents, including those of juveniles at Gulu Remand Home and vulnerable children enrolled in agricultural skills training, were trained in positive parenting. The training, delivered in four groups over three days, was facilitated by Stephen and Beatrice Langa of Family Life Network with support from Rev. Michael Oryem.



Sessions covered building stronger parent-child bonds, managing emotions, addressing root causes of street migration, and balancing financial provision with emotional presence. Parents who attended multiple sessions reported greater confidence in resolving family conflicts without resorting to violence. Families also began addressing underlying causes of tension, reducing the likelihood of children returning to the streets. Many parents expressed a commitment to supporting one another within their communities.

These engagements have become a cornerstone of Hashtag Gulu's reintegration model—strengthening families, reducing harmful practices, and fostering community ownership as the foundation for sustainable reintegration and stronger family bonds.

ART INITIATIVES

At Hashtag Gulu Initiative, we see art not just as expression but as a pathway to healing, resilience, and advocacy. Through theatre, dance, music, and painting, we created safe spaces for children and youth to process trauma, share stories, and inspire change. Our Art and Therapy agenda reduced stigma, sparked dialogue, and empowered young people to reimagine their futures.

In 2024, we piloted a new project in partnership with **Watwero Dance Initiative** and supported by **Association Omoana**, primarily implemented at the Gulu Remand Home. We facilitated weekly training sessions in music, dance, and painting; more than 60 juveniles participated every weekend. A key achievement was hosting 88 parents and guardians at a parent-juvenile interface, many visiting for the first time. This shifted perceptions of the remand home from punishment to rehabilitation while giving children an opportunity to reconnect with families.

What began as moments of joy through dance and song evolved into a powerful tool for therapy and reflection. Many juveniles later joined our safe space, collaborating with former SCCYs to stage forum theatre productions about street life, family struggles, and resilience. Together, they delivered 10 forum theatre showcases, reaching over 2,900 people across Gulu City and surrounding areas. Community members and leaders actively participated, even reenacting scenes to model positive alternatives and solutions.

This initiative not only raised awareness but also fostered dialogue, accountability, and change. Integrated with therapy, mentorship, and reintegration efforts, the project demonstrated that art can be a catalyst for healing, advocacy, and community transformation; a pathway to hope for children and youth once excluded from society.



WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT OUR WORK



ALFONSE OJOK

L.C 1 Chairperson, Kal Ali Village, Paicho

I have attended most of the events at the Hashtag Gulu Farm, from welcoming new trainees to engaging parental interfaces to agribusiness trainings and graduations. The agriculture program has had a great impact on the youth. The farm has not only trained agripreneurs but also fostered behavioural change, healing and bonded families through its diverse programs. I believe that this initiative is equipping young people with the much-needed skills and mindsets to reintegrate and adapt within their communities successfully. I am proud to be a part of this journey of impact and remain committed to supporting it for the continued development of my community.



LAKICA TRACY

Project Beneficiary

I was one of the first drama cast members at Hashtag Gulu and later participated in several skits. This experience taught me teamwork and friendship, a welcome change from the isolation I was used to. One of my most memorable performances was a drama where I played a mother of two children. The role gave me insight into the challenges of parenthood and the importance of avoiding gender discrimination. Many of our performances reflected personal struggles like stigmatisation, family neglect, mistreatment, and the challenges of surviving on the streets. I hope our performances encouraged the audience to rethink their attitudes toward street-connected youth, particularly in terms of unfair treatment. Now, as an expectant mother, I'm determined to raise my child with love and positive parenting practices, avoiding verbal insults and physical violence—things I experienced growing up.



MS ROSE ETIT

Officer In-charge of Gulu Remand Home

The art program at the Remand Home has had a transformative impact on the emotional and behavioural well-being of the juveniles. Some children, who were initially introverted and anxious, have become more open and social. Through singing, dancing, and drawing, they now share their dreams, struggles, and hopes with peers. These activities provide a much-needed outlet for expression, helping the juveniles manage their emotions better. The program not only breaks their silence but also nurtures their talents, with some considering careers in the arts. It's wonderful to see the children look forward to these sessions every week.



AMITO LILLIAN
Parent of a Juvenile

When my son was arrested and jailed, I was filled with anger and shame. I couldn't even bring myself to call him my son. However, attending the positive parenting training and theatre performance organised by Hashtag Gulu was an eye-opener that helped me realise that, despite facing the consequences of his actions, he still needed my love and support during that difficult time. One of the most impactful moments for me was the session where parents shared feedback from the activities. It was a powerful experience of collective reflection and empathy. It reignited my sense of responsibility toward my son, renewing my commitment to accept him, stay involved in his life, and support him through visits and encouragement. For the children, I believe the drama provided a crucial lesson about life after detention, teaching them to avoid recidivism. More importantly, it gave them hope—reminding them that even in detention, a brighter future is still possible.



AMONO JULIET
Project Beneficiary

When my parents separated a few years ago, my father became an alcoholic, which worsened our family's situation. As the youngest and still in school, I was hit hardest—he neglected his responsibilities, stopped providing for me, and I had to drop out of school. The most painful part was his verbal abuse, which drove my elder sister into early marriage to escape the toxic home environment. Since dropping out of school, I've struggled with thoughts of leaving home to join friends on the streets or getting married. However, I continue to resist peer pressure, hoping my father will stop drinking and rebuild our family. When I had the chance to participate in this drama, I eagerly accepted. I played the lead role of a daughter to an alcoholic father, a wife to an abusive husband, and a mother. The role required dynamic character shifts, which improved my acting skills. Coming from a background of neglect and abuse, the story hit close to home—I felt like I was sharing my own story. Through my performance, I hope to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect, inspire resilience, and show children in similar situations that running to the streets isn't the solution. I am deeply thankful to Hashtag Gulu for the opportunity to be an agent of change through performances.



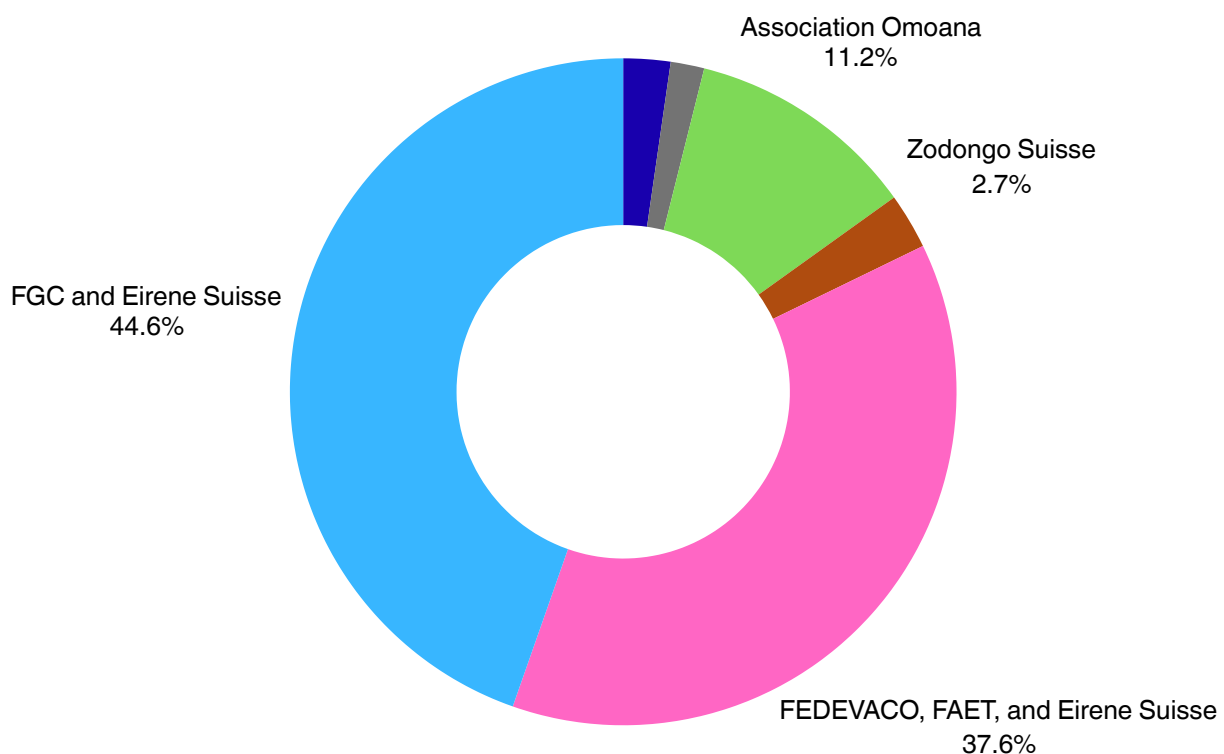
ABER CAROLINE
Project Beneficiary

My first encounter with the Hashtag Gulu team was earlier this year when they held a peer mentorship session at Layibi Corner, where I lived. By then, I had been surviving on the streets for over a year due to the challenges at home. The mentorship program, followed by counselling, became an anchor of hope for me. The most important lesson I learnt was forgiveness and the value of family. This prompted me to reunite with my family. I deeply appreciate Hashtag for the guidance and opportunity to transform my life. After successfully reuniting with my loved ones, I am now enjoying a strong, supportive and loving relationship with my family—a blessing I was missing.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

UGX 915,348,388

INCOME RECEIVED IN 2024



- FGC and Eirene Suisse – Ugx 408,467,159
- FEDEVACO, FAET and Eirene Suisse – Ugx 343,977,129
- Zodongo Suisse – Ugx 24,705,600
- Association Omoana – Ugx 102,395,400
- Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Uganda and South Sudan) – Ugx 14,923,500
- Hashtag Gulu Farm Enterprise – Ugx 20,879,600

DONORS & PARTNERS

On behalf of the entire team at Hashtag Gulu and the countless young lives we serve, we extend our deepest gratitude to our invaluable donors, partners, and friends—Eirene Suisse, Association Omoana, Zodongo Suisse, Fédération vaudoise de coopération (FEDEVACO), Fédération Genevoise de Coopération (FGC), Elephante Commons, Gulu District Local Government, Gulu City Council, St. Phillips Health Centre, Vivo International, PACTA Uganda, Rotary Clubs of Aigle, Gulu and Gulu City, Rotaract Clubs of Gulu and Gulu University, Watwero Dance Initiative, Radio Pacis Gulu – 101.4 FM, Family Life Network, Centre for Victims of Torture (CVT), Gender Tech Initiative, and many others. Your unwavering support, belief in our mission, and commitment to partnership remain the foundation of every achievement we celebrate today.



Rotary



Rotaract





Physical Address: Tee Olam village, Paicho, Gulu District

Town Office: Plot 75/79, Jomo Kenyatta Road, Pece-

Lukung, Laroo – Pece Division, Gulu City

P.O.Box 1540, Gulu, Uganda

Phone: +256 (0) 393243139 / +256 (0) 777361943

Email: info@hashtaggulu.org / Web: www.hashtaggulu.org

 |  |  **Hashtag Gulu**