



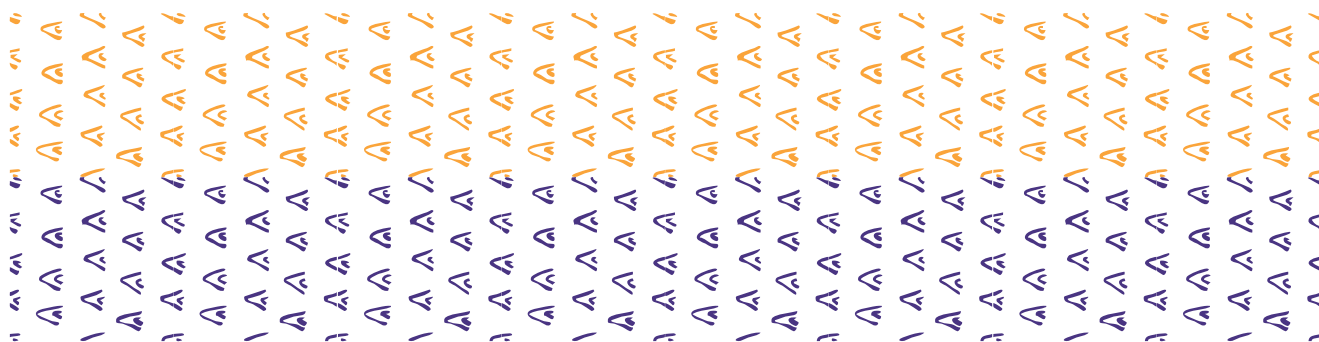
HASHTAG
Gulu

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Rebuilding Lives, Restoring Hope

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1 ABOUT US



Hashtag Gulu Initiative is a registered, youth-focused, and youth-led non-profit organisation based in Gulu, Northern Uganda. We work with children and young people in street situations and those in conflict with the law, supporting them to transition from survival to stability, and from vulnerability to opportunity.

We were founded on the belief that every member of our community deserves to be seen, heard, and supported, especially those often labelled as troublemakers.

Our work focuses on building trust, restoring confidence, and working alongside communities to understand the root challenges faced by children and youth living and working on the streets, rather than relying on assumptions.



OUR VISION

We envision a society where no child has to depend on the streets to survive



OUR MISSION

To empower children and youth who live or work on the streets to become productive citizens



OUR STRATEGIC AREAS

- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- Health and Wellbeing
- Reintegration
- Lifeskills and Livelihoods
- Art for Psychosocial Support
- Advocacy for Changed Systems and Mindsets

2 MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As I reflect on 2025, I am reminded that real change is not measured by numbers alone. It is measured by restored relationships, renewed hope, and young people who choose to believe in a better future.

This year, Hashtag Gulu Initiative continued to walk alongside some of the most vulnerable children and youth in Northern Uganda. Many have experienced trauma, violence, poverty, substance abuse, and life on the streets. Despite these challenges, we witnessed remarkable resilience. Young people rebuilt relationships with their families, started agricultural enterprises, found healing through counselling and the arts, and became advocates for positive change in their communities.

Our work continues to remind us that no child belongs on the streets. Lasting solutions require more than emergency support. They require strong families, supportive communities, responsive institutions, and opportunities that give young people hope and dignity.

During the year, we strengthened our mental health services, expanded our farm-based rehabilitation programme, invested in organisational systems, built new partnerships, and continued to place young people's voices at the centre of our work. We are grateful to our staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, partners, donors, government institutions, and the communities that continue to believe in our mission.

While we faced challenges, including poverty, climate shocks, and institutional delays, these experiences strengthened our resolve to build programmes that are resilient, practical, and community-led.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to expanding opportunities for vulnerable children and young people, including those in conflict with the law who are now serving time at the Gulu Remand Home, through mental health support, family strengthening, sustainable livelihoods, climate-smart agriculture, and advocacy. Together, we continue rebuilding lives, restoring hope, and creating opportunities for every child and young person to thrive.

Ojok Michael
Executive Director
Hashtag Gulu Initiative

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3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2025 marked another significant milestone in Hashtag Gulu Initiative's journey of supporting vulnerable and street-connected children and youth in Northern Uganda. Guided by our vision of a society where no child has to depend on the streets to survive, we continued implementing integrated programmes that addressed the complex realities facing young people through rehabilitation, reintegration, health, mental health, livelihoods, advocacy, and community engagement.

During the year, the organisation reached 1,828 street-connected children and youth through integrated health, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, skills development, advocacy, and community-based interventions. Our clinic recorded 417 health consultations, while mental health services expanded considerably following the recruitment of an in-house Clinical Psychologist, providing counselling, therapy, and peer support to hundreds of vulnerable young people. Community health outreach and strategic partnerships further strengthened access to specialised health-care and substance abuse services.

Through the Dongo Anyimi agricultural rehabilitation programme, 51 young people completed accredited vocational training in poultry, piggy, horticulture, and agribusiness, with 49 graduates receiving start-up support to establish their own enterprises. The programme also demonstrated the potential of agriculture as both a pathway to economic reintegration and a sustainable social enterprise, generating income that continues to strengthen programme delivery.

Creative arts remained a powerful tool for healing and social transformation. Theatre performances, community showcases, and creative arts sessions at Gulu Remand Home enabled young people to process trauma, tell their stories, challenge stigma, and engage communities in conversations about child protection, identity, and social inclusion.

Advocacy remained central to our work. Through community dialogues, radio programmes, podcasts, public screenings, school outreach, and research, Hashtag Gulu Initiative continued to influence public attitudes and strengthen community ownership of child protection. Our advocacy increasingly highlighted the intersection of mental health, identity, belonging, and post-conflict recovery, while ensuring that young people's voices remained at the centre of these conversations.

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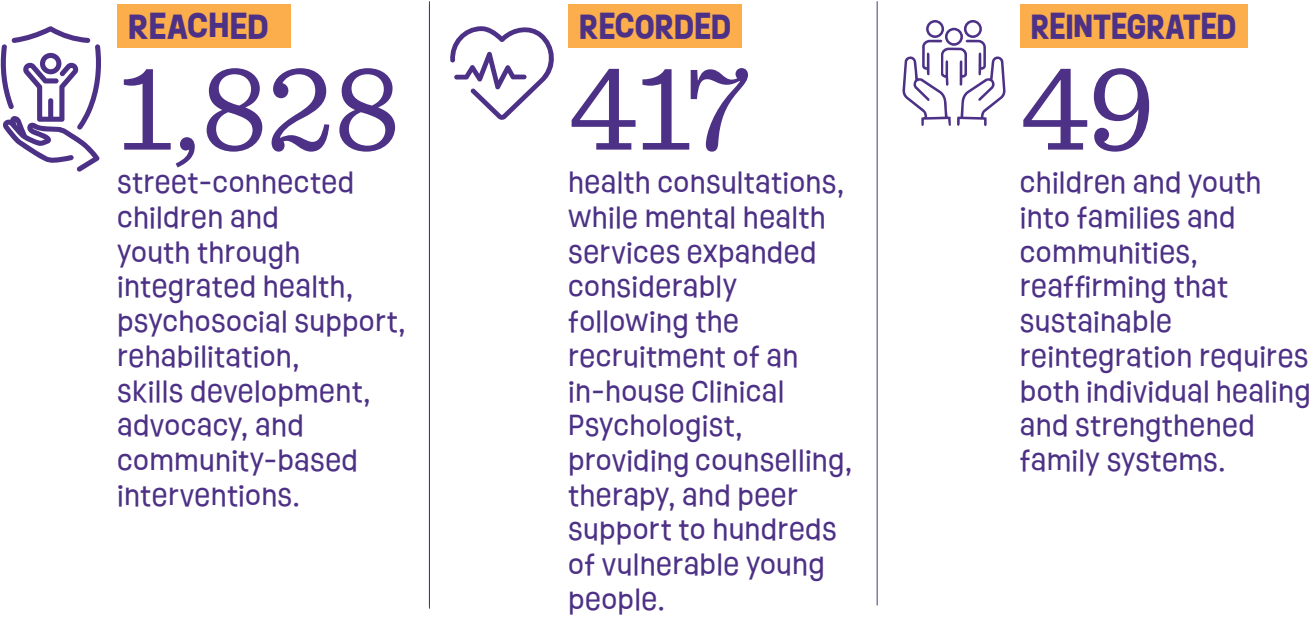
Family strengthening and reintegration continued to underpin all programme areas. Through family tracing, mediation, parenting support, psychosocial care, and community engagement, 49 children and youth were successfully reintegrated into families and communities, reaffirming that sustainable reintegration requires both individual healing and strengthened family systems.

The year also saw important investments in organisational capacity through staff development, strengthened partnerships, improved infrastructure, and expansion of our farm-based social enterprise. These efforts have positioned Hashtag Gulu for greater sustainability and increased impact in the years ahead.

Despite these achievements, significant challenges persisted. Household poverty, stigma against street-connected children and youth, climate-related shocks affecting agricultural production, political instability, institutional delays, and complex mental health needs continued to affect programme implementation. These experiences reinforced the need for integrated, flexible, and community-centred approaches that address both immediate needs and the underlying causes of vulnerability.

As we look towards 2026, Hashtag Gulu will continue strengthening its governance systems, expanding youth livelihoods and climate-smart agriculture, improving access to integrated health and mental health services, supporting family reintegration, growing social enterprise, and influencing policies and public narratives that promote dignity, inclusion, and opportunity for vulnerable children and youth.

Together with our partners, communities, and the young people we serve, we remain committed to rebuilding lives, restoring hope, and creating a future where every child belongs.



4 OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE



1,828

children and youths reached



51

youths trained in agriculture



181

parents and guardians engaged in various activities, including positive parenting trainings



49

children and youths were reintegrated



417

Health consultations made



4,850

Community members reached out through dialogues and convenings



261

children and youths underwent counselling and group therapy



07

Theatre showcases organised



70 - 100

Juveniles reached

5 PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

GULU HEALTH BRIDGE

Access to healthcare remains a persistent and critical challenge for many street-connected children and youth (SCCYs) in Gulu, who often face systemic barriers to receiving even the most basic health services. Through the Gulu Health Bridge Project, Hashtag Gulu Initiative continued its commitment to providing accessible, comprehensive, and youth-friendly healthcare. The project goes beyond treating physical illnesses by integrating mental health and psychosocial support, professional counselling, peer mentorship, health education, and referrals to specialised care. This holistic approach has created a safe and trusted space where vulnerable young people can access the support they need to improve their health and wellbeing.



#Gulu team leader (in maroon shirt) supporting a street connected child with a sprained ankle.

KEY RESULTS

Expanded access to healthcare services

During the reporting period, the project reached 1,828 street-connected children and youth with health and hygiene education. A total of 587 SCCYs accessed the project's clinic and sanitary facilities, while the clinic recorded 417 consultations for conditions including malaria, respiratory tract infections, skin infections, wounds, fractures, sexually transmitted infections, and other common illnesses. The project also conducted two community health outreaches, reaching 90 individuals with integrated health services, and facilitated 65 referrals to specialised healthcare facilities.

Strengthened mental health and psychosocial support

The recruitment of an in-house Clinical Psychologist significantly strengthened the project's mental health component. Four therapy groups were established, supporting 53 SCCYs, of whom 40 were diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The project conducted 40 individual counselling sessions, completed six rounds of group therapy, and facilitated 23 peer mentorship sessions, engaging 261 SCCYs on topics including substance abuse recovery, emotional regulation, anger management, resilience, and positive coping strategies.

Strengthened partnerships for integrated healthcare

The project expanded its referral and service delivery network through strategic partnerships with St. Phillips Health Centre for primary healthcare services, PACTA Uganda for substance abuse rehabilitation, Pi Wan Medical Centre and Gulu Regional Referral Hospital for specialised dental services, Marie Stopes Uganda for sexual and reproductive health education, and The Recreation Project (TRP) for life skills development. These collaborations enhanced access to comprehensive care while reducing barriers to specialised services.

Expanded community health outreach and prevention

In collaboration with PACTA Uganda, the project implemented a substance abuse prevention campaign targeting six high-risk schools. The campaign reached 2,646 learners and 24 teachers through interactive awareness sessions on the dangers of drug and substance abuse, healthy decision-making, and available support services.

Strengthened referral pathways

A coordinated referral system was established to connect street-connected children and youth with specialised physical, mental, and dental healthcare services. Through partnerships with Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, PACTA Uganda, Gulu Mental Health Unit, Pi Wan Medical Centre, and other service providers, beneficiaries were able to access timely and appropriate care beyond the project's capacity.

LESSONS LEARNED

The high demand for integrated health and psychosocial services continues to demonstrate the complex and interconnected needs of street-connected children and youth. The Gulu Health Bridge Project reaffirmed that improving health outcomes requires more than clinical treatment. Sustainable recovery depends on addressing mental health challenges, substance abuse, trauma, stigma, and social exclusion alongside physical health needs.

The project also demonstrated the value of strong referral partnerships and multidisciplinary collaboration in delivering comprehensive care. Going forward, Hashtag Gulu Initiative will continue strengthening community-based mental health support, expanding family engagement, building the capacity of caregivers to support long-term recovery, and advocating for improved access to specialised health services for one of the region's most underserved populations.



A dentist working on a SCCY during a Hashtag Clinic Day



A group of young people undergoing group counselling



A nurse conducting a community awareness session in Pece Lukung

AGRICULTURE-BASED REHABILITATION AND TRAINING CENTRE

Agriculture remains one of the most practical and sustainable pathways to economic reintegration in Northern Uganda, where the majority of households depend on farming for their livelihoods. Through the Dongo Anyimi: Support for Vulnerable Children and Street-Connected Youth to Promote Their Reintegration into Society through Sustainable Agriculture project, implemented in Gulu, Hashtag Gulu Initiative equipped vulnerable young people with practical agricultural and agribusiness skills to support their transition from the streets to productive and self-reliant lives.

The programme combined hands-on technical training with life skills, psychosocial support, mentorship, and family engagement to strengthen participants' confidence, resilience, and long-term economic independence. By integrating livelihood development with rehabilitation and reintegration, the project created a holistic pathway for young people to rebuild their lives while contributing to their communities.



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FGC and Eirene Suisse carrying out monitoring visit at the garden of a former trainee

KEY RESULTS

Youth completed accredited agricultural training

A total of 51 young people completed structured vocational training in poultry production, piggery, horticulture, and agribusiness. Training was delivered in two cohorts to ensure participants gained practical experience across all enterprise areas. Upon completion, trainees were assessed by the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB) and awarded modular certificates, enhancing their employability and entrepreneurial prospects.

Graduates launched their own agribusiness enterprises

To support sustainable reintegration, 49 of the 51 graduates received start-up support to establish their own agricultural enterprises. This enabled them to immediately apply the skills they had acquired through income-generating activities, increasing their prospects for economic independence while reducing the risk of returning to street life.

Family engagement strengthened reintegration

Recognising that successful reintegration extends beyond skills training, the project invested in strengthening family relationships. Family tracing, mediation, and home visits were conducted, while parents and guardians were invited to the training farm to observe their children's progress, participate in reintegration planning, and discuss how best to support them upon returning home. This approach strengthened family ownership of the reintegration process and created a more supportive environment for graduates.

Demonstrated commercial viability and infrastructure development

The project's production enterprises generated UGX 34.3 million in revenue from piggery, poultry, and horticulture activities. Income generated from these enterprises has been reinvested into farm operations, contributing to the long-term sustainability and expansion of the programme. In addition, a deep water well was constructed, improving access to safe water for both the training farm and neighbouring communities while supporting year-round agricultural production.



A former trainee in the green dress with her mother in the floral dress receiving her certificate from the Paicho Agriculture extension Officer and Area LC1



A parent advising his daughter after a progress report visit on the farm

LESSONS LEARNED

The project reaffirmed that technical skills training alone is not sufficient to achieve lasting reintegration for vulnerable young people. The strongest outcomes were achieved when vocational training was combined with psychosocial support, mentorship, family engagement, and practical start-up assistance. Providing graduates with the resources to establish their own enterprises proved essential in bridging the gap between training and economic independence.

The implementation period also highlighted the growing impact of climate variability on agricultural livelihoods. Prolonged drought significantly affected crop production, while red ant infestations contributed to high poultry mortality. These challenges reinforced the importance of integrating climate-resilient farming practices, improved biosecurity measures, water conservation technologies, and climate-smart agriculture into future programming.

Going forward, Hashtag Gulu Initiative will continue to strengthen its integrated model by combining accredited agricultural training, climate-smart farming, enterprise development, psychosocial support, and family reintegration. This holistic approach provides vulnerable and street-connected youth with the skills, confidence, and support systems they need to build resilient livelihoods and successfully reintegrate into their communities.



An agriculture skills trainee weeding his cabbage garden

ART FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Art continues to provide a powerful platform for healing, self-expression, and social transformation among street-connected children and youth. Through theatre, music, dance, and storytelling, young people have found a safe space to share their lived experiences, challenge stigma, and contribute meaningfully to conversations about inclusion, belonging, child protection, and community responsibility. The Art for Community Transformation project has demonstrated that creative expression is more than entertainment. It is a tool for healing, advocacy, dialogue, and positive social change.



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**It is a tool for healing,
advocacy, dialogue, and
positive social change.**

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A group of SCCYs during a community theatre performance in Gulu District

KEY RESULTS

Theatre productions amplified youth voices

Street-connected children and youth performed at major public events, including International Women's Day, the Day of the African Child, and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Through these performances, young people used their voices and lived experiences to advocate for greater understanding, influence public attitudes, and stimulate dialogue on issues affecting vulnerable children and youth. Productions explored themes such as youth suicide through *End the Silence, End Suicide*, gender-based violence, social exclusion, and community responsibility.

Community theatre strengthened dialogue and social inclusion

The project organised four major community theatre showcases, reaching more than 600 community members. Using participatory theatre techniques, including the Dutch Square Method, young people developed and performed improvised stories reflecting the realities of life on the streets, family breakdown, violence, and resilience. These performances encouraged audiences to reflect on their own roles in protecting vulnerable children and challenged negative stereotypes by presenting street-connected youth as talented, resilient, and capable members of society.

Creative arts supported rehabilitation in Gulu Remand Home

Weekly creative arts sessions were conducted at Gulu Remand Home, engaging juveniles in structured activities including drama, dance, games, and creative expression. Beyond recreation, these sessions provided a safe environment where young people could build confidence, strengthen social skills, manage emotions, and experience moments of hope and normalcy while in detention.

Parents and caregivers strengthened family support

Recognising that lasting reintegration requires supportive families, the project organised **two** major parent and caregiver engagement initiatives. A Juvenile-Parent Interface at Gulu Remand Home brought together 49 parents and caregivers, while a four-day Positive Parenting Training equipped 48 parents and caregivers with practical skills in trauma-informed care, positive discipline, effective communication, and strengthening family relationships.

Community dialogues challenged harmful attitudes

The project facilitated four community dialogues, engaging 498 participants across Paicho Sub-county, Pece-Cubu, Kapedopong, and Koro Abili. These discussions encouraged communities to move beyond blaming street-connected children and youth and instead examine the underlying drivers of vulnerability. Participants identified parental neglect, family breakdown, child labour, poverty, substance abuse, and gender-based violence as key factors contributing to children living and working on the streets. The dialogues promoted greater community ownership of child protection and reintegration efforts.

LESSONS LEARNED

The project reaffirmed that art is one of the most powerful tools for promoting healing, dialogue, and social change. Creative expression creates safe spaces where difficult conversations can take place, allowing audiences to connect emotionally with the lived experiences of vulnerable young people. Performances led by street-connected children and youth proved particularly effective in challenging stigma because they transformed abstract social issues into authentic human stories.

The project also demonstrated that community transformation is most effective when artistic expression is complemented by dialogue, family engagement, and practical opportunities for participation. Going forward, Hashtag Gulu Initiative will continue expanding its arts-based programming to reach more communities, schools, and families, recognising that sustainable social change is achieved by changing attitudes, strengthening relationships, and restoring dignity alongside providing information and services.



Famous Local Artist Kamuzu performing for juveniles at their end of year party in December



Omoana Director and other stakeholders cut cake with representatives of juveniles during end of year party at the Gulu remand home

ADVOCACY FOR CHANGED SYSTEMS AND MINDSETS

During 2025, Hashtag Gulu Initiative continued its commitment to advocating for policies, practices, and social norms that protect and promote the rights of vulnerable children and youth. Advocacy remains at the heart of our work, grounded in the belief that every child deserves to grow up in a safe, supportive environment and that preventing children from ending up on the streets is a shared responsibility. Through strategic partnerships, evidence generation, media engagement, and community mobilisation, we worked to challenge stigma, amplify the voices of street-connected children and youth, and influence systems and policies that support their protection and reintegration across Northern Uganda.



#Gulu team leader (in the brown shirt) participating in the Identity Talks dialogue in Gulu.

KEY RESULTS

Community dialogues strengthened collective responsibility

The project facilitated four community dialogues across Paicho Sub-county, Pece-Cubu, Kapedopong, and Koro Abili, engaging 498 participants, including community members, local leaders, and other stakeholders. These dialogues created safe spaces for honest discussions on the underlying causes of street-connectedness. Rather than placing blame on street-connected children and youth, participants increasingly recognised the roles of family breakdown, poverty, violence, substance abuse, child labour, and weak community support systems. The dialogues also strengthened accountability by encouraging local leaders and communities to take greater responsibility for child protection.

Media engagement amplified advocacy messages

Hashtag Gulu Initiative participated in 35 radio talk shows on Radio Pacis and Radio Maria, using these platforms to raise awareness on child protection, positive parenting, stigma reduction, mental health, and community-led approaches to preventing child street migration. These discussions reached audiences across Northern Uganda and promoted informed public dialogue on the rights and well-being of vulnerable children and youth.

Radio broadcasts expanded community outreach

Key advocacy messages and selected community dialogue discussions were recorded and broadcast through Radio Pacis, extending their reach far beyond those who attended the events in person. This enabled broader community engagement and reinforced advocacy messages on child protection, family responsibility, and social inclusion.

Evidence-informed advocacy and programming

Research examining the transgenerational impacts of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict continued to shape the organisation's advocacy agenda and programme design. By generating and applying local evidence, Hashtag Gulu Initiative strengthened its ability to advocate for policies and interventions that address the long-term psychological, social, and economic effects of conflict on young people and their communities.

Strategic stakeholder engagement strengthened systems

Hashtag Gulu Initiative actively participated in key coordination and policy platforms, including the Gulu City Gender-Based Violence Activists Group, Gulu Human Rights Group, the District Chain-Link Committee, and the Gulu District Coordination Group. The organisation also worked closely with the Probation and Social Welfare Office, the Resident City Commissioner's Office, and other duty bearers to ensure that the needs and rights of street-connected children and youth were represented in planning, coordination, and decision-making processes.

Youth voices amplified through Street Voices podcasts

The project produced 12 episodes of the Street Voices podcast, featuring discussions in local languages on issues affecting vulnerable young people. Broadcast on Radio Pacis, the series created an accessible platform where young people, community members, and practitioners could openly discuss child protection, mental health, substance abuse, reintegration, and social inclusion.

School-based prevention strengthened youth awareness

In partnership with PACTA Uganda, the project conducted six school outreach sessions on substance abuse prevention, reaching 2,646 learners and 24 teachers across six high-risk schools in Gulu City. These interactive sessions equipped students with knowledge on the risks associated with drug and substance abuse while promoting positive decision-making and help-seeking behaviour.

Film screenings promoted dialogue on identity and child protection

In collaboration with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the Media Challenge Initiative, and the Gulu City Marathon, Hashtag Gulu Initiative organised two public screenings of the film Call 112, attracting more than 1,000 participants. The screenings served as a platform to raise awareness about child protection, disinformation, violence reporting mechanisms, and civic responsibility. Importantly, the discussions that followed highlighted the persistent identity crisis affecting many young people in the Acholi sub-region, linking it to the long-term social consequences of more than two decades of the LRA insurgency. These conversations reinforced the need for continued dialogue on identity, belonging, healing, and social cohesion as essential components of post-conflict recovery.



LESSONS LEARNED

The year reaffirmed that sustainable change requires more than direct service delivery. Transforming the lives of vulnerable children and youth also depends on changing attitudes, strengthening community ownership, and influencing the systems that shape their lives. Community dialogues, media engagement, storytelling, and evidence-based advocacy proved effective in shifting public perceptions and encouraging collective responsibility for child protection.

The increasing interest from communities, government institutions, and development partners also highlighted the growing need for structured dialogue on identity, belonging, mental health, and social cohesion in Northern Uganda. Going forward, Hashtag Gulu Initiative will continue investing in youth-led advocacy, strategic partnerships, research, and community engagement to influence policies and practices that create safer, more inclusive communities where every young person has the opportunity to thrive.

REINTEGRATION

Reintegration remains at the heart of Hashtag Gulu Initiative's mission. For street-connected children and youth (SCCYs), leaving the streets is far more than a physical transition. It is a gradual process of healing from trauma, restoring family relationships, rebuilding trust, and creating opportunities for a safe and dignified future. Throughout 2025, Hashtag Gulu Initiative continued to implement a holistic reintegration model that combined family tracing and mediation, psycho-social support, life skills development, peer mentorship, community engagement, and economic empowerment to support young people in successfully returning to their families and communities.



Reintegration visit in Agago following up the boy in a red t-shirt with his father next to him explaining to our team about life at home.

KEY RESULTS

Family tracing and mediation strengthened reintegration

Family tracing and mediation remained central to the reintegration process. During the year, the team conducted 55 family tracing visits across the Acholi sub-region and beyond, locating families and assessing their readiness to receive children back home. These efforts resulted in 55 family mediation sessions, during which social workers facilitated dialogue between young people and their families, helping to resolve conflict, rebuild trust, and prepare both parties for successful reunification.

As a result, 49 former street-connected children and youth were successfully re-integrated into their families or placed under the care of parents and guardians. These reunifications represented not only a return home but also renewed hope, restored relationships, and a stronger foundation for long-term recovery.

Family strengthening addressed the root causes of street migration

Recognising that sustainable reintegration requires strong family support systems, the project invested in family engagement and parenting support, including a Juvenile-Parent Interface at Gulu Remand Home that brought together parents and their children who are in detention, and Positive Parenting Trainings equipping parents and caregivers with practical skills in trauma-informed care, non-violent discipline, effective communication, and positive parenting. These interventions strengthened caregivers' capacity to support returning children and reduced the risk of future family breakdown.

Community dialogues and family engagement activities also helped identify the major drivers of child street migration, including parental neglect, family conflict, domestic violence, poverty, substance abuse, and limited livelihood opportunities. Understanding these underlying factors informed both reintegration planning and future prevention efforts.

Psychosocial support strengthened readiness for reintegration

Mental health support remained a critical component of the reintegration process. Through the Gulu Health Bridge Project, street-connected children and youth participated in structured therapy groups, receiving specialised counselling and psychosocial support. These services enabled participants to address the emotional impacts of trauma, develop healthier coping mechanisms, and build the resilience needed to successfully reintegrate into family and community life.

Peer mentorship promoted positive behaviour change

The peer mentorship programme continued to demonstrate the power of lived experience in supporting recovery. A total of 261 street-connected children and youth participated in 23 peer-led mentorship sessions covering topics such as addiction recovery, anger management, decision-making, resilience, and the realities of life on the streets. Hearing directly from peers who had successfully transitioned away from street life inspired participants to believe that positive change was possible and encouraged them to pursue healthier life choices.

✓ Creative arts promoted healing and community acceptance

Creative arts remained an important tool for supporting reintegration and challenging stigma. Through theatre, music, dance, and storytelling, young people expressed their experiences, processed trauma, and shared messages of hope and resilience. Public performances helped communities better understand the lived realities of street-connected children and youth, contributing to greater empathy, acceptance, and support for reintegration.

LESSONS LEARNED

The year reaffirmed that successful reintegration requires far more than returning a child home. Lasting outcomes depend on a coordinated approach that combines psychosocial support, family strengthening, mentorship, livelihood opportunities, and sustained community engagement. Where these components worked together, young people demonstrated greater resilience and stronger prospects for remaining with their families.

The reintegration process also highlighted persistent challenges. Many families continued to struggle with extreme poverty, limiting their ability to provide food, education, healthcare, and other basic needs. Family rejection, unresolved conflict, and community stigma also remained significant barriers, increasing the risk of relapse to street life. These experiences reinforced the importance of ongoing post-reintegration follow-up, economic empowerment, and community sensitisation.

Going forward, Hashtag Gulu Initiative will continue strengthening its integrated rehabilitation and reintegration model by expanding family support services, improving post-reintegration monitoring, increasing livelihood opportunities for vulnerable youth, and working more closely with government structures, communities, and families to create safe, inclusive environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive. Ultimately, our goal remains unchanged: to build communities where no child is forced to depend on the streets for survival.



Our social worker (in the pink shirt, extreme left) following two SCCYs in white T-shirt and Red Jersey standing with their parents at home in Bweyale

6 ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Strengthening organisational systems remained a priority throughout 2025 as Hashtag Gulu Initiative continued to build the structures, partnerships, and capacity needed to deliver high-quality programmes and support its long-term growth. Investments made during the year enhanced the organisation's operational efficiency, sustainability, accountability, and ability to respond to the evolving needs of vulnerable children and youth.

HIGHLIGHTS

✓ Expansion of the Farm-Based Social Enterprise

The organisation continued to strengthen its farm-based social enterprise as a key pillar of sustainability and youth reintegration. Production was expanded across poultry, piggery, and horticulture enterprises, generating income that was reinvested into programme implementation while providing practical learning opportunities for trainees. The farm increasingly served as both a rehabilitation centre and a commercial enterprise supporting the organisation's long-term sustainability.

✓ Infrastructure Improvements

Significant investments were made to improve the training farm's infrastructure, creating a more conducive environment for learning, production, and service delivery. Improvements included the construction of a deep water well to ensure reliable access to safe water for agricultural production, trainees, staff, and neighbouring communities. These investments strengthened the farm's resilience and improved its capacity to support future programme expansion.

✓ Staff Capacity Strengthening

The organisation invested in building staff capacity through technical training, mentorship, peer learning, and professional development opportunities. Staff enhanced their knowledge and skills in areas including child protection, mental health and psychosocial support, procurement, safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, storytelling, and programme management. These investments strengthened service quality and improved the organisation's ability to deliver integrated, evidence-based interventions.

✓ New Partnerships Established

Hashtag Gulu Initiative continued to strengthen collaboration with government institutions, civil society organisations, health facilities, and development partners. New partnerships with organisations such as PACTA Uganda, Pi Wan Medical Centre, Marie Stopes Uganda, The Recreation Project, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, among other stakeholders, expanded access to specialised services, strengthened referral systems, and enhanced programme delivery. The organisation also continued to actively participate in district and city coordination structures, contributing to collaborative approaches to child protection and youth development.



#Gulu board member Bernard Loum training staff members in strategic thinking.



Staff members doing a group exercise during a capacity building training

STORIES OF CHANGE



Behind every statistic is a human story. Throughout 2025, Hashtag Gulu walked alongside vulnerable children, youth, families, and communities as they navigated journeys of healing, hope, and transformation. The voices below reflect the lived experiences of those whose lives have been touched by our work. Their stories remind us that lasting change is possible when people are given the opportunity, support, and dignity to rebuild their lives.





Amarorwot Patricia – Pupil, Labourline Primary School

I am 13 years old, and although I have never used drugs or alcohol, I have seen how substance abuse affects many of my peers whose parents, guardians, or family members are addicted to alcohol and drugs. Through these experiences, I have come to understand how harmful alcohol can be to people's health and relationships.

When I attended the substance abuse outreach organised by Hashtag Gulu, it strengthened my resolve to stay away from drugs and alcohol. It reminded me that I have the power to make healthy choices. I hope the team can reach even more schools and pupils so that more young people have the opportunity to build healthier and brighter futures.

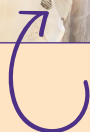


Lagum Euhice – Street-Connected Young Person

When I first came to Hashtag Gulu, I was frightened. I still vividly remember how warmly I was welcomed and given hygiene supplies so that I could bathe and wash my clothes. It made me feel that someone genuinely cared about my wellbeing.

Later, I joined the peer mentorship sessions. Listening to a peer mentor share his journey from life on the streets to a better future gave me hope that I could also change my life. He told us, "Life is not a straight journey. Be strong because one day your story will also change."

As I work towards leaving drugs behind and returning home, my dream is to own a small shop and earn an income to support myself.





Nyeko Nickson – Street-Connected Young Person

My name is Nickson, and I am 16 years old. I have participated in several theatre performances with Hashtag Gulu. At first, I only visited the Hashtag Safe Space to access hygiene materials before returning to collect bottles on the streets. Later, I joined the peer mentorship and therapy sessions, which taught me many important life lessons.

When I became part of the drama team, everything changed. Theatre became more than just entertainment. It gave me a chance to express myself, tell my story, and enjoy myself while learning.

My favourite performance was when I played the role of a caring community member. People living on the streets are often rejected and treated with stigma, so portraying kindness reminded me that communities can choose compassion instead of rejection. I hope our performances encourage more people to show care and understanding towards children living on the streets.

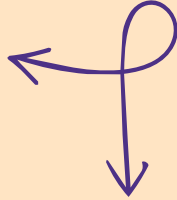
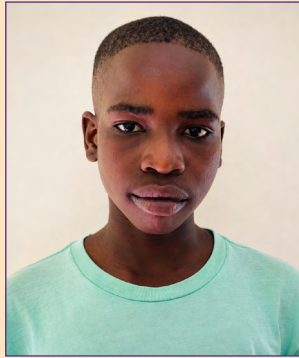


Ayubu Stella – Former Street-Connected Young Person

My name is Stella, and I am 20 years old. I started coming to Hashtag Gulu in early 2025 after the team visited my community and invited us to their Safe Space. I first joined a group therapy session before later becoming involved in the theatre programme.

Initially, theatre was simply a fun way to spend my time and take my mind off the challenges I faced. As I became more involved, I started to see how the performances reflected many of the realities I had experienced while living on the streets.

Every performance helped me grow in confidence and believe in my own potential. Before joining the programme, I saw myself only as a disadvantaged young woman. Today, I know that I have a voice and can use drama to advocate for the rights and dignity of girls living in street situations.



Walony Pius – Former Street-Connected Young Person

My name is Pius, and I am 15 years old. Sharing my story during the group therapy sessions was both painful and uplifting. It reminded me of the difficult experiences I have been through, but it also gave me a safe place where I could speak openly without fear.

At first, I worried that people would laugh at me, but when everyone listened with respect, I felt accepted and became more confident. Through the therapy sessions, I have learned how to build healthy relationships with others.

My dream is to train in agriculture, and I believe I have the ability to succeed and build a better future for myself.



Opiyo Hassan – Former Street-Connected Young Person

When my grandmother, who was my guardian, passed away, my mother promised she would come and take care of us. Unfortunately, she never returned, and my siblings and I were left to fend for ourselves. Eventually, we found ourselves surviving on the streets.

I became overwhelmed with anger and, at one point, even had suicidal thoughts. Everything began to change when I joined Hashtag Gulu and started speaking with the counsellors. Sharing my story helped me feel relieved, understood, and hopeful again. Their continued support and regular follow-up reminded me that I was not alone and that there were people who genuinely cared about me.

Today, whenever I feel overwhelmed or sad, I reach out to the counsellors or engage in activities that bring me joy, such as playing football. I now believe that my future can be different.



Ogik Alfred Gerald – Peer Mentor

As a peer mentor, I have seen first-hand how the juveniles at Gulu Remand Home brighten up whenever the Hashtag Gulu team arrives. It is heartwarming to watch them participate enthusiastically in the activities. Having once been in a similar situation myself, I understand the emotional burden many of these children carry. If there is something that can bring them joy, even for a short while and help them forget their struggles, then it is truly worthwhile.

“

Having once been in a similar situation myself, I understand the emotional burden many of these children carry.

”

What stood out most to me was my first mentorship session, when the children openly shared their experiences of drug use and life at the Remand Home. For a moment, everyone became vulnerable and spoke honestly about their fears, loneliness, and feelings of abandonment. I believe those conversations brought healing because when we share our experiences, we begin to find hope for a better future.

Through this mentorship programme, I hope to continue being a friend, a listening ear, and a source of encouragement. I also encourage Hashtag Gulu to follow up on juveniles after they are released because, mentally and emotionally, the journey does not end when they leave the Remand Home.



Agelo Catherine – Officer in Charge, Gulu Remand Home

Although I have not had one-on-one conversations with the juveniles specifically about the art activities, I have seen the excitement they show whenever they participate in dance, drama, and other creative performances.

I have also paid attention to the themes they choose in their songs and performances, many of which reflect their personal experiences and emotions. One aspect I particularly appreciate is the mentorship programme, which allows them to openly share their stories while interacting with young people who have overcome similar challenges. This gives them hope and encourages them to make better decisions for their future.

I hope the team can spend even more time with the juveniles this year so they continue benefiting from these meaningful engagements.



Anena Evelyn – Parent

I am a single mother of eight children. Before attending the parenting training, I struggled with bitterness, frequent emotional breakdowns, and excessive alcohol consumption as a way of coping with life's challenges. Sadly, I took my frustrations out on my children by neglecting them and often speaking to them harshly.

During the training, I reflected deeply on my parenting and realised that I was setting a poor example and unintentionally pushing my children towards the streets, even though all I wanted was for them to succeed.

Today, I am learning to listen to my children more, rebuild our relationship, and work towards overcoming my alcohol dependence so that I can focus on raising them in a loving and supportive home.



Adyero Sarah – Parent

I experienced severe domestic violence throughout my marriage before my husband passed away, leaving me to raise my children as a single mother. Those experiences greatly affected my parenting, and I became a very strict parent because I associated my children with the pain of my unhappy marriage.

During the parenting training, I learned the importance of regulating my emotions and avoiding taking my frustrations out on my children. Since then, I have been working to become a calmer, more understanding, and more attentive parent.

I have also joined a parenting support group where we encourage one another, share our experiences, and learn better ways of raising our children together as a community.



Adoch Florence – Parent

For a long time, I saw my children as a burden. The constant responsibility of raising them left me feeling exhausted, and whenever they misbehaved, I believed they were ungrateful for all the sacrifices I had made. As a result, I became rude, unforgiving, and eventually gave up on them.

Today, I leave this parenting training with new knowledge, renewed energy, and a different perspective. I am committed to changing my attitude and ensuring that my children are not only provided for but are also loved, cared for, and accepted.



Tumusiimwe Stephen – Parent

For me, disciplining children simply meant beating them into obedience. I always believed that, as the head of the family, I had to be harsh and feared. Through this training, I have come to realise how misguided that belief was.

I have learned practical ways of building mutual respect, love, and understanding within my family. Through open and guided conversations, I believe we can resolve our disagreements without resorting to violence.

I have also committed to visiting my son at Gulu Remand Home more often to show him that he is loved, supported, and encouraged as he works towards a better future.

8 CHALLENGES, RESPONSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Despite the significant progress made in 2025, Hashtag Gulu continued to operate in a complex post-conflict environment characterised by poverty, social exclusion, institutional constraints, and emerging climate-related challenges. Working with highly vulnerable children, youth, and families required continuous adaptation and innovation. While these challenges affected programme implementation, they also generated important lessons that will strengthen our future programming and improve the quality and sustainability of our interventions.

1

Persistent Poverty Among Beneficiary Households

Extreme household poverty remained one of the greatest barriers to sustainable reintegration. Many families lacked the resources to provide returning children with adequate food, education, healthcare, shelter, and other necessities. As a result, some young people relapsed into street life in search of survival. In some instances, families also perceived the project primarily as a source of material assistance rather than a pathway to long-term empowerment, leading to unrealistic expectations and disengagement when support was not continuous.

Response

The organisation strengthened livelihood interventions through vocational skills training, climate-smart agriculture, agribusiness development, and start-up support for youth-led enterprises, while continuing to engage families in economic strengthening and reintegration planning.

Lesson Learned

Successful reintegration requires addressing both social and economic vulnerability. Sustainable livelihood opportunities, combined with family strengthening and psychosocial support, are essential for preventing relapse.

2

Persistent Stigma Against Street-Connected Children and Youth

Negative perceptions of street-connected children and youth continued to hinder reintegration efforts. Many community members viewed them primarily as a security concern rather than as vulnerable young people requiring protection and support. This stigma limited access to services, reduced community acceptance, and weakened reintegration outcomes.

Response

Hashtag Gulu expanded its advocacy through community dialogues, radio programmes, theatre performances, public campaigns, and media engagement to promote positive narratives, challenge harmful stereotypes, and encourage shared responsibility for child protection.

Lesson Learned

Changing attitudes requires sustained community engagement. Arts-based approaches, storytelling, and direct interaction with young people are powerful tools for humanising vulnerable youth and building community ownership of reintegration.

3

Climate-Related Impacts on Agricultural Programming

Agricultural production was significantly affected by prolonged drought, which reduced crop yields, while red ant infestations caused high mortality among poultry. These challenges affected both the farm's commercial performance and the practical training opportunities available to young people.

Response

The organisation invested in a deep-water well to improve year-round water access and began strengthening climate-smart agriculture practices, improving farm management, and resilience planning.

Lesson Learned

Climate resilience must be integrated into all livelihood programmes. Diversified enterprises, improved water management, and climate-smart agricultural practices are critical for sustaining both training and income generation.

4

Political Instability and Electoral Disruptions

The election period created a challenging operating environment characterised by heightened political tensions, public unrest, and restrictions on community gatherings. Several planned activities, including community outreach, life skills training, therapy sessions, and public engagements, were postponed or cancelled. The unrest also heightened anxiety and retraumatised many vulnerable young people.

Response

The organisation temporarily suspended large public activities where necessary and continued providing individual and small-group support while closely monitoring the security situation.

Lesson Learned

Programme implementation must remain flexible in volatile contexts. Contingency planning and adaptive programming are essential to ensure continuity of support while protecting beneficiaries and staff.

5

Behavioural and Mental Health Challenges Among Street-Connected Youth

Many young people entering the programme presented with complex behavioural and psychosocial challenges, including substance dependence, trauma, low motivation, difficulty following structured routines, and reluctance to leave the perceived freedom of street life. Engagement of boys in health services also remained relatively low, contributing to relapse among some participants.

Response

The organisation strengthened peer mentorship, individual counselling, therapy groups, and outreach activities to build trust, address trauma, and promote positive behaviour change.

Lesson Learned

Behaviour change is gradual and requires patience, consistency, and trust. Tailored approaches that recognise the different experiences and motivations of girls and boys are essential for successful rehabilitation.

6**Institutional and Bureaucratic Delays**

Programme implementation experienced delays due to lengthy government approval processes. Finalising the Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development for work at Gulu Remand Home required sustained engagement. In addition, national restructuring of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) assessment system delayed trainee registration, assessment, and certification.

Response

The organisation maintained close engagement with government institutions, strengthened relationships with key stakeholders, and adjusted implementation timelines to accommodate institutional processes.

Lesson Learned

Strong institutional partnerships require continuous engagement, patience, and flexibility. Programme plans should anticipate potential administrative delays and include realistic implementation timelines.

7**Family Dysfunction and Parental Neglect**

Family conflict, neglect, and unresolved trauma continued to present significant barriers to reintegration. Many families were initially reluctant to receive children back home because of previous conflict, property loss, substance abuse, or the social stigma associated with street life. These challenges often required multiple mediation visits before progress could be achieved.

Response

The organisation intensified family tracing, mediation, counselling, and positive parenting interventions to strengthen family relationships, promote reconciliation, and prepare households for successful reintegration.

Lesson Learned

Reintegration is fundamentally a family-centred process. Sustainable outcomes require healing not only for the child but also for parents, caregivers, and the wider family system. Long-term accompaniment remains essential for rebuilding trust and preventing future breakdowns.

9 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

FEDEVACO and Eirene Suisse

**FEDE
VA
CO**

eirene
Suisse

362,605,585

Eirene Suisse

eirene
Suisse

100,522,128

FGC and Eirene Suisse

FGC

eirene
Suisse

273,573,752

Association Omoana


omoana

56,170,151

Zodongo Suisse

 **ZODONGO**

36,993,096

Farm Revenue

Farm Revenue

34,140,500

KAS Uganda and South Sudan

 **KONRAD
ADENAUER
STIFTUNG**



11,908,000

10 **LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026**

In 2026, Hashtag Gulu will focus on the following strategic priorities to strengthen its organisational capacity and expand its impact for vulnerable children and youth:

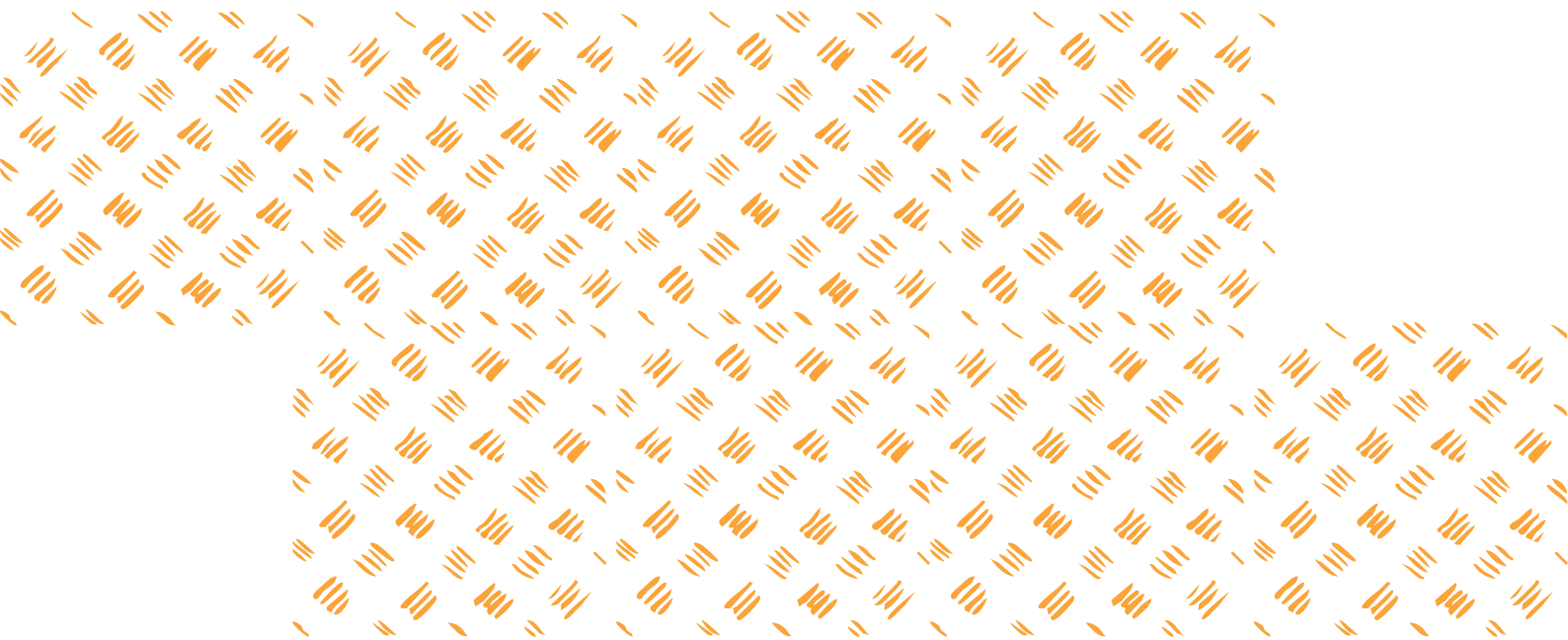
- 1 Strengthen organisational governance and internal systems to improve accountability, efficiency, and institutional resilience.
- 2 Expand youth livelihoods, skills development, and agribusiness programmes to promote sustainable economic reintegration and self-reliance.
- 3 Strengthen access to integrated health, mental health, and psychosocial support services for vulnerable children and youth.
- 4 Enhance family strengthening and reintegration programmes to promote safe, supportive, and sustainable family and community-based care.
- 5 Grow the organisation's social enterprises and financial sustainability to increase unrestricted income and reduce dependence on donor funding.
- 6 Influence policy, practice, and public narratives to advance the rights, inclusion, and wellbeing of vulnerable and street-connected children and youth.

11 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our work is made possible through the power of collaboration. We sincerely thank our partners, including Eirene Suisse, FEDEVACO, Association Omoana, Gulu District Local Government, Gulu City Council, St. Phillips Health Centre, PACTA Uganda, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Uganda and South Sudan, Elephante Commons, Kijani Forestry, Family Life Network, Watwero Dance Initiative, The Recreation Project, Justice for Children, VIVO International, TakaTaka Plastics, and the Rotary Club of Gulu, as well as the many other organisations and individuals who continue to support our mission.

We are equally grateful to our donors, communities, staff, volunteers, and, most importantly, the children, young people, and families we serve. Thank you for your trust, partnership, and unwavering commitment.

Together, we continue to create pathways to dignity, belonging, resilience, and opportunity for vulnerable children and young people across Northern Uganda.





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