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For Yassin Hashim (9), living freely with no fear while playing happily with his peers around his new home is something which just two years ago was a daydream.

"What I remember is that when I was living with my parents in my home village they used to hide me inside our house as a way of protecting me from bad people... I was not supposed to get out until they asked me to do so...I hated that kind of life," explains the boy.

Hashim, a standard one pupil with albinism at Mkuranga Primary School in Mkuranga District, Coast region is currently living in Mkuranga urban with his guardians after he was handed over from his parents.

"We proposed to take him in our family after noticing that the innocent boy's life was in danger following brutal killings of people with albinism which were taking place in the home village," says Sultan Dako, a guardian in of Hashim's new family.

In an exclusive interview with this paper, Hashim's foster father said the idea of taking care of the boy was initiated by his wife Ashura Sultan Mwago, who is the Mkuranga ward councilor (Special seat).

"Fulfilling her political duties in different villages, that was when she encountered Hashim at Mkamba village."

According to Sultan, by the time her wife met the family, Hashim's health was already deteriorating due to the fact that he spent much of his time hiding inside their house as requested by his father who had already noticed that some people were after his son's life.

"His skin was full of lesions and scars and he was very weak...thanks God that his parents did not resist when we proposed to them the idea of taking him in our family," Sultan reveals.

The foster father adds that after taking the boy the first thing was to take him to the hospital for health checkup and minor treatments.

"Later on we decided to send him to school for his primary education as he was already approaching nine years with no dreams of going to school. This went parallel with his 'madrassa' registration aiming at adding to him religious knowledge," added Sultan.

Just like it happens to most parents raising children with disabilities, Sultan thought that it was better for Hashim to join in a special school for children with disabilities like him, though the idea hit a snag.

"Initially we thought that it would be better for him to join in a special school so that he can get a chance to study under proper attention in relation to his disability...thanks to God that the idea hit a wall because studying in a regular school like other children has helped him a lot."

Currently, in Tanzania, education service is gradually changing towards special needs education as it is moving toward inclusive settings. Positive changes of attitudes are taking place hence enhancing inclusive education.

Anatolia Masembo is the Education and Training, Inclusive Education Programme coordinator for ADD International—a non government organization that deals with handling people with disabilities in the country.

According to her, disabled children should be able to learn in regular schools, just like others as special education system only meets the needs of a few.

"Special schools are expensive to establish and run, and by segregating disabled children they inadvertently contribute to their permanent exclusion...quite apart from this, the best chance a disabled child usually has of an education is through inclusion in a mainstream school," she says.

According to her, real world is not segregated in regular and special sectors and if children are educated in a system that does not delineate between people, all students will be prepared for society.

"Children with disabilities should be educated in an inclusive education setting because after their graduation these children are expected to live in their mainstream society where the majority of the population does not have disabilities..." she said.

"...the question to ask is how we prepare our special needs teachers so that we build a society that accepts equality," she challenges.



Sultan Dako, a father of Hashim's new family (left) in a pause with his new 'son' Yassin Hashim (right) at their home in Mkuranga District.

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However, disabled children need more attention in terms of curriculum adaptation, teaching methods, and availability of teaching and learning materials, assistive technology, assessment systems, as well as funds for more assistance in adapting the school environment, according to Hassan Katundua the person in charge of institutions for people with disabilities in Mkuranga district.

"In Mkuranga District we have more than 800 people with disabilities. The society needs to share a number of services with this population without segregation due to the fact that despite being improper to create specialization also the government cannot afford to allocate enough resources to meet the demands of the so called special groups," he adds.

However, speaking of his interactions with his fellow pupils in the regular school, Hashim says that he feels very happy all the time simply because his peers and the community in general like him and share with him a number of things.

Still, living with his new family does not mean taking from him the right to see his biological parents. Hashim's parents have got a regular tendency of visiting their son whenever they feel like doing so.

"I love both my parents as I do love my teachers, friends and all people around me," Hashim says.

The boy promises to study hard in order to accomplish his dream of becoming a doctor when he gets older.

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