

## Care and Support Success Story

### BIBIANA, UP AND ABOUT

It was very hot in the hospital ward in Kyarusozi Sub-County in Bundibugyo District. Members of AFIA, an HIV/AIDS post test club, sweat as they continue to sing and dance, bringing music to a usually sombre hospital ward. The young children crawled around on the floor pulling at this and that as the adults and older children joined together in song. Nobody cared about the coughs, skin rashes or physical condition of fellow members. The scene looked and felt like a large family gathering. Sister Angelica, an HIV/AIDS counsellor in the hospital, swayed to the music. She beamed with joy at seeing 45 members present. Once a month they come from the four corners of the sub-county to provide social support to each other and gather strength for the next month. The majority are women and children.

“*Mucurere Mucurere* (calm down),” asked the facilitator and Master of Ceremony. “Friends, are you happy to be here?” “*Egoooo* (yes),” the members answered in chorus. When the facilitator invited members to share their testimonies, many hands shot up, including those of a three year old girl who made everybody laugh. A small looking woman stood up, determined to be heard. She was petite but exuded a strong presence. Her hair was thin and her skin glittered with a grey tint. “*Nebaza mukama wanje* (Praise the Lord).....,” she begins.

This woman was 35 year old Bibiana Atuzalirwe. She shared how far she had come in one month thanks to the care and support of a Community Counsellor Aide (CCA) and the hospital nurses and counsellors. She explained that her husband had passed away a year ago, leaving her to care for her two small children who were sick and



Bibiana and her two children with the CCA who provided care, support and referral to services.

hungry. One month ago she reached a desperate point. She was bedridden and abandoned by her mother who works on a tea estate and her two brothers. Even the neighbours had stopped providing support, assuming that she would die at any time.

It was on one of those dreary days that a Community Counsellor Aide (CCA) visited her village to assess the need for home-based care, using a new bicycle provided by USAID through UPHOLD. Local leaders told him about Bibiana, but explained that he was too late and should not bother with her. But he continued on to her home and nursed Bibiana back to health. He also took her to the HIV Counseling and Testing center to get tested and helped her get on ARVs. She expressed gratitude for his care and the love and support of the nurses, "I now can access medicine and I have hope of looking after my children. Even if this young child is infected we will be able to get medicine for her. What I really need now is an income to send her to school. As for ideas of what I can do, my head is very sharp and I have all kinds of business plans."

UPHOLD will continue strengthening home based care and support.