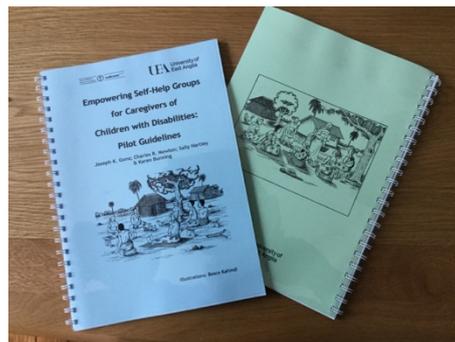


## Self-help Groups for Caregivers in Africa

Empowering self-help groups for caregivers of children with disabilities in resource-poor regions of the world

### Guidelines

Welcome to our second newsletter about empowering caregivers to run their own self-help groups. Thank you to all the people who have sent us completed evaluation forms on our guidelines. This is a gentle reminder that we would love to hear about your experiences of self-help groups, how you have used the guidelines so far and what you think of them. This will help us to make changes and to share everyone's ideas.



### Sharing personal situation



We want to share some of the stories from our self-help groups in Kilifi, Kenya. The stories demonstrate the power of the caregivers when they come together. In the early days of the groups, many of the caregivers reported that they didn't really tell each other about their own lives and what it was like to have a child with disabilities. They were used to concealing their child because of stigma in the community. We encouraged the caregivers to talk to each other about the difficulties and the positives, the sadnesses and the joys. They talked of many things: the challenges of meeting basic needs at home (food, shelter, clothes), discrimination within the homestead, negligence by spouses and relatives, abandonment by a spouse, the child's illnesses, the lack of access to education and rehabilitation, and negative responses from the community. For many this was the first time they had talked about these things. Being with other caregivers gave them courage to express themselves.

**Quote from caregiver:** *"Some of us come to meetings when disturbed, unhappy and with thoughts. But we laugh together, and then leave here when happy and relieved. We share stories, ask each other how we feel at our homes and give each other assurance that things will change for the better in this group."*

## Self-help in action!

Disaster for one caregiver came when her son burned down her house. She lost everything. The picture here shows the result of the fire. The group immediately responded by bringing clothes, food, water and offers of temporary shelter to her and her son. They worked tirelessly together to raise funds and gather materials so that her house could be rebuilt. The house was rebuilt and the mother and her child are safe and well.



## Access to education

Many of our caregivers have told us of difficulties in their child attending school such as the child becoming sick, taking an older child to school, transport - particularly when some of schools 'are far'. The caregivers felt school was important: "school can help a child to be known"; "can reduce people talking about the child"; "shapes children". We invited staff from the local Education Assessment Resource Centre to meet the caregivers and their children at the group's usual meeting place. So many turned up - keen for their child to be assessed and a school place to be found!

## Attending health centres

Our caregivers have talked about the importance of keeping their children healthy. Transport to clinics has been a particular problem. One group arranged for a physiotherapist to visit the group to show them how to do exercises with their children.



## Newsletters

If you would like to receive further updates about the work on self-help groups, please let us know. The next newsletter will come out in February 2020. If you have any comments please e-mail us at:

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