

How vocational skills brought hope to youth

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Nicholas Arthur Sebuliba and Isaac Asuman Olanga (below) say they do not regret enrolling for a vocational course. Above a wall unit they made for their office on Entebbe Road. Photos by Kelvin Atuhaire

In Summary

For six months in 2017, they were on that site, ‘doing magic’ – like they call it, because most of the things they were doing for the first time but ideas would come as they work. The work was a success.

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By Desire Mbabaali

When Nicholas Arthur Sebuliba, 26, and Isaac Asuman Olanga, 25, met at a church youth camp in 2015, they never thought they would be friends and business partners a few years later. Their story is more or so the same. Both were former alcoholics, abused drugs, and are school dropouts. The two also attended the same course in woodworking and cabinetry in 2016 for nine months at the Life Skills Centre, a skills institute of Christ Church, Namasuba.

“I dropped out of school in Senior Five in 2011. I started doing music in different hangouts and that way I would earn a little income. In 2012, I was employed at SEV pharmaceuticals in their production section, till 2014 when I was fired. I spent the rest of the year hustling until 2015 when I went for the youth camp organised by Life Church and met Jesus and Isaac,” says, Sebuliba.

Olenga’s story is no different. After sitting Senior Six at Kitende Secondary School, he joined Buganda Royal Institute in 2014, for a course in Computer Science.

“But I did not like the course. I felt bored so I dropped out. I started selling weed in Seguku, to get what I used to call good money. This at least felt better than me reading books,” he confesses.

And as fate would have it, he was also invited by a friend for the same youth camp. “I agreed to go for the camp but mainly to have fun,” Olenga adds.

Two youths who were struggling with work then got an opportunity to be enrolled on a skilling programme in the hope that this would make their lives better.

Each semester of the nine months-long course was Shs450,000, but since the two were unemployed, a few well-wishers contributed towards their tuition in carpentry and cabinetry courses.



Starting out

“After the course, I would wake up in the morning and go to Industrial Area to sand chairs. I would get Shs6,000 for every dinning chair I would sand,” Olenga says. “On the other hand, I was still the confused man living at my grandmother’s home. One day, though, I called Olenga and told him we had to do something about our situation. He told me he had a gig in Lubowa. I walked from Namasuba to Lubowa, and we fixed doors and a few things in a few houses. After those five days, we received Shs100,000. I had never made that much money in just five days in my life,” Sebuliba recalls.

That way, in 2017, the duo would do their carpentry work moving place to place with a toolbox. “We used to call ourselves the ‘Movers’,” he recalls.

Next, a friend who wanted her clinic partitioned gave them the job. “That was our first professional work and that paved a way for us to do bigger. Next, a friend at Affinity Impressions believed in us and gave us a contract to furnish nine houses, each, two bedroomed, including the kitchen, wardrobes and all,” Sebuliba reminisces about their first big job.

The big cheque

For six months in 2017, they were on that site, ‘doing magic’ – like they call it, because most of the things they were doing for the first time but ideas would come as they work. The work was a success.

“They paid us Shs3.6m, but the first deposit they gave us was Shs1.2m to work on the first floor. We used the money to buy a compressor, a grinder and other machines. What we wanted was to be self-reliant and not move to different workshops to borrow their machines so as to do the work we want. We wanted to have everything,” Sebuliba says.

But after they had used their money to invest in machinery, they had none left. They endured the challenges and often, their employer would come through as well as other people on the site.

Today, the duo still believes there is nothing impossible. They co-own a woodwork company called Fikaka Interiors in Bwebajja on Entebbe Road where they do woodwork on cabinets, office partitioning, and home furniture, among others.

They have also ventured into metal fabrication and construction and employ three people and five to six part-time workers.

They also get their work through subcontracts, contracts, walk-in customers, but are generally a versatile work group.

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