



African Stuttering Centre to Train Local Physicians on Fluency Treatment

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KIGALI, RWANDA — Although unconventional in its approach, the African Stuttering Centre is taking steps to educate and train about stuttering outside of the field of speech pathology in Africa — to physicians — where there is a severe shortage of speech pathologists to serve its stuttering population, in a culture where the presence of fluency disorder results in a severe stigma, often escalating to physical violence in school settings.

“The situation in Rwanda provides an example of this shortage,” said Dieudonne Nsabimana, coordinator for the African Stuttering Centre and board member of the International Stuttering Association. During this past week was International Stuttering Awareness Day, October 22nd.

“At present, there are only 2 speech therapists in Rwanda out of a population of more than 11 million people. Clearly, access to treatment for stuttering is not available to all who need it,” Nsabimana said, later adding that in the public schools, it is common for teachers to hit students with a stick when they stutter.

The African Stuttering Centre has a number of projects, including:

- the “Resources for Stuttering — African Program” (RSAP), where there is distribution of educational materials to teachers about stuttering, working with teachers to educate them to break-down cultural barriers about stuttering;
- research; and,
- the “Distance Stuttering Therapy Program Africa” (DSTPA) currently exists, a distance tele-therapy program to provide direct speech pathology services to individuals who stutter from students of speech pathology programs in the USA.

In addition, the Centre’s newest endeavor will involve the implementation of a non-traditional approach with a program called “Stuttering Therapy Africa.” Nsabimana explained that due to the shortage of SLPs in the area, stuttering assistance typically falls into the hands of physicians in Africa, who typically have no training in stuttering or knowledge of speech pathology.

“The program offers training courses in speech-language pathology in Africa (to physicians), where the number of SLPs is extremely low,” Nsabimana said. “The program uses tele-conferencing and an easily accessed learning platform to deliver coursework to physicians and medical students in Rwanda and Ghana.”

The model of the training will involve the observation of clinical speech pathology services — via Dr. Rodney Gabel via the University of Toledo in Ohio, USA. Providers will then return demonstration and eventually will provide direct services to individuals who stutter, due to such a shortage of SLPs in the



country. This education to physicians will be helpful in order to improve education among providers that are already providing stuttering services to the population.

Dr. Gabel is currently creating a curriculum to utilize, Nsabimana said.

In addition to training physicians on stuttering therapy, continued education in the with classroom educators is needed because Nsabimana recalls a time when he was a child; he was hit by a teacher repeatedly when he stuttered during a poem. He said this is commonplace in Africa.

"These schools are still places of humiliation for children who stutter, and I want to change that, Nsabimana said, adding that is why he started the African Stuttering Centre's "Resources on Stuttering School Program."

Nsabimana said that most teachers in Africa utilize hitting with a stick for when students exhibit stuttering behaviors, slow their rate of speech or hesitate in any capacity.

"More often, these are young children who stutter, who are the victims," he said. "It's too absurd, because the schools should not be places of fear and violence. And I am constantly working to combat this."

The African Stuttering Centre is the one and only non-profit centre in Africa that offers support for people who stutter and their families. The "Distance Stuttering Therapy Program Africa" (DSTPA) helps individuals of all ages, Nsabimana said. It is the first program to provide teletherapy to children and adults in Africa where there has been no access to therapy services, and also heals the negative emotions caused by stuttering, he said. It is a free service and telehealth SLP students from the US are supervised by a licensed SLP, Nsabimana added. This teletherapy program is a direct response to the current shortage of speech pathologists in the area.

"The application of telehealth technologies offers effective solutions to this challenge," Nsabimana said, adding that speech pathologists he has worked with state that the telehealth avenue is as effective as in-person delivery models. He also added that individuals that have received the services are thankful for the therapy. The program currently utilizes a Skype platform to deliver services.

The "Resources for Stuttering – Africa Program" (RSAP) brings information into areas where there has been no access before, Nsabimana said, helping children, teachers and parents have access to materials to develop knowledge about stuttering and to learn to help each other.

Distributing the resources to teachers has been a large focus of the organization.

"At our centre, we have developed a new strategy to better help stuttering children, with more emphasis on the teachers," said Nsabimana. "Our new strategy is to help teachers be a partner and allies of students who stutter, simply by raising the teacher's awareness and providing him with the necessary educational materials to assume this role."

The most important aspect of the education is that teachers and students benefit from increased awareness about stuttering.



"This will significantly reduce the number of children who drop out of school," Nsabimana said. "Because the child now sees the teacher as an ally and not as an enemy to flee."

In addition, there is an impact on the stutter's educational experience.

"Teachers can do a great deal to help students who stutter, he said. "Because the teacher's attitude about stuttering and the example they set in the classroom will influence, to a large extent, the attitude of the other students – teachers will also influence how students who stutter react to their own speech."

The Centre is located in Kigali, Rwanda in East Africa and began in January of 2013. It is a non-profit organization, run by volunteers.

"The African Stuttering Centre is a bridge from stigmatized to the hope, for people who stutter in the developing world," he said, adding that there have been challenges along the way. "The challenge we've faced and continue to struggle, is to raise money to support our programs."

To support the initiatives of The African Stuttering Centre, readers can utilize this [link](#).

Nsabimana said that two US universities currently partner with the Centre for students to provide therapy for practicum hours: Florida Atlantic University and Southeast Missouri State University. The Centre is currently in talks with several other universities about expanding the program.

He is open to other universities to partner with his organization. Interested universities may utilize the "[Contact Us](#)" link to send a message to nicespeechlady.com in order to reach Nsabimana.



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Nice created nicespeechlady.com as a platform for medical SLPs to have free access to practical resources on the site; she also enjoys blogging and writing news articles on medical SLP issues. She also works full-time as a home health SLP.



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