

Catholic Care for Children: Celebrating Sister Scholars

Cause for celebration In 2022 40 sisters in Zambia, 17 in Uganda and 27 in Kenya will graduate, joining a growing cadre of sisters with degrees in social work or allied fields. They have studied diligently, worked hard, and pursued their training during a pandemic. They are already using their new knowledge and skills in caring for children and their families.

These sister scholars are the backbone of *Catholic Care for Children*, a sister-led, charism-driven movement to ensure children grow up in safe, nurturing families. With growing appreciation for the importance of family for a child's wellbeing and the concomitant risks of institutional care, they are leading efforts to transition from over-reliance on institutions toward family- and community-based models of care for children. In leading the transition, they are using their newly accrued skills to help strengthen families and ensure children can grow up in families or family-like environments.



As of April 2022	Scheduled to start studies	Continuing in studies	Graduating in 2022	Graduated
Kenya		12	27	
Uganda	11	7	17	49
Zambia	10 (MA)		40 (BA)	

Effort and impact Sisters undertook years of study, often struggling to balance studies, work and community life. Many routinely traveled significant distances. While sisters were studying, others covered their childcare responsibilities. Already diligently focused, sisters ably pivoted to on-line learning when COVID-19 broke out. According to the former executive director of the Global Social Work Workforce Alliance, the training of sisters in social work via CCC is the largest one-time workforce development investment in Africa ever made.

- *Sisters*: New graduates report that they are more qualified, competent, and confident in their work.
- *Religious congregations*: With sisters using new approaches and skills aligned with best practice, the charism of the community stays relevant in today's world. Congregations have started repurposing childcare facilities to serve children and their families in new ways.
- *Children and families*: Sisters and lay colleagues are providing high quality, wholistic care through professional case management. Significant numbers of children have already been reunited with their families.
- *Care sector*: Long-time providers of care, sisters are emerging as champions of care reform, working with government officials, church officials and local communities to reduce recourse to institutional care in favor of family- and community-based care.



Strategic considerations

- *It's about the charism* Sisters pursue studies with an understanding that they will gain knowledge and skills so they will be better prepared to give expression to their respective charisms of care. Retreats and workshops for sister scholars underscore the spiritual purpose of their studies.
- *There is strength in numbers* Studying in cohorts builds camaraderie and networks of support for sisters. A community of practice dedicated to care reform makes a significant difference.
- *Persistence: a remaining challenge* Some sisters trained in social work have been assigned to other ministries where those skills are not as relevant.

Voices of Sister Scholars

Uganda

"I just used to remain at the CCI to ensure that children eat, bathe and sleep; now I take part in resettling children, work with the legal team as well as working directly with the probation officers."

"I have been able to build a network of people that I know it's easy to interact with ministry people, probation officer that I used to fear, community members. Something I didn't ever think I would do."

"In line with my institute's charism...with social work training I have acquired knowledge and skills of handling the vulnerable children in the society to discover their mental, spiritual and intellectual abilities and helping them understand that they are still valued members of the society hence promoting self-acceptance. This scholarship has helped me change my negative attitudes towards the physically and mentally challenged children and I have developed positive love for them. This means for me that human dignity must be respected in all aspects of life."

"Trained as a social worker, it has been an eye opener to me. I have acquired knowledge and skills of knowing how to work with the community, how to handle issues concerning children's rights, how to prevent and respond to family separation...Really family is the best place for every child."

Zambia

"The program has given me skills and knowledge of how to link with other systems and network for the betterment of the children... I have learned how to identify the children's needs and seek for the required resources."

"My course has empowered me with the skills me to identify and see the needs of persons who are vulnerable and attend to them. The counselling skills enable me to holistically guide and advise in areas of their need. Active listening, acceptance of each individual and commitment to confidentiality are key in creating trust."

"One of the many skills I have acquired and I greatly appreciate is dialogue and quality listening to what is said and not said. My perception of diverse ways of approaching and ministering to vulnerable children has been heightened. This has enabled me to discover issues among the children in which they might not readily open up and share, especially when I visit them in their homes."



Kenya

"The education I got is helping me in serving the children and the community. Initially in our Institute we used to keep children in the CCI for long time, but with the education I have, I have come to value re-integration of children very much, because children develop and grow in a better way. Also with knowledge, I have through the CCKC scholarship, I know how to do good family tracing, and follow-up visits, I am able to do proper documentation and I can easily and efficiently do my apostolate without stress."

"With the education I am receiving I am capable of changing and updating many things in our Institution of Care which were not there before. I feel very happy because, I am now competent and I have courage to lead the Institution as a professional social worker. I have the knowledge and skill that are helping me do more and good practices, especially dealing with the vulnerable children and the community. I am very confident with what I am doing."