From living with type 1 diabetes to bringing hope to my community

This is a guest blog by Lucy Johnbosco Kifaru | Diabetes advocate and founder of Diabetes Consciousness for Community (DiCoCo) in Tanzania

For more than 20 years, I have lived with type 1 diabetes. During this journey, I have learned that living with type 1 diabetes is about much more than taking insulin and checking blood glucose. It is also about access to healthcare, reliable information, acceptance, dignity and the opportunity to live a full life.

My personal experience has shaped the advocate I am today. It has also helped me understand that, while diabetes can present significant challenges, the challenges become even greater when people lack access to essential medicines, healthcare services and accurate information.

This understanding is at the heart of my work through Diabetes Consciousness for Community (DiCoCo), an initiative I founded to improve diabetes awareness, education and community engagement in Tanzania.

Today, my attention is increasingly focused on Mkunya, a rural community in Newala District, Mtwara Region, where I bring diabetes education and support closer to the people who need it.

Making diabetes education accessible in Mkunya

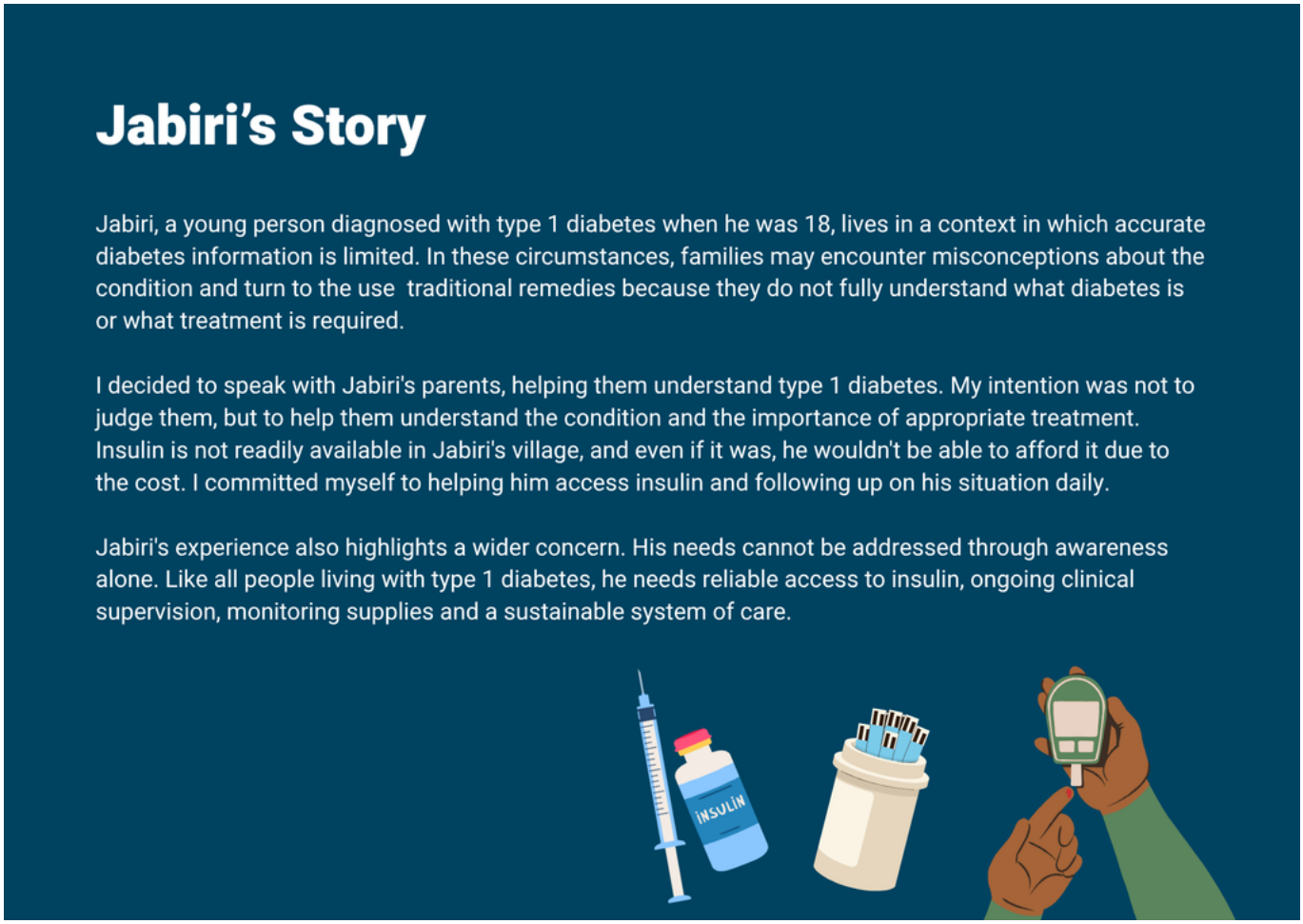
As part of this work, one of DiCoCo's goals in the coming year is to establish the Diabetes Information, Art and Education Centre in Mkunya. The idea behind the centre is simple: access to diabetes information for my local community in my village should not depend on where they live.

In communities where diabetes awareness and education are limited, misconceptions can influence how people understand the condition and seek treatment. People living with diabetes may also struggle to find opportunities to participate in conversations where they share their experiences and learn from others. The centre will be a place where people living with diabetes, those at risk, young people and the wider community can learn, ask questions and engage with diabetes in a more informed and supportive way.

Art is an important part of this vision. Through drawing, painting, drama and storytelling, we hope to use creative expression to communicate diabetes information in ways that people can understand and relate to. I believe that education does not always have to begin in a classroom or a hospital. Sometimes, a drawing, a community performance or a personal story can open a conversation

that changes someone’s understanding.

The DiCoCo Diabetes Information, Art and Education Centre is no longer just an idea, we have already begun turning this vision into reality. Construction has started, and we are mobilising young people living with diabetes to become part of this journey. Through this process, we have encountered the realities faced by young people in rural communities, including Jabiri*, a young person living with type 1 diabetes.



People like Jabiri, living in rural communities deserve the same opportunities to access diabetes education, support and quality healthcare as those living in cities.

Bringing diabetes screening closer to the community

This year, we are preparing for our first community diabetes screening exercise in Mkunya, taking place on 14 November to mark World Diabetes Day.

In keeping with the theme of World Diabetes Day, this event encourages ***early action on diabetes*** through awareness and blood glucose screening. For me, screening is about more than numbers. It is about giving people an opportunity to learn about their health, recognize potential warning signs and seek professional advice when needed.

However, organising Mkunya community screening exercises requires essential supplies, including glucose meters, test strips, lancets, gloves and other materials needed to support safe testing. We are still seeking partners and sponsors who can help us obtain these supplies and make the planned activity possible. This experience has reminded me that good intentions alone are not enough. Community health initiatives need practical support, resources and collaboration to reach the people they are designed to serve. I hope this first screening exercise will help open the door to more consistent diabetes awareness and early detection activities in Mkunya.

From individual experience to community action

My work in Mkunya is deeply connected to my own journey with type 1 diabetes. Living with this condition for more than two decades has given me an understanding of the daily realities that cannot always be captured in medical statistics.

Personal experience has also taught me that awareness must lead to action.

Through DiCoCo, I want to help build a community where people understand diabetes, where misconceptions can be challenged without shame, where children and adults can access appropriate care, and where young people have opportunities to learn, express themselves and support one another.

This World Diabetes Day, let us make early action possible for everyone

World Diabetes Day is an opportunity to raise awareness, but it is also a reminder that awareness must be matched by access to care.

For communities like Mkunya, early action means helping people understand their risk, making screening more accessible, ensuring that those diagnosed can obtain appropriate treatment and care, and strengthening local healthcare services.

It also means recognising the voices of people living with diabetes. We are not only recipients of healthcare, we are also advocates, educators and partners in creating solutions that respond to our communities' realities.

I hope our grassroots work can also serve as an inspiration to other communities facing similar challenges. I know this journey will not be easy. Building something meaningful for a community takes time, determination and resources, and there will be obstacles along the way. I also understand that not every individual or organisation will be in a position to support this vision. There may be moments when the journey feels difficult and the support we need seems far away.

But I believe in Mkunya, and I believe that one day, my community will look at what we are building and feel proud that we chose to begin. I am proud that, despite the challenges, we have taken these first steps. We have started building, mobilising

young people and turning our vision into action.

My mother may not be here to see how far this journey will go, but I hope that, through this work, I can honour her wishes and build something that will continue to serve our community for years to come.

Find out more about Lucy's work by visiting the DiCoCo website.

Visit the ACCISS Toolkit for an evidence base of knowledge and tools that can help to improve access to treatment and care, both globally and at the national level.

* Jabiri's story is shared with appropriate permission, and with consideration for his privacy and dignity.