

Parents counselled against hiding children with autism

From HAZLA OMAR in
Arusha

MANY children born with autism are hidden from public by parents who are not keen to have them seen by other people, it has been disclosed.

This was revealed by the Coordinator of Autism Association of Tanzania, Ms Grace Lyimo, who said that many parents in Arusha and other parts of the country would rather keep their autistic children hidden with some believing that the children have been bewitched.

Tanzania joined 140 other countries around the world to mark the International Autism Day in Arusha yesterday.

Ms Lyimo was of the view that many children living with autism can still be treated or at least provided with basic education that may help them face life challenges like normal people despite their handicap.

The Arusha District Commissioner (DC), Mr Christopher Kangoya, was the guest of honour during the event and reminded parents who may be hiding children with autism indoors that it was against the law and he called upon such children to be taken to special centres at once.

Ms Fatma Abdallah, resident of Unga-Limited has an autistic child, Bakar Janja who studies at Kaloleni Primary School about two kilometres from home.

"I have to carry the child all the way from home to school and back, it is a demanding

task," she said.

Sometimes, she noted, she hires a motorcycle taxi to ferry the child to and from school every day at the cost of 4,000/- which she can't afford and, therefore, Bakar only attend lessons on the days that his mother could afford his fare.

The main objective of the Global Autism Day was to raise awareness among local residents regarding the issue of autism and people living with the condition so that they can also be recognised, valued and assisted in every way.

In Tanzania, the International Autism Day was observed in Arusha, Tanga and Dar es Salaam and this year was the second time that the country was marking the occasion. The event here was attended by children, parents and teachers who deal with youngsters living with autism.

There are 26 centres that cater for children with autism, many being imbedded within public education institutions such as primary schools like Uhuru, Meru, Kaloleni, Chemi-Chemi, Kibaila, Patandi, Leganga, Mwidaro, Nyaurei, Ilboru, Ngaramtoni, Them and Longido as well as the private Jaffery Academy School, among others.

At the moment there are over 70 million people around the world that are living with autism. Experts say, in order for autistic children to get good education, they must be few in class (not more than five) and each should have two teachers attending to a single pupil.