

THE SMALLER PICTURE

A CLOSER LOOK AT **THE CHILDREN WHO
INSPIRE US** IN UGANDA





CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES

A ONE-STOP CENTRE FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN

13-year-old Aziz Maliyamungu arrived in Uganda on his own. Orphaned as a child, he lived with his grandmother and extended family in their village in South Sudan, when fighting broke out nearby. As people fled, the family was separated in the chaos and Aziz ended up alone.

He followed a group of strangers until he reached the Ugandan border. At the registration point he finally had a stroke of luck and met his brother Francis. Later, officials worked to reunite them both with their grandmother and cousins.

Now they live together in northern Uganda's Bidi Bidi refugee settlement, one of the largest in the world hosting more than 220,000 refugees.

Maliyamungu is not like other boys – he was born with only one arm. But at a Save the Children Child-Friendly Space (CFS) he's found the support he needs. On his way home from primary school, where he is in class three, he stops at Yangani CFS – a one-stop centre where children come to play, learn and socialize in safety.

He and his friends stop here every day, usually to play football. "I enjoy playing

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REFUGEES IN UGANDA

football, it's my favourite game. And I've made some friends," he says, panting from an energetic game.

Yangani is one of 61 child-friendly spaces that Save the Children runs in the settlements, which host refugees mostly from South Sudan and DR Congo. Uganda now hosts more than 1.1 million refugees – the most in Africa, and one of the most worldwide.

The child-friendly spaces are a proven approach for supporting vulnerable children to return to a sense of normalcy.

Each CFS has outdoor play materials such as swings, see-saws, slides and balls, and indoor materials like board games. The games help children interact and release stress, but also learn different skills. Playing is not only fun; it contributes to a child's growth and holistic development. In the morning, while older children are at school, the younger ones (aged 3-6) participate learn basic numeracy and literacy skills.

Many of the refugee children experienced terrible violence or lost relatives in the war, and show signs of emotional distress. Some arrive at the CFS quiet and withdrawn, while others are loud and boisterous. The staff identify and help children in need of psychosocial or medical support.

For Maliyamungu, when he's on the football pitch he can forget his traumatic journey to safety and the challenges of only having one arm. Back in the game, he fixes his eyes on the ball, races to reach it first, and delivers a perfect pass to one of his new friends.