

Health

Unlocking Potential: Families find hope at neurodevelopmental therapy outreach

...as experts reach 100 persons with special needs

Stories: **Appolonia Adeyemi**

As conversations around disability inclusion continue to grow in Nigeria, a community-based therapy outreach programme in Ikoyi-Obalende, Lagos, has provided renewed hope for families raising children with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

The Therapy Outreach and Awareness Programme, organised by Patrick Speech and Language Centre and Pure Souls Learning Foundation, with support from Roseline Emenike Foundation, Cradle Lounge Special Needs Initiative and other partners, brought together specialists, caregivers, parents and community members to promote early intervention, awareness and inclusion for children with special needs.

About 100 persons with special needs accessed screening, therapy consultations, treatment information and support services during the programme which was held on Friday.

The initiative aimed to raise awareness about developmental disabilities, educate caregivers, provide access to specialist support and reduce the stigma and misconceptions that often surround neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, cerebral palsy, speech and language disorders.

Representing the Permanent Secretary of Lagos Health District III, Dr. Monsurat Adeleke, Director of Health Planning, Research and Statistics, Dr. Adebayo Akintayo Akintayo, described the outreach as a vital partnership between government, communities and non-governmental organisations.

According to him, awareness remains one of the greatest tools for improving health outcomes.

"We need inclusive governance and inclusive quality healthcare delivery that will leave no one behind," he said.

Akintayo stressed that neurodevel-

opmental disorders should not be viewed from a single perspective because each child has unique needs and abilities. He emphasised the importance of maternal health, antenatal care and early childhood screening, noting that the critical period for brain development begins in the womb and continues through the first five years of life.

"If defects are discovered early and appropriate interventions are provided, many children can develop skills that allow them to contribute meaningfully to society," he said.

He urged parents not to hide children with disabilities because doing so deprives them of opportunities and prevents the government from gathering data needed for effective planning.

His key message was clear: "Special need equals special talent. Behind that special need, there is a special talent waiting to be discovered."

Akintayo also called for stronger partnerships in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, stressing that government alone cannot meet the needs of every vulnerable population.

Founder of Cradle Lounge Special Needs Initiative, Solape Azazi, said awareness about neurodevelopmental disabilities remains limited despite increasing diagnoses.

"A lot of people think they understand autism and other developmental disabilities, but their knowledge is often far from reality," she said.

Azazi praised the organisers for offering free multidisciplinary services, including speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioural analysis, paediatric assessments and educational psychology support.

She encouraged parents to see beyond diagnostic labels.

"Before the label is the child. Love that child unconditionally, find the strengths the child has and leverage those strengths. You will be amazed at what can come out of that child," she said.

For Ayomikun Sonuga, Grant Manager at Roseline Emenike Foundation, the programme demonstrates the power

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Founder and Director, Patrick Speech and Language, Dotun Akande

of collaboration in improving the lives of vulnerable children.

"We were impressed by the work Patrick Speech is doing and wanted to support this project. It is wonderful to see so many professionals helping children within the community," she said.

Sonuga urged caregivers not to give up despite the challenges of raising children with special needs, encouraging them to seek support, training and guidance whenever necessary.

The programme's impact was evident in the testimony of Mrs. Damilola, a civil servant and mother of seven-year-old Anuoluwa, who began showing developmental concerns shortly after infancy.

After years of speech therapy and interventions, she said her daughter now

communicates in simple sentences, reads and interacts better with others.

"There is improvement. She can read and express herself now," she said.

She advised other parents not to lose hope. "If there is an opportunity like this, take it. Do not relent. There is always a solution."

Beyond helping individual families, organisers said the outreach contributes to healthier communities by promoting early diagnosis, reducing stigma, supporting inclusive education and ensuring children with disabilities are not left behind. By unlocking the potential of children with neurodevelopmental disorders and connecting families to care, the initiative advances social inclusion, sustainable health and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those focused on health, education, reduced inequalities and partnerships.

For many families, the outreach was more than a medical intervention—it was a reminder that every child deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, belong and contribute to society.



Dr. Akintayo (3rd right); Azazi (third left); and other dignitaries at the Therapy Outreach and Awareness Programme, where persons with special needs accessed screening, therapy consultations, treatment information and support services in Lagos... recently

As Nigeria joined the global community to mark World Blood Donor Day 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO) has called on citizens to embrace voluntary blood donation as a civic responsibility capable of transforming healthcare delivery and saving thousands of lives.

Speaking at the commemoration of the day in Abuja, the WHO Representative to Nigeria, Dr. Pavel Ursu, said a stronger culture of regular blood donation among Nigerians could significantly reduce blood shortages and improve access to life-saving transfusion ser-

WHO urges Nigerians to turn blood donation into civic duty

vices across the country. The event, themed "One Drop of Humanity. Give Blood. Save Lives," celebrated voluntary, non-remunerated blood donors whose contributions support patients facing medical emergencies and critical health conditions.

According to Ursu, thousands of Nigerians require blood transfusions every day, including women experiencing complications during pregnancy and childbirth, children battling severe malaria and anaemia, road crash victims, surgical patients, and people living with chronic illnesses.

"Blood donation is one of the purest expressions of solidarity and humanity. A single donation can save multiple lives and provide hope for families facing medical emergencies," he said.

While commending the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the National Blood Service Agency, healthcare institu-

tions, development partners and civil society groups for strengthening Nigeria's blood transfusion system, Ursu noted that the country still faces significant shortages in blood supply.

He explained that WHO recommends a minimum of 10 blood donations per 1,000 population to meet basic clinical requirements, but many countries in Africa, including Nigeria, remain below this benchmark.

The WHO representative stressed that increasing the number of regular voluntary and unpaid donors remains the safest and most sustainable way to ensure adequate blood supply.

"We know that blood obtained from regular voluntary, unpaid donors is the safest source of blood. Therefore, increasing voluntary non-remunerated blood donation must remain a national

priority," he said.

Ursu urged young people, educational institutions, faith-based organisations and community groups to lead efforts in dispelling myths and misconceptions surrounding blood donation.

He also reaffirmed WHO's commitment to supporting Nigeria through policy guidance, quality assurance, workforce development and ongoing technical assistance for the review of the National Blood Policy.

Calling blood donors "silent heroes," Ursu said greater public participation in blood donation could change the narrative from recurring shortages to a reliable supply of safe blood nationwide.

"When we give blood, we give far more than a medical resource—we give hope, dignity, and a second chance at life," he said.

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