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FUN BEYOND THE CLUB

Four young Kenyans who are spearheading alcohol and drug-free initiatives say how they are focusing on building 'tribes' instead of fleeting friendships **P.4&5**



MyNetWork Show Biz

Elizabeth Ngigi



Podcast Review

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/the-local-pod-ke/id1583977796>

The Local Pod Ke, hosted by Adrian Simba, invites listeners on a journey of self-discovery, blending humour and heartfelt conversations about the complexities of life. With his engaging and relatable approach, Adrian navigates various life issues, making this podcast both entertaining and insightful. Adrian's ability to tackle serious topics with a light touch is commendable. He ensures that listeners leave with hope and motivation, even after difficult discussions. The podcast's format focuses on candid discussions that resonate with the everyday experiences of Kenyans.

Hotspot



Nairobi's Dance Extravaganza

Nairobi is gearing up for an exciting fusion of Afro-Latin rhythms and dance at the upcoming Afro-Latin Tamasha happening on Saturday, November 2 at Alliance Française. This event will celebrate Afro-Latin culture through dynamic performances, live bands, and an electrifying DJ lineup. The stage will showcase solo and couple dance performances from renowned Kenyan and international artists, including Jos Lyon & Kerrtu (Bachata) from Estonia, Michu & Dominika (Urban Kiz) from Tanzania, and Kenya's own stars like Esther Reggaeton, Sanchez Salvador & Luycer (Cuban Son), and The Gentlemen (Afrobeat/Gengetone fusion). Attendees will revel in a variety of genres like Salsa, Kizomba, Semba, Kompa, and Afrobeats, curated by top DJs and dance troupes. There will also be live Afro-Latin music. Tickets are available via Hustle Sasa.

Ian Oure, popularly known as Iyanii, has taken the music scene by storm with his latest hit, *Kifo Cha Mende*. Featuring Mwanaa of Vijana Barubaru and produced by music producer Ceddo, this track has captured the hearts of fans nationwide. In this interview, the *Pombe* hit maker tracks his music journey from being raised in Mathare slums, and reflects on the financial struggles that forced him to leave Daystar University. He also talks about how working alongside artistes like Arrow Bwoy shaped his vision

1. What inspires your dress code as an artiste?

I love being authentic in everything that I do. Most of the time, my manager and I sit down, brainstorm ideas, and create designs that represent who I am. We even have our tailor who brings these ideas to life and gives each outfit a clean, polished look. As for the accessories, I keep it simple yet bold with some bling to complete the vibe. Today, for example, I'm rocking this unique cowboy belt.

2. You have become one of the most sought-after young artistes in Kenya. Was there a defining moment when things just clicked for you?

Absolutely! That moment came with my song *Pombe*. I had released other songs, but they did not make as much impact. Actually, after releasing the song, there were about four weeks when we had just 3,000 views. My manager and I were monitoring the numbers and we said, this is it. Let us go to the studio and try something else.

Then one day, out of nowhere, we woke up to phone calls from friends telling us that the song was trending on social media, especially on TikTok. I did not have a TikTok account but people were using my song in thousands of videos, so I opened an account and found the song had over

60,000 videos at that time! That is when I knew things were going to be different.

3. Your family has been a big part of your journey. Can you share a bit about their influence?

I grew up with both parents and while we did not have much, they nurtured me well and taught me the importance of hard work. My brother, who used to sing too, is now my manager.

He gives me creative input and helps me stay focused. I am grateful for that support. I had been singing for a decade before people came to know me. I don't mean I am old, I just started singing when I was young, around age seven.

I was inspired by my brother and my dad who used to listen to music together with my mum. My grandfather played the guitar. By the time I was seven years old, I had decided that music was for me, and I started honing my skills.

4. What were some of the challenges you faced growing up in Mathare?

I had an amazing experience as a child. My neighbourhood showed me that I needed to work hard to get a better life. I knew that music was the only thing that could get me out of the slum so I used my music as a tool to uplift myself. I am so glad with the strides I have made so far. Music has changed my life in a major way. I have a whole team behind me. For us, it is a full-time job.

One of the challenges growing up in the slums is peer pressure. In Eastlands, so many young people end up in crime. You look at some of your friends who are living very good lives and you just admire them, but what you don't know is that some of them are criminals. If you are not careful, you might end up getting into crime while chasing that lifestyle. Living in Eastlands was also a blessing because you get to see the dark side of life, and that gives you the opportunity to reflect and decide what you really want in life.

Growing up, I saw so many artistes coming from that area, including the legendary Mighty King Kong. I saw EKO DYDA come up, I saw Willy Paul, Bahati and even Mr Seed. All these artistes with similar backgrounds kept me motivated and focused on building my craft.

5. How did dropping out of Daystar University and facing financial challenges shape your life?

I got a B+ in my final secondary school exams and I was enrolled in Daystar University for a journalism course but after a year, I dropped out of school.

My dad was not in a position to pay for my education because there was so much going on in the family. Luckily, I did not take it negatively when he came and told me that I could no longer continue with school. I told myself that since I had talent, I



Ian Oure, popularly known as Iyanii, is a vocalist, singer, songwriter and performer. PHOTO/FRANCIS NDERITU

could focus on music. After dropping out, I was privileged to get a scholarship at Sauti Academy, a music school, so I went for auditions. I was accepted but I still could not pay the fee. I approached the CEO of the school and I told her my story. She allowed me to be in school but requested me to support the institution through an outreach program as compensation.

Sometimes, we would go out to the streets to educate street children, or to prisons to teach inmates about music. I got to learn a lot and that's how I got my skills. I studied music for one and

a half years until I graduated. I would love to go back to school and pursue something related to music.

Working with Arrow Bwoy and his record label was a great experience. We had a strong connection and shared vision, which made the journey smooth. When I felt ready, we had an open talk, and he supported my decision to go solo. Even now we are still close, and I know I can call on him for advice any time. It is rare in this industry to find someone who genuinely cares and understands your dreams.

The Hustler

After getting kicked out of the house, The Empress strikes back



BY MIKE SAFARA

“Won’t you help me get the suitcase into the house, Mike?” Fatma Nunez Mahmoud said, as she started to drag her huge suitcase into the house.

“What happened to gentlemen these days, uh?”

As she made herself at home by going straight to the kitchen to cook dinner, my mind was racing frantically.

How dare this married woman run away from her rich abusive husband, and presume to immediately be my live-in partner?

“Where are your friends, Fatma?”

“You are my only friend, Mike.”

“But what about your siblings?” I asked.

“Shouldn’t they be hosting you until you work things out with Mr Mahmoud?”

“No brothers, we are just three girls, all married.”

“Fatma popped up at the doorway, a very sharp kitchen knife in her right hand.”

“You want to throw me out, Mike, even as you see how my eyes are sooo black?”

I gulped, looking at that knife, and rapidly shook my head.

“Good,” Fatma nodded slowly.

“Happy we understand one another, Michael.”

Her cooking was actually great, very tasty, spicy pilau, the like I hadn’t eaten for ages in my kibanda takeaway existence and I couldn’t help but compliment her.

“Wait until you taste my other food,” Fatma said with unmistakable

blewldness.

I quickly went to my bedroom, got the spare duvet and a pillow, and came to the living room couch to sleep there for the night. . .

“It’s too soon for me,” I said. “Let’s give it a few days?”

“Yes,” Nunez agreed. “I’m on my Ps, anyway.”

Was anything TMI in this runaway wife’s world?

Fatma took my room, and I took the couch, and was awoken at dawn by both the muezzin’s call to prayer, and a prayer delivered straight into my phone.

“Habari yako Bwana Safara? Naskia bibi wangu Fatma yu nyumbani kwako. Let her go. Tell her to come home!! Ama utapatikana Eastleigh na mambo yako itakuwa imeenda mrama, tunaewelwana kaka?”

My hands were shaking after I read the text, not to mention my left big toe and swollen foot (was I also getting gout at just 40?) but I did have a hustler’s plan.

After breakfast of scrambled eggs, white bread, hot white coffee – I could get used to it, which was my worry – I appealed to Fatma Nunez Mahmoud’s vanity.

“You’re such a pretty woman,” I said. “Let me treat you to a full salon treatment.”

Eagerly, Fatma accompanied me to the nearby mall where I told salonist Julianna Nywelele (she was actually Nyerere, a Tanzanian, but when you work in a salon with such a name. . .) to lay it on thick.

“Hair, facial, nails, kila kitu for the mrembo,” I said, before leaving Fatma Mahmoud in the hands of Madam Nywelele, and hurrying

back to the apartment.

Once there, I quickly put Fatma’s clothes and other items back in her suitcase – although I had to sit on it to get it to close.

Then I lugged it down the staircase, five floors down, to the very chilled Chebet, the daytime security guard at our block, and told her.

“Kuna mwanamke na hijab atakuja. Don’t let her up. Muambie nime hama, sawa?”

Chebet didn’t even blink, or change her expression. She just said, Ok.

Next, I fled to an Airbnb in the neighbouring hood and paid 4K for two nights. I didn’t want Mr Mahmoud’s men kidnapping me from my own house.

Then I called my friend Noni Mbuguas in Malindi, and gave her the man’s number.

“Please tell Mr Mahmoud his wife is at Madam Nyerere’s salon at the mall, Nons,” I said to the barely believing Ms Mbuguas. “And that I don’t want any trouble.”

Having played the part of Iscariot delivering Jesus to the Jews, I settled down at the Airbnb to watch a Netflix series, but I could hardly concentrate.

I was now down to Sh55,000, enough for my needs for the month of November.

But the holidays were here, and I hadn’t seen Neo for months. So I called Lora.

She didn’t pick up, but instead sent a rude message. “Do you have 50K for his upkeep in November? If not, keep off. Or like Riggby G, you can go to court. Bye!”

I didn’t bother to reply. How had I managed to live with Mama Neo

for five years?

I must have drifted off because when I awoke, it was to the ringing of the phone – and it would not stop ringing, throbbing there on the Airbnb couch like a rattlesnake. And I wouldn’t pick the strange number, as I knew it must be one of Mahmoud’s men. Had Noni not delivered my message? Should I call the police, tell them my life was under threat, and show them the text?

As I picked up my phone to do this, I saw the SMS. “Am a police officer, Mbui Mawangi. please call me agently, mr. Safari.”

I return her calls and get the shock of my life. “Do you know a Fatma Nunez Mahmoud?”

My throat went dry, the way the heart just knows when things are about to go south: “Should I know her?”

“Did she sleep at your house last night, Bwana Safara?” this Mbui asked, and I could tell she already had a statement from Chebet.

“She stayed over. O-o-overnight,” I stammered. “Her husband had abused her. She needed someone to stay. . .”

“That’s odd!” Police officer Mbui sounded skeptical. “Because she said you groped her this morning. And when she resisted, you hit her twice, giving her black eyes.”

“She told you that?” I said, incredulous.

“She did,” Mbui said. “In the company of her husband. Come down to the station I take down your statement, Mr Safara. This is a very serious double offense.”

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Movie Review



BY MICHAEL OCHIENG

PENGUIN
Where to watch: Prime Video
Genre: Drama

Penguin is a gripping crime-drama series that delves into the dark underbelly of Gotham City, following the rise of Oswald Cobblepot, better known as the Penguin. Created by Lauren LeFranc, this spin-off from the 2022 film *The Batman* explores the power struggles and moral ambiguities of Gotham’s criminal world.

The series picks up shortly after the events of *The Batman*, with Oz Cobb (Colin Farrell) navigating the treacherous waters of Gotham’s underworld. The show brilliantly portrays his transformation from a low-level thug to a formidable crime lord. Farrell’s performance is nothing short of mesmerising, capturing the complexity of a character who is both ruthless and oddly sympathetic.

One of the standout aspects of *Penguin* is its rich character development. The show doesn’t shy away from exploring the psychological depths of its characters. Oz’s relationship with his mother, Francis (played by Carmen Ejogo), adds a layer of vulnerability to his otherwise hardened persona. Their interactions are fraught with tension and reveal the emotional scars that drive Oz’s ambition.

The series also introduces Sofia Falcone (Cristin Milioti), the daughter of the late Carmine Falcone. Sofia is a formidable adversary, and her power struggle with Oz forms the crux of the narrative. Milioti’s portrayal of Sofia is compelling, as she brings a mix of charm and menace to the role. The dynamic between Oz and Sofia is electric, with each trying to outmaneuver the other in their quest for dominance.

Visually, *Penguin* is stunning. The show’s cinematography captures the grim, noir aesthetic of Gotham City, with its shadowy alleys and rain-soaked streets. The production design is meticulous, creating a world that feels both lived-in and larger-than-life.

The writing in *Penguin* is sharp and engaging. The dialogue is crisp, and the plot is tightly woven, with each episode building on the last to create a sense of mounting tension. The series doesn’t rely on gratuitous violence but instead focuses on the psychological and strategic aspects of crime.

MyNetWork Cover Story



In cities, people tend to isolate themselves, which leads to loneliness

These gatherings appeal to creatives, professionals and students who prefer a more meaningful way to relax without indulging in drugs or alcohol

BY JACKSON NGARI

As the world's social structure grows and evolves, a surprising number of young individuals are shunning the party atmosphere as the main source of entertainment. Instead, they're choosing to build close-knit communities where connection, creativity, and purpose are the main focus. These gatherings offer a break from loud music and late-night partying, and focus on genuine relationships and shared experiences.

Many of these gatherings are drug-free and aim to nurture deeper relationships, appealing to creatives, professionals and students who prefer a more meaningful way to relax without indulging in drugs or alcohol.

Keith Angana, 23
Co-founder and Executive Director of Qwani

I noticed early on that urban areas lack a strong sense of community, unlike rural settings where extended families live together and interact regularly. In cities, people tend to isolate themselves, socialising mostly with colleagues or school friends, which leads to loneliness. Luckily, my extended family maintains close ties even though most of us live in the city.

I sometimes feel strange telling my friends I spend weekends with my family. They tend to feel left out. When I share the nice experiences we record with my family members, I notice that it makes them think about how disconnected they are from their own families.

It is for this reason that I thought of creating an outfit that could bring people closer together.

At Qwani, what sets us apart is that our gatherings aren't centred around alcohol, unlike many social events in the city. Instead, we focus on activities that foster meaningful connections. Some say they struggle to open up and bond without alcohol, but we create opportunities to network and build relationships through shared experiences and creative pursuits, without drinking. Our events are usually free or low-cost, much cheaper than nights out at bars or clubs.

Our activities include book-writing projects where we produce an anthology every year featuring young writers. We go for hikes every month and attend cycling events outside the city twice every month.

Activities such as reading salons, poetry readings, open mics, karaoke, painting parties, sketch tours, and photography walks offer creative outlets. We also organise theatre performances, trivia nights, film screenings, and comic



How young Kenyans are having fun beyond drinking and clubbing



workshops. There is always something happening at Qwani. Themed picnics and fun days in parks add a layer of joy. We focus on creativity and believe these events promote genuine connections.

What makes our community feel like home is how we value every member. I always welcome new members personally. If they return and I remember our last conversation, it strengthens our bond. By the third visit, when I acknowledge their contributions, they know they're truly part of the group. This personal touch is what makes Qwani special.

We attract young people from all social classes, including the "cool kids," and even celebs. Ironically, I don't see myself as one of them. I'm more of a ghetto guy, so it's amusing to lead such a vibrant community.

I believe the internet has weakened the community's social fabric. Many are glued to their phones even at social gatherings, which makes it difficult to establish real connections.

This is something we are countering with Qwani.

It is hard to maintain social ties because young people's lives are quite dynamic. Some members have moved abroad or outside Nairobi for jobs, which is sad because they can no longer attend meetings regularly.

Growing our numbers is also tough. Even though we offer great activities, attracting new people isn't always easy. Sometimes I think a billboard or newspaper feature could boost our visibility.

Ultimately, I hope Qwani helps people love life. Life is beautiful when shared with people you care about, and that's what I want our community to bring out. I want to help creatives succeed, whether in music, art, writing, or other fields. We keep our members engaged with plenty of activities that encourage them to get out of the house. We always say, "Why stay home when Qwani exists?"

Our events are interactive and inclusive, ensuring everyone feels involved. I've noticed friendships built in communities like ours last longer than those formed around clubbing or fleeting social scenes. Plus, clubbing can be expensive, while real connections don't need much money to thrive.

We started as a hub for writers, but we've expanded to include poets, musicians,

Our events are usually free or low-cost, much cheaper than nights out at bars or clubs,

Keith Angana



painters, actors, scriptwriters, filmmakers, and more. Most of our members are Gen Z, but we're hoping to attract more millennials as well. Initially based in Nairobi, we now have branches in Mombasa, Eldoret, Nakuru, and Kisumu, with plans to expand to every town in Kenya.

My advice to anyone looking to start something similar? Just start. Use what you have, and let things evolve as you go.

Oyamo Richard, 24
Programs Manager at Rafinki

I am a writer, poet, editor, and the pro-



Creatives connect at a lively painting party organised by Qwani. PHOTO: POOL

grams and partnerships manager at Rafinki. I've performed in various shows and published two books – a poetry anthology titled *Musings on Life* and *The Kenyan Gen Z Protest Lexicon*, which documents the unique protests led by Gen Z in Kenya early this year. I'm particularly proud of the latter, as it captures the youth's role in establishing change.

I co-founded Rafinki in 2019, inspired by a desire to bring creatives together. Rafiki means "friend" in Kiswahili, while 'ink' is a symbol of the creativity of writers and artists.

The idea came to me while I was a student at Kenyatta University. While attending various art events, I often met poets and writers from KU, but we didn't know each other. It struck me that there was no dedicated space within our university for us to connect.

We initially tried to establish a club for poets and writers at KU, but bureaucratic challenges made registration difficult. Instead, we broadened our vision to include creatives from other institutions, which saw Rafinki evolve into an inclusive society for poets, writers, and visual artists.

Rafinki is a community strictly for creators, not just fans of art. We aim to exchange ideas and create opportunities for collaboration. While we socialise and have fun, our primary focus is on artistic and personal development.

We host monthly workshops at venues like Alliance Française where we discuss matters relevant to creatives, including financial management, intellectual property rights, marketing, and branding. These sessions equip members with skills for success in the industry. We also organise monthly open mic events at Baraza Media Lab where poets, spoken word artists, and musicians



Brian Khavalaji is the founder of Tabasamu Concepts, which focuses on curating events for young people. PHOTO: POOL

can showcase their talents and receive feedback.

Rafinki also emphasises building strong connections. We organise outings to art galleries, nature trails, and other creative spaces for members to unwind, bond, and get inspiration.

However, we face challenges, primarily financial ones, since many of us are fresh out of campus and unemployed. Another challenge is maintaining relevance. As members grow in their creative careers, some feel they've outgrown our projects. We're working on creating advanced opportunities for those who have progressed in their careers.

To add, many members have moved out of Nairobi after graduation, complicating in-person meetings and events.

Despite these challenges, our vision remains to empower creatives to use their art as a tool for social change while helping them find ways to earn a living from their craft.

Brian Khavalaji, 27
Founder of Tabasamu Concepts

I started my community by posting photos of myself smiling, with the caption '#SmileyDayAhead.' A friend suggested I turn that into something bigger, which led to the idea of hosting a small group of creatives for coffee.

After a planned picnic failed, I found individuals who shared my vision, and I secured a larger venue where we could meet. Following our first event, attendees requested monthly gatherings, and that's how we started creating spaces for unwinding and networking. My goal was to build a space where myself and others could feel comfortable.

While we aim to have fun, all our events are drug-free, proving that we can enjoy ourselves without substances. I'm constantly experimenting with new ideas to cater to the diverse needs of my audience.

We focus on creating experiences and helping people unwind from their hectic schedules. We've organised painting events, live music, outdoor hangouts, poetry readings, and gallery exhibitions, and are always seeking new ways for attendees to relax.

I strive to keep our hangouts affordable so that more people can attend. Beyond events, I build genuine friendships by checking up on members and involving them in planning.

Our hangouts attract a diverse crowd—students, young professionals, fresh graduates, and Gen Zs seeking spaces to socialise and network. The drug-free environment appeals to those uninterested in typical party scenes, and our affordability draws in those who may struggle to attend more expensive gatherings.

I don't believe platforms like TikTok or In-

stagram hinder community building, they can encourage more connections. However, social media can create a false sense of connection.

Growing and maintaining the community has its challenges. It is difficult to remain affordable while providing quality experiences, especially in Nairobi, where venues are costly. I started without experience and made mistakes, leading to some early negative experiences. However, I've learned from these setbacks and improved my event planning skills.

To keep people engaged, we host monthly hangouts and maintain WhatsApp groups for banter and connection.

I believe Gen Zs prefer tribe-building over clubbing because these communities offer a sense of purpose beyond just fun. Here, you find people with common interests, which can be more fulfilling than a night out at the club.

Our experiences have improved, and our group has grown. What began as a small circle of friends has expanded into a diverse gathering. I've witnessed meaningful friendships, collaborations, and even romantic relationships form through our

events. Looking ahead, I want to expand Tabasamu Concepts into a full-fledged events company. There's a growing need for mental health conversations, which I plan to incorporate into future events.

For anyone looking to build a tribe or community, my advice is, just start. I envisioned a circle of 10 friends, but our events now host around 50 on average. Identify a niche or purpose, gather like-minded people, and begin. Use affordable spaces like parks and learn as you go. There's a tribe for everyone, you just have to find your people.

Cynthia Nkanai, 24
Co-founder of This Is Me Community

I am a digital creator on Instagram and a social impact influencer. I co-founded This Is Me Community in 2018, and we focus on creating spaces where people can build genuine relationships and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

I've always had a passion for community outreach, but I wanted our activities to be engaging, different, and impactful. Our focus is always on fostering genuine connections. For example, when we visit children's homes, we encourage meaningful interactions with the children.

Our activities are structured around three core areas – impact projects, community hangouts, and events. Impact projects give young people an avenue to give back, while community gatherings help members connect and grow. For instance, we hold self-development classes where we discuss topics like financial literacy or body image. The events are open to everyone, and serve as fundraisers that also raise awareness about our mission.

We foster connections through discussions that encourage openness and introspection. When people come to our spaces, they feel comfortable enough to open up and connect through shared stories. Our members are mostly young people who want to make a difference, and they're drawn to us because of the unique mix of activities we offer. It's not just about socialising, it is about finding a space where you can truly be yourself and explore different aspects of yourself.

Social media has been instrumental in helping us grow. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow us to reach people who resonate with our mission.

Of course, we've faced challenges, especially financially. Since we're self-funded, many of our members are students or recent graduates, which sometimes makes fundraising difficult, but we keep pushing because we believe in the positive impact we're creating.

I hope our work inspires members to be more socially conscious and compassionate. I'd love for people to think beyond themselves and perhaps contribute to causes that support the less fortunate.

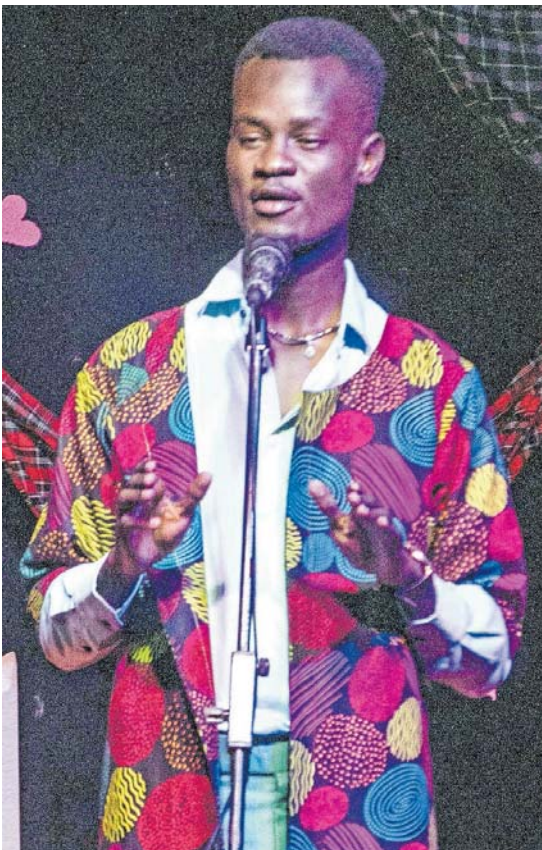
Some of our members have gone on to create their own initiatives inspired by This Is Me, which makes me incredibly proud.

As members of Gen Z, we are keen on creating change, and that's been a huge factor in our growth.

In future, I see This Is Me becoming a structured and influential youth initiative on a national level. I'd like us to become something akin to St John's Ambulance, but with a focus on community impact.

For anyone wanting to build their community, I'd say know your purpose because that's what will sustain you when things get tough. Be authentic, stay true to yourself, and have fun. People are naturally drawn to genuine energy, and as long as you're connected to something bigger than yourself, your community will grow.

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Richard Oyamo is a writer and programs manager at Rafinki, a Gen Z-led community. PHOTO: POOL



Cynthia Nkanai at an event, promoting genuine connections and positive change. PHOTO: POOL

Accomplished The second-born child in a family of four is the African long jump record holder

Samson Ojuka: Paralympian and upcoming lawyer

Q&A

BY GEOFFREY ANENE

Samson Ojuka, 28, is a para athlete who competes in sprints and long jump. He played football at Maseno School as a striker, but switched to athletics after he learned about paralympic sports when he joined Kenyatta University to pursue Bachelor of Law in 2018. The second-born child in a family of four is the African long jump record holder after he won silver at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games with a 6.20metres jump. The jump made Ojuka the first ever Kenyan to win a medal in long jump in the history of paralympics.

With all your accomplishments, it is hard to tell that you are living with a disability...

It is called Erbs Palsy. The classification for it in athletics is T37. It's an impairment on the arm and on the foot. I was not born with the condition. When I was born, I weighed around 5.6 kilogrammes. It was impossible for me to be removed from my mother's womb, so the doctors decided to break my arm so that I would stand a chance. It also affected my leg, so that's how I got the disability. Throughout my life I've been living with this disability, but it didn't stop me from participating in sports. I used to play with other children as usual. I have always wanted to be a sports person.

When did you start your athletics journey?

In 2017 while I was in high school. Initially I played football for my school and afterwards I joined the sub-county league playing as a striker with Komarock All Stars in Nairobi.

Who do you consider your role model in sports?

I have many role models. From sprinting, in Kenya, I look up to African 100 metres record holder Ferdinand Omanyala because I started as a sprinter. In long jump, it is for-

mer American sprinter and long jumper Carl Lewis. I like their resilience and success in their careers.

What challenges have you encountered so far in your sports career?

As paralympians we don't get as many endorsements and sponsorships as the able-bodied persons. Additionally, when it comes to employment opportunities, para-athletes are not given priority. Para-athletes have to struggle so much even to get training facilities, coaches and equipment.

What's your big dream as a para athlete?

I already achieved one of my dreams, which was to break the African record. I did so by winning silver at this year's Paralympic Games in Paris. I'm now aiming to break the world record which is just over 50 centimetres shy of my personal best (6.20 metres).

How did it feel to win Kenya's only medal at the 2024 Paris Paralympics?

The medal was a consolation for us as a country. I did not expect to get a medal or an African record. I was just hoping to do my best but in the process, God had his own plans and I won the silver medal.

You will be graduating with a law degree at Kenyatta University in December, how do you manage to pursue both sports and academics?

It is really difficult to juggle between the two. I consider sports a full-time job, yet a course such as law requires you to be committed to your studies. Juggling these two has been a struggle for me but I hope to achieve the best in both. I train for three days every week and concentrate on my studies for three days. When I'm on the field, I give my full attention to training and I do the same with my studies.

Tell us about how the law degree you are taking is helping you as an athlete...



This course is my retirement plan. After retirement, I hope to combine sport-related activities with the legal aspect of things because in law, there is sports laws that I can pursue as a career.

You must have been rewarded by the government for your efforts at the Paris 2024 Paralympics?

I cannot talk about that. But, what I can say is that I have financial advisors and financial managers that will help me utilise the cash award properly.

Has your family been supportive of your sports career?

Always. They support me financially, emotionally, spiritually although my dad Moses Ojuka and mother Martha Ojuka did not participate in sports when they were young. Before competing in Paris, they really encouraged me. And now that I'm pushing for the world at the 2026 Paralympics, they are fully behind me.

How did they celebrate your win at the Paralympics? Were your classmates happy for you?

The university supported me by waiving part of my school fees and I thank them for that. Additionally, they kept me posting me on their social media pages

which gave me a really nice feeling. As for my family, we went out for a family celebration when I came back from Paris.

Paris 2024 Paralympic long jump gold medallist Brian Lionel Impellizzeri must have said something to motivate you after you came second...

He cannot motivate me because he is my opponent. But I know he was shocked that I was got the silver medal. Ahead of the Paris Games, my competitions and performances had not been that impressive. It was only in the Paris games that I really came up. So I think he feels challenged. I just aim to do better and better. I managed to get the medal because of intense training. I used to get a lot of injuries because of over-training, but I kept putting in the hard work. I used to train three times a day, every day. Even on the days when I was supposed to rest, I was still training. This is what led to my success.

Tell us about your best moments in athletics...

Winning the silver medal at the Paris 2024 Paralympics is the best moment for me. I'm glad I've joined the elite and the few members who have Olympic medals.

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Kenya's Paris Paralympics silver medallist Samson Ojuka displays the silver medal he won with a new African record of 6.20m in men's long jump T37, on September 30, 2024. PHOTO: CHRIS OMOLLO

It has been said that personality is crucial for career success. What do you think? Are personality traits not in-born and therefore different from one person to another?

Personality traits play a vital role in career success, often rivaling technical skills and experience. While expertise is essential for performing tasks effectively, personality traits shape how individuals navigate professional environments, collaborate with others, and seize arising opportunities. Personality influences not only how one works but also how one is perceived. Meeting performance expectations is doubtless a prerequisite for career success, yet it is often personality traits that determine the alti-

tude of the perches an individual can access in an organisation.

Research has associated personality traits such as conscientiousness, emotional intelligence, adaptability, resilience, and openness to career success. Conscientious individuals tend to be disciplined and reliable, attributes that could inform consistent performance. Emotional intelligence, the knack of properly recognising and managing one's emotions and those of others, is crucial for effective communication, conflict resolution, and leadership. Emotional intelligence also helps to build strong relationships and foster a positive work environment. Adaptability, the ability to adjust to new circumstances

and challenges, is particularly important in a rapidly changing environment, enabling individuals to remain relevant. Resilience helps individuals persevere in the face of career setbacks. Being able to maintain composure and motivation during trying times often distinguishes those who can sustain long-term success from those who falter. Openness fosters creativity and innovation, traits that are crucial in nearly every industry.

In addition, a positive attitude, openness to feedback, and hunger for growth can further enhance one's career progression. Individuals who exhibit optimism and enthusiasm tend to inspire confidence and attract more career and leadership opportunities. Mean-

while, those who embrace feedback and continuous learning tend to get further along their career journeys.

No personality trait, however, has an inherent monopoly on career success. Instead, the key lies in self-awareness and adaptability. Understanding one's strengths and limitations allows individuals to align their career choices with their personalities, thereby optimally harnessing their potential. While genetics may predispose individuals towards some and not others, desirable personality traits can be forged by a commitment to personal development. Career success is seldom nested in the genes.

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