

White skin, evil ghosts. The life and survival of albinos in Tanzania

Albinism is a medical condition that can occur in anyone, anywhere in the world. It can be found in dark, coloured or white people. It is the absence of melanin, a group of natural pigments, in the body.

Many albinos have been killed, maimed or mentally abused, and this is still happening today, due to stigma, superstition and a lack of understanding of the medical condition.

Another big enemy for albinos worldwide is sunshine and bright lights. Their skin and eyes need constant extra protection in order to avoid cancer and infections. Their life expectancy is half that of a healthy person.

That is why the DEAR Foundation supports a number of projects around the world providing albinos with extra care and helping to develop greater medical understanding in surrounding populations, to facilitate greater integration of albinos in society.

One such project, 'The Sisters of Saint Francis of Assisi Primary School', located at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, has been taking care of orphaned, blind, mute, and deaf children, as well as 70 children born with albinism, since the year 2000. They live and learn together in a large compound surrounded by high walls to protect them from crime and wild animals. A large grinding machine, together with other equipment for the school and this protective wall were all financed by the DEAR Foundation.

In Tanzania there is now an albino football team, albino teachers, and even an albino government minister - Dr. Abdallah Possi. The DEAR Foundation have also supported many albino women in establishing their own businesses, by providing microcredit through partner organisations.

The overall situation is improving gradually, and the key to further improvement is education - for both albinos and for the rest of society. The ultimate goal is to fully integrate them into society, ensuring they receive the same opportunities as everyone else, without prejudice.