

Batram Lwambano, 35.

Carpentry runs in my blood. I studied it at the disabled college in Mbeya and I did it for a living before coming to Neema, so when I saw I could do it here, I was really pleased. It was great to discover there was a job available for me here as it's very seldom the disabled get jobs.

I began by making special chairs for disabled people to go in the physiotherapy unit here. I also help with papermaking. Working with other disabled people was an exciting thing to see. I feel like I'm doing positive things for other people. Life's better than before and I feel better about myself. As a worker, I feel I have more respect from society too.

My parents had a negative outlook on disabilities when I was young, so they didn't send me to school. I was lonely as a child and I felt like I had no right to go. I was always at home in the village and it was difficult to meet other children.

But when I was a teenager I managed to receive some sponsorship to go and learn a new skill – this was carpentry, after studying for two years I asked my family to help me buy tools to start my own business, but they said no because I was disabled.

Eventually a missionary helped me and I worked in the trade for five years. I was very happy to finally be working. It felt like I was proving people wrong, but business was not good because many customers would not ask me to work because of my disability.

I caught polio when I was three, which affected my leg. I have to use a stick to support myself everywhere I go, although I have a tricycle from Neema to get to work on.

I want to put my children through school and build a good house with the money I make at Neema. Life with children is tough – I have four and a wife to support, but Neema's helped me financially with loans and with organising healthcare.

It's also opened the government's eyes. It gives out a very positive message and shows we don't need to be isolated and segregated.