

Johari Mdota, 33.

I could have despaired in my last job. I had to collect stones from the mountains nearby to make concrete. It was exhausting but I did it for five years anyway. There was little choice. I started to work there as soon as I could use a stick to support myself, as it required slightly less walking than other jobs, even then I had to crawl a lot of the time because I could not carry the heavy stones and walk with a stick at the same time. I couldn't have sold things on any sort of mobile business for instance; that would've required lots of moving around.

I have to use a stick to support one of my legs after contracting polio when I was six. When I first became ill, I just used to crawl around and I wasn't able to visit friends. My parents sent me to the doctor regularly and I made it to school, but only for the first three years. Getting around was difficult.

I heard about Neema Crafts through a relative and I knew it was going to improve my life. I was on the waiting list for work for nearly 2 years when Susie came to find me to say I had work. I was so happy to join and I enjoyed the work instantly. I started in the solar panel workshop, which I think is a brilliant, sustainable project. I began to feel better in myself and gradually, things improved.

Where I'd struggled with money and long hours before, I could now afford school fees for two of my children. My third child is now sponsored by an Englishman. I could pay rent and bills and afford my bus ticket every day. Tanzanian life is still stressful – my husband is now sick and I have to look after him. We never have lots of money, but I know I'm better off than I was before especially as I have almost finished building my own house on land I have bought with help from Neema Crafts.

I hope there'll come a time when the government and banks can provide disabled people with loans (The bank would not lend to me because I was disabled, even though Mama Susie came with me to speak to the manager), so we can have help with rent or to buy our own plot for example. I think we're getting onto an equal level here, but there's still some distance to overcome.