

## Amani: Learning to steal the show



“Amani was not even 4years old when he arrived at the Shule ya Viziwi (Swahili for Deaf School) in March 2010. Like most children when they first arrive at the School, Amani did not know any spoken or Sign language. For many children, this can be a very frustrating experience, but Amani soon showed us his special talent for communication.

During his first week, Amani was always sad and cried. When one of the teachers, Mwalimu Mushi (Mwalimu is Swahili for Teacher) asked him why he was crying, Amani took her by the hand and led her outside, where he began to draw two stick figures on the sand; one big and the other smaller. He pointed at the small figure and then to himself. After that he pointed at the bigger one and started crying again.

Mwalimu Mushi then realised that Amani was trying to explain that he was missing his mother – a natural reaction for a 4years old! Mwalimu Mushi then did her best to comfort Amani.

Implementing Shule ya Viziwi’s philosophy of “Total Communication”, Mwalimu Mushi recognises the individual talents of each child. Greatly impressed with Amani, she told the other teachers about Amani’s communication skills. Soon afterwards, Amani had learnt the names signs of all children at the school, as well as many other daily signs. And Amani wasn’t simply imitating others when he made the signs – he could clearly understand each sign’s meaning and used the right signs at the appropriate times. Two months later, Amani was making full sentences with up to 6 signs. He had mastered not only the presence tense, but could also give information or ask questions about past or the future. For example, one day he asked a teacher; “Teacher, do you remember last week when Raymond (one of the deaf kids) stole my pencil?”

It is impossible not to notice Amani; he is an extremely happy and somewhat cheeky little boy. As he skips around school, he interacts easily with others. In fact, Amani knows exactly how to steal the show and to get lots of attention; he makes everyone around him laugh with his creative sense of humour – and of course with his sparkling huge eyes”

*VSO Volunteer- Renee Kwakel, Speech and Language Therapist at the Shule ya Viziwi (Dodoma Deaf School) 2010*