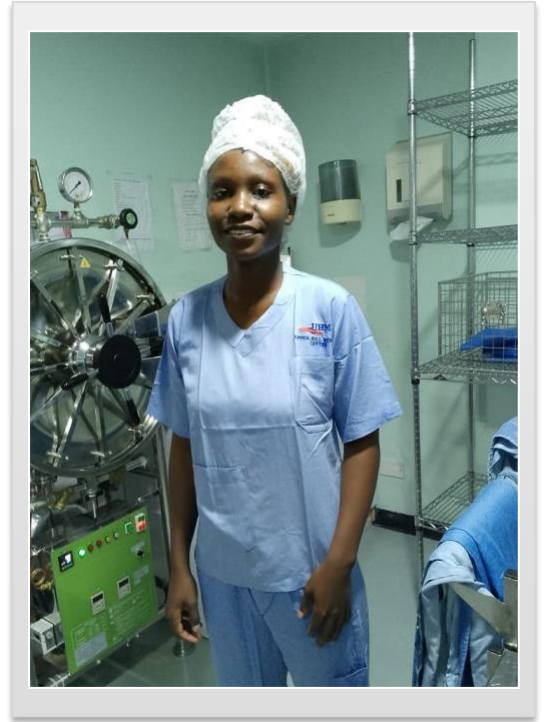


Determination and discipline – the keys to Esther’s success

Esther Wahu Njeri is nothing if not determined. Raised by a single mother who works as a casual labourer, Esther knows what it is like to be poor. “It was so tough,” she says. Sometimes her mother got work only two or three times a week, which meant food was in short supply.

Despite the daily struggle Esther did well at school, getting a good pass in her primary exams. But in Kenya, while primary education is free, secondary education is fee paying. Together with her cousin, Esther decided to go from house to house in an affluent area of Nairobi, hoping to find sponsors. Unfortunately, they had no luck.

Then Esther heard about FDC, and the two girls set out for the FDC offices in Dagoretti, where they met Catherine Muguru, the FDC social worker. But they were too late, as students had already been selected for that year. Dejected again, the girls walked the long road home. Determined to continue her schooling, Esther returned alone to FDC, where she once again found Catherine. Impressed by her resolve, Catherine decided to interview Esther on the spot, to assess whether she met FDC’s standards. “I couldn’t help but see how much she wanted to continue with her education”, remembers Catherine, and after visiting Esther’s home, she asked FDC committee members to do their own assessment. “They all agreed she was the kind of child who would do well if given a chance.”



Fast forward four years and Esther was taking her secondary exams, hoping to achieve the necessary grades to study nursing. Unfortunately, she underachieved in one subject, but instead was offered a place on a new course at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. Esther was delighted, but Catherine had her doubts. “She was offered a new, unproven course which was of no interest to her” says Catherine, who asked her to defer her place for a year. “I felt so discouraged”, Esther recalls, but defer it she did, continuing her community service while she considered her options.

Concerned that FDC might “give up on her”, Esther began a catering course in 2020, but after three months the college closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. By chance, FDC heard about a new two year course at Karen Hospital Medical Training College in Perioperative Theatre Technology – that is, training to become a hospital theatre technician. The course appealed to Esther. If she could not study nursing, she could still work in the medical field. Of the 20 students who began the course with her, less than half completed it. “It’s tough”, Esther explains. “You really need discipline – it’s the key thing.”

Nearly three years later Esther, now 24, has no regrets. Having worked as an unpaid intern for six months at a large hospital in Nairobi she now has a contract with a prestigious medical centre. “I like everything about this job”, she enthuses. The centre is small enough for Esther to work within the whole surgical process, from preparing the instruments for surgery, to assisting in the operating theatre.

Does Esther have regrets about not going to university? “I had that mentality of getting into university”, she admits. “It was a big deal. But now I have no regrets. I feel that what I have achieved is something that gives me joy. Everything happens for a reason.”