

Uhuru and the 'What After Me' Question – Research Report (Cohort 2)

Field-Based, Rhythm-Rooted Training for Neurodiverse Adults through Community, Care, and Co-Facilitation
By Snehadhara Foundation

Title: Uhuru and the 'What After Me' Question – Cohort 2

Field-Based, Rhythm-Rooted Training for Neurodiverse Adults through Community, Care, and Co-Facilitation

Subtitle: An Inquiry into Empowerment, Stamina, and Belonging in Arts-Based Assisted Living Models

Abstract

This study explores the outcomes of the second cohort of the 26-day Uhuru Assisted Living Programme, engaging 10 neurodiverse adults and one short-term participant. Designed as an immersive model integrating two daily learning sessions, vocational tasks, and community participation, the programme emphasized rhythm, repetition, and relational care. Through narrative analysis, triangulated facilitator data, and structured documentation, the research captures significant growth in stamina for learning, emotional regulation, and self-leadership. Fieldwork in government schools and engagements in public spaces further enhanced participant confidence, resilience, and social reciprocity. The study offers a grounded model for community-embedded assisted living frameworks.

Methodology - Summary

A mixed-methods approach was employed. Data sources included structured facilitator observations, creative artifacts, behavioral trackers, and session-wise logs. The design emphasized daily experiential and vocational learning paired with community engagement. Coding was applied across domains of functioning, triangulated with public-facing interactions and field immersion insights.

Methodology – Detailed

Design: Mixed methods; emphasis on qualitative narrative synthesis and coded quantification

Participants: 10 participants + 1 short-term (5 days)

Data Sources:

- Daily reports and session-wise engagement logs
- Vocational tracking (clay, kitchen, setup, and cleanup)
- Creative reflections, government school session documentation

Key Domains Coded:

- Stamina and Learning Capacity
- Government School Participation and Co-Facilitation Readiness
- Community/Public Engagement
- ADL, Emotional Regulation, Social Interaction, Vocational Engagement

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Quantification:

- Frequency mapping of domain-specific behaviors using engagement logs and observation matrices
- Frequency counts and percentage calculations for comparative analysis across developmental domains.

Codes and Definitions

The following codes were used to analyze participant behavior and growth across domains in the Uhuru programme. These definitions provided the framework for both qualitative coding and descriptive quantification.

- ADL Progress refers to observable improvement in activities of daily living, such as hygiene, dressing, eating, and managing routines. Progress was marked by increased independence, reduced need for verbal prompts, and spontaneous task initiation.
- Community Participation captures the extent to which participants engaged in shared responsibilities like cleaning, cooking, gardening, and preparing common areas. This code reflects a growing sense of ownership, rhythm, and interdependence within the group.
- Vocational Engagement denotes the willingness and ability of participants to focus on structured vocational tasks, demonstrate skill development, and take pride in outcomes. This includes both guided and self-initiated work, and responsiveness to feedback.
- Emotional Regulation involves a participant's capacity to manage emotional responses—such as frustration, anxiety, or overexcitement. Regulation may be self-initiated or co-regulated.
- Social Interaction is identified through the initiation or response to peer and adult interaction using gestures, language, touch, or shared activity. This includes checking in on peers, mirroring behaviors, or collaboratively navigating tasks.
- Communication and Expression encompasses both verbal and non-verbal modalities through which participants shared their thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Artistic forms such as drawing, music, dance, or storytelling were key pathways for this expression.
- Co-Facilitation Skills refers to a participant's readiness to model behavior, lead tasks, or guide others, particularly in structured environments like government school sessions. It reflects an emerging leadership and support role within a shared space.
- Learning Stamina indicates a participant's ability to sustain attention, engagement, and cognitive effort across two or more daily learning sessions, with minimal signs of fatigue or behavioral disengagement.
- Public Space Navigation was used to capture how participants handled unstructured, unpredictable environments such as travel, performances, or community events. Success in this area reflects comfort with transitions, sensory adaptation, and collective behavior.
- Peer Reciprocity highlights moments of mutual interaction, where participants offered help, mirrored behavior, or co-created experiences with peers—demonstrating trust, empathy, and growing social awareness.

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Key Additions in Cohort 2

1. Learning Stamina & Rhythm-Based Design- This cohort undertook two structured learning sessions per day—in addition to daily vocational routines. This increased cognitive and physical stamina:

- By Week 2, 90% could sustain attention and participation across both sessions
- Reflection circles showed increased articulation of learning experiences
- Participants adapted to group norms, transitions, and recall of earlier content

2. Government School Immersions- Cohort 2 conducted field-based sessions in local government schools, where they co-facilitated activities with children:

- All participants engaged in at least two visits; 5 participants initiated or led parts of sessions
- Tasks included: rhythm circles, visual art facilitation, movement-based warm-ups
- These sessions served as real-life application of group regulation, empathy, and instruction clarity
- Peer leaders emerged, notably in setting up materials, managing group rhythms, and initiating child engagement

Inclusion in Public Spaces: Bhakti – A Shared Longing

One of the most defining moments for Cohort 2 was the field immersion experience at Bhakti: A Shared Longing—a multidisciplinary, multilingual dance-theatre performance. For many participants, this was their first exposure to a live public arts event, one that demanded emotional containment, sensory adaptability, and group regulation in an unpredictable space.

Without prior social stories or structured preps, the group:

- Boarded a bus joyfully, adjusting to new routines and timelines
- Ate dinner early, adapting mealtime to the event's schedule
- Sat together through the entire performance without restlessness or disruption
- Managed transitions, toilet needs, sensory shifts, and crowd dynamics with remarkable calm
- Remained fully engaged in the performance—attuned to the rhythm, visuals, and energy of the show

This experience surfaced multiple spontaneous milestones across regulation, stamina, and peer connectedness. It also deepened the group's ability to:

- Navigate large, public environments with minimal facilitation
- Practice co-regulation in dynamic, high-sensory contexts
- Demonstrate resilience, containment, and respect in shared cultural spaces

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Domain-Wise Summary in Cohort 2

Domain	% Demonstrated Growth	Key Highlights
ADL Progress	90%	Improved dressing, grooming, meal prep routines
Community Participation	100%	Shared meal setup, cleaning, kitchen chores
Vocational Engagement	100%	Daily clay work, some moved to complex designs
Emotional Regulation	80%	Fewer outbursts
Social Interaction	70%	Peer-to-peer interaction, growing reciprocity
Co-Facilitation Skills	50%	Public school sessions, storytelling, rhythm circles
Learning Stamina	90%	Sustained attention across 2 sessions daily

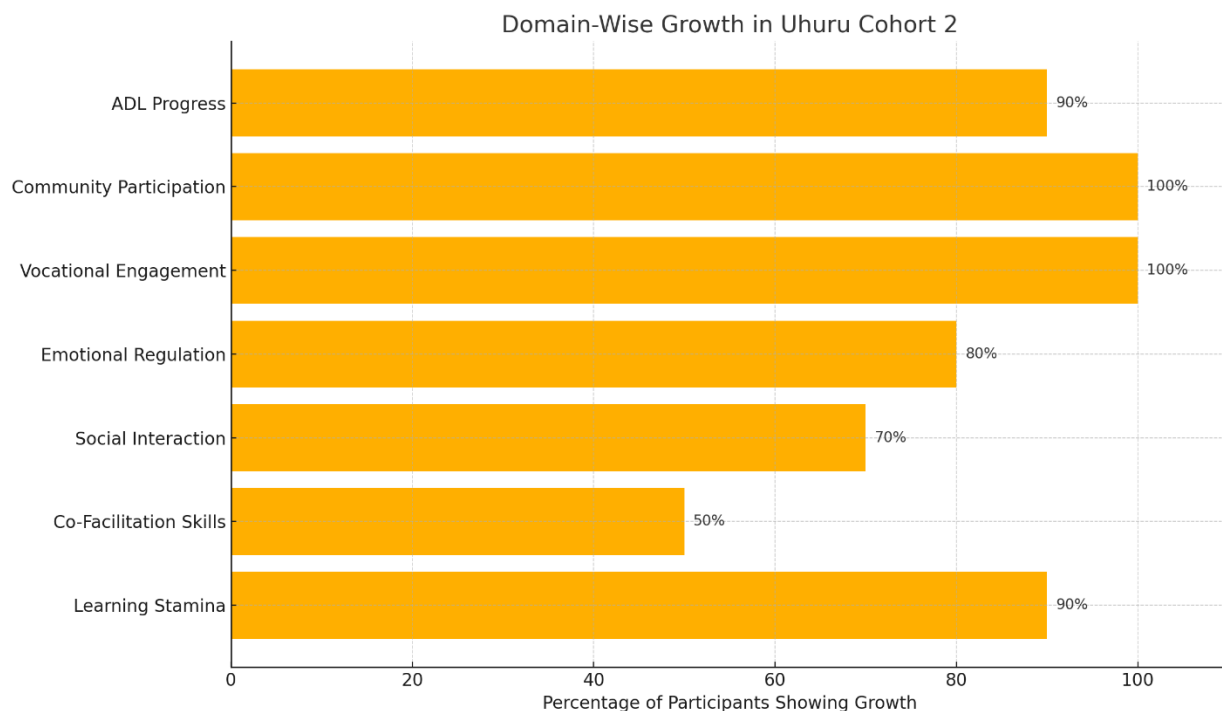
Domain Wise Detailed Analysis

- **Activities of Daily Living (ADL):** Across the cohort, 90% of participants demonstrated significant improvement in activities of daily living. Many moved from needing consistent prompts to independently initiating routines like brushing, dressing, and help with preparing for meals. The shift was marked not just by functional independence but also by increased willingness and reduced resistance.
- **Community Participation:** Every participant actively engaged in community living responsibilities, including cleaning, kitchen prep, gardening, and setting up common areas. What began as modeled behavior transformed into self-motivated acts of participation. Many chose to repeat tasks voluntarily, showing a growing sense of ownership and rhythm with the group.
- **Vocational Engagement:** All participants took part in vocational tasks such as clay modeling, cutting, and shelf organization. These activities saw steady improvement in task completion, focus, and pride in output.
- **Communication and Expression:** Eight out of ten participants communicated their thoughts, feelings, or preferences using speech, gestures, or creative arts. Expression became more spontaneous and layered over time. Compared to Cohort 1, there was a visible shift toward sustained self-expression, often emerging in group sharing or post-activity reflections.
- **Emotional Regulation:** About 80% of participants were able to regulate their emotions. Escalations were minimal. While a few continued to rely on adult co-regulation, most showed increasing awareness of their emotional states and tools for managing them.
- **Social Interaction:** Approximately 70% of the cohort initiated or responded to peer interaction with comfort and ease. Others required facilitation but still engaged with modeled cues. Participants were often seen checking in on peers, sharing resources, or initiating touch-based interactions like high-fives or hugs, signaling increased trust and social confidence.

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- **Co-Facilitation Skills:** Half the group displayed emerging co-facilitation skills during structured external engagements, especially in the government school sessions. Participants modeled behavior, offered instructions to younger children, and supported peers.
- **Learning Stamina:** The group was able to sustain two structured learning sessions each day in addition to their vocational and community tasks. 90% maintained attention, showed minimal signs of fatigue, and displayed enthusiasm for recurring routines and sessions. This stamina marks a significant gain in cognitive and emotional endurance.
- **Public Space Navigation:** Participants adapted to public environments such as field trips and performances with grace and composure. The visit to “Bhakti: A Shared Longing” exemplified this; not a single participant disrupted the event, expressed discomfort, or needed to leave. They managed transitions, toileting, sensory input, and social etiquette in unfamiliar settings, showing increased resilience.
- **Self-Agency:** Several participants expressed their preferences, asked for specific tasks, and demonstrated initiative. Whether it was choosing a role, advocating for needs, or deciding how to participate in a session, these moments highlighted growing confidence and the internalization of choice-making.
- **Peer Reciprocity:** The cohort frequently exhibited mutual exchanges helping one another, mirroring actions in group settings, and celebrating each other’s successes. This shift from parallel participation to cooperative engagement reflects a maturation in relational capacity and social learning.
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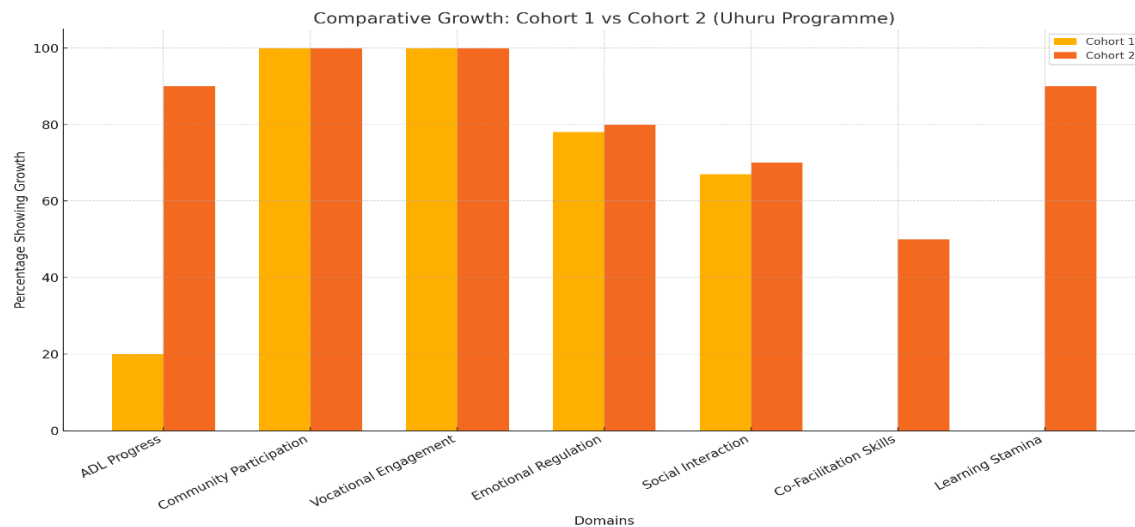
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Cohort Comparison: Key Shifts from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2

As the Uhuru programme evolves, the comparative analysis between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 offers valuable insights into how refinements in design, facilitation, and community engagement have translated into measurable developmental shifts. While both cohorts share the foundational principles of dignity, rhythm, and inclusion, Cohort 2 was intentionally structured to deepen learning stamina, broaden community immersion, and promote co-leadership.

Domain	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Shift Observed
ADL Progress	20% average increase in independence	90% demonstrated ADL gains	Greater autonomy, task initiation, and reduced prompts
Community Participation	100% engagement in group tasks	100% engagement sustained	Consistent strength; deeper pride in shared ownership
Vocational Engagement	Focused on exposure and routine tasks	Skill-building with pride in output	Increased confidence and visibility of outcomes
Emotional Regulation	78% regulated with adult scaffolding	80% showed self-led or peer-supported regulation	Greater use of tools and internalization of rhythm
Social Interaction	67% initiated/engaged with prompts	70% initiated or responded with growing ease	Emergent autonomy in peer interactions
Co-Facilitation Skills	Not present in cohort design	50% demonstrated readiness in peer leadership	Shift from recipient to contributor roles
Learning Stamina	Not tracked	90% sustained dual sessions with cognitive focus	Stronger attention spans, motivation, and persistence



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Comparison Summary of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2

1. Activities of Daily Living (ADL):

- Cohort 1: Showed an average 20% increase in ADL independence, primarily with scaffolding.
- Cohort 2: Jumped to 90% improvement, with more participants initiating tasks with reduced prompts.
→ Insight: The structured rhythm of dual sessions likely built stronger muscle memory and daily routine ownership in Cohort 2.

2. Community Participation:

- Both cohorts achieved 100% participation in community tasks.
→ Insight: This remains a core strength across cohorts, validating the model's emphasis on group rhythm and shared responsibilities.

3. Vocational Engagement:

- Cohort 1 & 2: All participants engaged in vocational tasks (e.g., clay, kitchen), but Cohort 2 displayed deeper skill acquisition and pride in outcomes.
→ Insight: Increased feedback loops and reflection time boosted confidence and visibility of impact.

4. Emotional Regulation:

- Cohort 1: 78% showed positive shifts; relied heavily on arts and facilitator support.
- Cohort 2: 80% achieved regulation; growing self-led regulation using rhythmic tools and peer co-regulation.
→ Insight: Cohort 2's exposure to public events and co-facilitation likely strengthened emotional containment.

5. Social Interaction:

- Cohort 1: 67% initiated or engaged in social interactions.
- Cohort 2: 70% initiated or responded with reduced prompts, showing emerging autonomy.
→ Insight: Peer bonding and exposure to new settings may have accelerated expressive confidence.

6. Co-Facilitation Readiness:

- Cohort 1: Not present.
- Cohort 2: 50% showed readiness through government school sessions and peer leadership.
→ Insight: Inclusion of facilitation training enhanced agency and leadership modeling.

7. Learning Stamina (New in Cohort 2):

- Cohort 1: Not measured.
- Cohort 2: 90% managed two daily sessions, reflecting increased cognitive resilience and motivation.
→ Insight: The model's rhythm-focused curriculum fostered better attention spans and self-motivation.

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Conclusion and Reflection

The second cohort of the Uhuru Assisted Living Programme has reaffirmed what the first cohort began to reveal: that neurodiverse adults thrive in rhythm-based, socially embedded environments when held with consistency, structure, and dignity. Cohort 2 deepened this understanding by integrating higher learning stamina, purposeful public interaction, and co-facilitation roles with school children, elements that extend the boundaries of what empowerment can look like for this population.

Over the course of 26 days, participants made visible transitions from dependence to autonomy not just in functional tasks like dressing or food preparation, but in self-led choices, co-regulation strategies, social reciprocity, and navigating public spaces with grace and confidence. These gains were neither incidental nor linear; they were the outcome of a carefully scaffolded curriculum anchored in rhythm, creative exploration, and community work.

Importantly, the design of two learning sessions per day alongside vocational training and daily responsibilities tested and strengthened the group's cognitive and emotional stamina. The cohort met this challenge with growing clarity, showing up with sustained attention, resilience, and a willingness to learn. The thematic structure of sessions and consistent use of documentation and anecdotal reflection allowed facilitators to track not only individual progress but group pattern shifts in rhythm, social trust, and shared joy.

Uhuru Cohort 2, like the first, stands as a living response to the urgent and emotional question: "What after me?" The answer is clear autonomy can be cultivated, not through control or isolation, but through rhythm, relationship, and respect. Participants were not only held, but invited to hold to lead, to co-facilitate, to model behavior, and to contribute meaningfully to collective life.

This model is replicable. The key lies in holding the programme within a values-based, arts-integrated framework where each participant's journey is documented not as a metric alone, but as a story worth telling. The richness of anecdotes from these two cohorts, combined with triangulated observations and behavioral shifts, offers a blueprint for future iterations. They point to the need for structured thematic sessions, rhythm-anchored routines, and a team aligned in values, vision, and presence.

Together, the two Uhuru cohorts have served as a crucible for a larger pilot. They offer tangible evidence and learning to now envision a new possibility: monthly, week-long residential modules that welcome more families and neurodiverse individuals seeking community-based assisted living training. These short-term, high-impact immersions can serve as steppingstones bringing families closer to supported autonomy and shared care. The journey of Cohort 2 shows us that when we let go of rigid expectations and lean into community, creative play, and co-learning, something transformative happens. Autonomy becomes not a destination, but a lived, shared experience held and shaped by the collective.