

FROM ACCUSED TO ADVOCATE!

Transforming Campus Diabetes Stigma into Action

Zinnia Wijsman

Person Living with Type 1 Diabetes, Diabetes Youth Care Ghana, VIA Diabetes



My name is Zinnia Wijsman and I was falsely accused of “injecting drugs on campus”

The Moment

The day I was summoned to the office, my heart pounding with confusion and fear. Someone had reported me for “injecting drugs” on campus. My crime? Injecting insulin to stay alive

That moment revealed a hard truth:

Diabetes stigma exists even in educated spaces.

If I, educated, supported, and confident, could be made to feel like a criminal for managing my health, how many others were suffering in silence? How many students were skipping insulin doses out of fear? How many students were hiding their conditions in shame? How many families were drowning in misconceptions? That humiliation became my catalyst. I decided that day: no one else would face what I faced. Not on my watch.

Why this matters?

Stigma creates fear. Fear makes people hide.

Hiding puts lives at risk.

For students with diabetes, stigma can lead to:

- Missed insulin doses
- Shame and silence
- Unsafe learning environments

This is not a personal failure.

It is a systems and awareness gap.

The Action!

With the Rotaract Club of Ashesi, we launched a campus-wide diabetes awareness initiative:

- Open conversations and Q&As
- Visual campaigns challenging stereotypes
- Sessions with diabetes specialists
- Free blood sugar and blood pressure screenings

180+ students and staff participated.

Curiosity replaced judgment.

Support replaced silence.



The Impact!

- Increased understanding of diabetes on campus
- Safer spaces for students managing their health
- Earlier screening and prevention
- Stronger empathy within the university community

We didn't just share facts.....We changed attitudes.



Going Beyond Campus

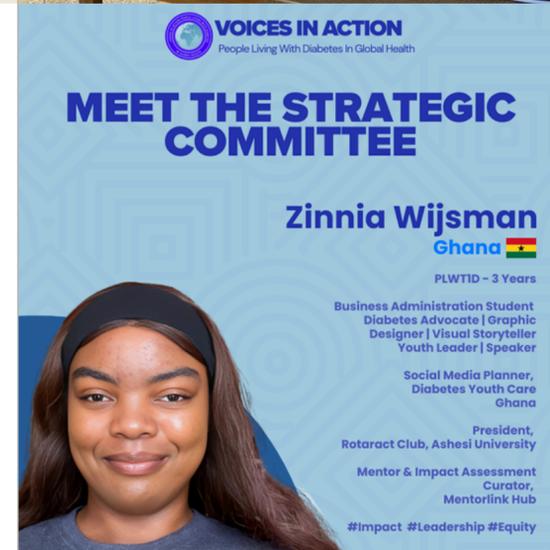
I now contribute to global diabetes advocacy through:

Social Media Planner for Diabetes Youth Care Ghana

Member of the Strategic Committee

Voices In Action: People Living With Diabetes In Global Health

T1International



Key Message!

Stigma thrives in silence.
Awareness thrives in community.