



WHY HAS ANNA BEEN NOMINATED?

Anna Mollel has been nominated for the 2012 World's Children's Prize for her over 20-year struggle for children with disabilities in poor rural areas in northern Tanzania.

Thanks to Anna and her organisation, Huduma ya Walemavu, thousands of children with disabilities have a chance to live a life in dignity. They get medical care, operations, physiotherapy, therapy, wheelchairs and other aids, the chance to go to school, safety, and love. Anna is constantly speaking out on behalf of the children through talking about their rights with politicians, organisations, and more than anything, with people living in remote rural villages. Since 1990, 12,500 children, mostly Maasais, have had a better life thanks to Anna and Huduma ya Walemavu. These are children who would have been neglected, abandoned and could even have died if it hadn't been for Anna's struggle for their rights.

Anna Mollel

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At the age of six, Anna Mollel saw for herself how difficult life is for children with disabilities in northern Tanzania. Her worst experience came many years later, once she had started fighting for the rights of those disabled children. Anna arrived at what she thought was an empty village. But lying on the floor of a house she found an eight-year-old girl, alone and abandoned, who couldn't move and would have died if Anna hadn't come. On page 55 you can find out what happened to the girl, Naimyakwa.

Anna, who belongs to the Maasai ethnic group, was six years old and had just come home from school. She helped her mother fetch wood and water and then ran to see her friends in the next village. They were playing out in the yard when Anna heard a noise from inside one of the houses.

"When I asked my friend

what it was, she looked down at the ground before replying that it was her sister."

Anna's friend explained that her sister wasn't allowed to go out, since their mother didn't want to show that she had a daughter who was 'not quite right'.

"I went into the house to look. And there actually was a little girl in there. She was

lying on the ground, completely alone, and she smiled when she saw me," recalls Anna.

Anna meets Nauri

Anna helped the girl to sit up and they started to play. The girl, who was called Nauri, was about the same age as Anna. She was thrilled to finally have some company. The next day Anna came back while Nauri's mother was out fetching water, so that she wouldn't see her.

"But we were having such fun that we didn't notice the time. Suddenly, Nauri's mother rushed in and hit me hard with a cane. She shouted at me never to set foot in their house again."

Anna had to run away, but she was determined to come back the next day.

"The other children were



afraid. Afraid of being hit, and afraid of playing with Nauri, who they thought was strange. But I told them that everyone needs friends. And since Nauri was one of us, I thought it was obvious that we should go and play with her too.”

Anna managed to convince the others. They took turns in keeping watch while the others played, and when the person keeping watch shouted that Nauri’s mother was coming, they all rushed away as fast as they could. After a few days, Anna helped Nauri stand up, and they practised walking together. Soon, Nauri was able to come out to the yard and play.

Unfair

After a couple of weeks, Nauri’s mother came to Anna’s house.

“I thought she was going to

shout at me, but instead she said that she knew what I had been up to, and that she wanted me to keep doing it! She said that Nauri had never been so happy and that it was a miracle that she could walk and run.”

Since Nauri’s mother was so happy, Anna took the chance to ask her whether Nauri could start going to school, but she didn’t agree to that.

“So I went to Nauri’s home every day after school and taught her the things I had learned that day. Even though I was young, I became her teacher – the only teacher she ever had. I never forgot that sense of unfairness. I was allowed to go to school, but she wasn’t, just because she had a disability. She had the same rights as me. But on my own I couldn’t help her more than I already was. I always

felt as though I should have done more.”

Became a nurse

Anna trained as a nurse and began working. One day, a German woman from the Catholic Church in Arusha came to the hospital. She was called Elifrieda and she wanted to talk to Anna.

“She knew that I was a Maasai, and she wanted me to tell her what life is like for children with disabilities in our villages. I explained that a long time ago, it was common for those children to be killed or abandoned as soon as they were born. People believed that a disabled child was punishment from God for doing something wrong.

But I explained that the main reason was that we Maasai people are nomadic herders, and to survive we need to walk many miles on foot over the savannah to find fresh pastures for our animals. A child with a disability who couldn’t move around freely was seen as a major hindrance to the whole group.

“I explained that children with disabilities still had their rights violated. That they were hidden away and didn’t get the medical care they needed, and weren’t allowed to go to school or play.”

Huduma ya Walemavu

Elifrieda asked whether Anna wanted to help start a new project for children with disa-



Proud Maasai

“I am a Maasai and I’m proud of that. I want my people to live a good life. That’s why I’m fighting for the rights of our disabled children,” says Anna.

Vulnerable Maasais

The Maasai people are nomadic herders. There are around 1 million Maasais, half in Tanzania and half in Kenya. Since the early 20th century the areas of land that the Maasais can use to pasture their livestock have shrunk. The authorities have handed over large parts of the Maasai people’s land to individuals and private companies for agriculture, as private hunting territories, and as national parks with wild animals. The Maasai people have been driven onto the least fertile areas. In 2009, armed riot police burned eight Maasai villages to the ground in northern Tanzania because the land was to be used by a private hunting company, for paying tourists to go on big game hunts. People were beaten and driven from their homes. Over 3,000 men, women and children were made homeless. Any Maasai people who allowed their livestock to continue grazing within the fertile area were imprisoned.

“The Maasai people are already the poorest people. If the animals don’t have grass to eat, they will die. And the people who are hit hardest are always the children,” says Anna.





“Our goal is always for the children to return to their villages, and live the life that the rest of their families live. For the children to be able to go to school with the other children and be a part of society,” says Anna, who is visiting Lomniaki’s village here.

➔ abilities in the Maasai villages, called Huduma ya Walemavu (Care for the Disabled).

“I said yes straight away. This was what I had been waiting for! Hopefully now I could do more for disabled children than I had been able to do for Nauri when I was little.”

In 1990, Anna began driving to the villages to talk about the rights of children with disabilities. At the same time, she searched for children who needed help. One of the first children she met was an orphan called Paulina, 15, who had had polio and

couldn’t walk. She had to get around by crawling on the ground. Anna thought it would be easy to persuade the village elders that Paulina could have a better life if she just had the right operation. She thought they’d think it was a great idea. But Anna was wrong.

Didn’t give up

“They didn’t know that some children with disabilities could have operations to help them get better, so they didn’t believe me. Because they lived so far away from hospitals and couldn’t read or afford a radio, they had never heard this. And even if it was true, they thought it was a waste of money. These children would still never be able to help with the livestock or go to school. But my biggest problem was

that I was a woman. In our society, women quite simply don’t have a voice. So they didn’t take me seriously.”

Anna didn’t give up. Just as she had challenged Nauri’s mother, she now challenged the village elders to help Paulina. It took four hours to get to the village, but in the space of two weeks, Anna travelled there five times! Every time she met with them she explained the rights of the child and said that they had managed to arrange a free operation for Paulina. And

finally she managed to persuade the men.

“I was so happy! But my problems were not over. I had booked a room for Paulina at a basic hotel in town, so that she had somewhere to stay before and after the operation. But when I carried Paulina in to the reception, the staff stared at her as if she was an animal. And they refused to take her in.”

Anna’s house

Anna was a divorced mother of six children, living in

Welcome!





cramped conditions in a small house. But Anna took Paulina home with her. There was no other option.

“My children had to share beds so that Paulina could have a bed of her own. The children were a bit annoyed at first, but they understood once I had explained. I bathed Paulina and gave her clean new clothes. Since she couldn’t sit at the table and eat, we all sat on the floor and ate dinner, so that Paulina wouldn’t feel lonely.”

After the operation,

Play is important!

“When I was young my parents always gave me love, and I got to play outside with my friends. These things are incredibly important for a child. Being alone and excluded is one of the worst things a child can experience. That’s why play and closeness are important to us here at the centre,” says Anna.

Paulina came back to stay with Anna. Slowly she began learning to sit and stand. After a few weeks, she started to practice walking with the crutches Anna had bought.

150 million children with disabilities

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children with disabilities have the same rights as all other children. They have a right to extra support and help to have a good life. Despite that, children with disabilities are among the most disadvantaged children, not only among the Maasai people in Tanzania, but all over the world. There are 150 million children with disabilities in the world, and 2 million of them are thought to live in Tanzania.





Anna playing with the children in their own school in her village.

“She was delighted, and so was I! When Paulina went back home three months later and could walk into the village on her own, people started to cry with happiness!”

Although Anna was happy that Paulina could walk, she knew that Paulina would still need an education to be able to get by in the future.

“Paulina wanted to be a seamstress, so we helped her get onto a sewing course. She was really talented!”

Centre in Monduli

Rumours of Paulina spread rapidly around the villages. People began to pluck up the courage to talk about their disabled children and ask for help. Anna spent long hours travelling to reach children in remote villages who needed her help. On every journey, she picked

up more and more children.

“But the hotels still refused to accept the children, so they had to stay at my house. Even though we had mattresses on the floor and children sharing beds, there just wasn’t space. We wrote to friends and organisations in Tanzania and Germany to ask for money to build a house of our own where we could take care of the children.”

To begin with they got enough money to rent a couple of rooms with space for twelve children. There was even enough to employ another nurse, and for the first time Anna got a small wage. Before that, Anna and her family had lived off their small vegetable patch.

“New children were arriving all the time, and we asked for more money. An organisation called Caritas in

Germany helped us, and in 1998 our centre in Monduli was finished.”

Physiotherapists and nurses were employed. And there were even teachers, because Anna knew that the children they helped hardly ever had the chance to go to school. There was space for thirty children, but sometimes there were 200 children there at once.

Not just Maasais

“To begin with we only worked with Maasai children, but not any more. We take care of all children who need our help, regardless of their ethnic group or religion. There are both Muslims and Christians here, as well as children who have fled wars in neighbouring countries. The fight for the rights of the child has no borders!” says Anna.

“Although we didn’t have space, we took in every child. Their families were so poor that they couldn’t pay for the children to stay with us, but we never sent anyone away.”





Now over 20 years have passed since Anna helped Paulina, and since then 12,500 children with disabilities have gained a better life thanks to Huduma ya Walemavu. Today, 30 people work for the organisation.

The new school

“I wanted to be sure that this work for children will continue after me. So I handed over responsibility for the work to a fantastic woman called Kapilima, and I retired in 2007,” says Anna.

When Anna retired, she carried on fighting for disadvantaged children. She has built a school in her home village for children who would not otherwise have had the chance to go to school. You can visit Anna’s school on page 68. 🌐



Anna saved Naimyakwa

“I’ll never forget the day I found little Naimyakwa alone in the abandoned village. She was eight years old and she was lying on the floor in one of the houses. She was hardly breathing. There was a strong smell of urine, since because of her disability she couldn’t move. I didn’t think she would survive,” says Anna. Even now, seven years later, she tells the story with tears in her eyes.

We took our mobile clinic to the area where a young orphaned girl affected by cerebral palsy lived. Many children with disabilities came to see us that day, but Naimyakwa didn’t appear with her older siblings and their families, as she usually did. When I asked if anyone knew where she was, a wom-

an said that her family had moved away with their livestock to try to find fresh pastures, since it was the dry season.

“I had a bad feeling about that. I knew how hard it was for Naimyakwa to move, so I wondered how they had managed to take her with them. I knew I had to go to her village and look.

Just to be on the safe side.

“We parked the jeep under a tree and walked the last bit of the road into the village. It was in silence. We couldn’t see a single person. The village was completely aban-



Naimyakwa's wardrobe

"I love clothes! When I grow up I want to be a seamstress and sew my own dresses. I keep my clothes in my locker, here in the dormitory."



"This is my best skirt. I got it from the minister."

"A girl from Canada who visited us gave me this beautiful dress..."



done. I felt calmer, and thought that the family had somehow managed to take Naimyakwa with them. "We were walking back towards the car when I heard a strange, whimpering sound."

response was a tiny whimper.

"I couldn't see anything to begin with. But then my eyes got used to the darkness, and I'll never forget what I saw. There on the earthen floor lay Naimyakwa, stock still and hardly breathing. There was a smell of excrement – she was helpless because of her disability. Beside her was a calabash that had had milk in it. It was empty, but it still smelt of old milk. And there was another calabash with a few drops of water left in it.

"Naimyakwa was very weak and hardly noticed that we were there. No-one could



"...and these gorgeous silver shoes! She really is a good friend!"

"This fleece top..."



"...and these sweatpants I got from Anna and Huduma ya Walemavu."



A lion?

"At first I thought it was a lion. My two workmates and I plucked up the courage to go back to the village. When we passed one of the houses, we heard the strange sound again. I was afraid, but I cautiously leaned in and asked if there was anyone there. The

Paralysis through brain injury

The damage done by cerebral palsy, CP, happens during pregnancy, birth or during a child's first two years. Common causes are lack of oxygen and bleeding in the brain. The effect on some children is just a slight disability, while others can be paralysed. Many of those affected by CP, as well as having reduced mobility, also have

other related problems such as epilepsy, speech difficulties and visual impairment. There is no cure for someone with CP, but with physiotherapy, occupational therapy and training, it is possible to make life as good as possible for CP sufferers.

"CP is very common here, since it can be caused by difficulties in

childbirth. Many people live so far away from hospitals and clinics that they have neither the time nor the money to get there when they go into labour," says Anna Mollel.

If a child is born with CP, then parents, neighbours and village elders can attend a two-week course at Huduma ya Walemavu's centre to learn how best to

take care of the child. They are taught things like simple exercises and physiotherapy that are good for the child's development. Huduma ya Walemavu runs these courses so that the whole village is better informed, to make it easier to share responsibility for the child.



say how long she had been lying there, but we guessed at least a week, since she was already so dehydrated and thin. Had her family really just left her there? I was used to families leaving children with disabilities at the centre and the parents never coming back. But to leave your child like this?"

Naimyakwa saved

"I knelt beside Naimyakwa, leaned in close to her ear and asked her if she was alone. She gave a slight nod. Then I asked her if she wanted me to take her to the centre, so that we could take care of her. She nodded again. She wanted to come. I wept. All my colleagues from Huduma ya Walemavu wept. As I held Naimyakwa in my arms I thought to myself that although others hadn't given this child the love she needed, I would. I would love this child.

"Later, we understood that Naimyakwa had never realised that her family had gone off on a long journey. She was lying there waiting for them to come back, as usual. Day after day. Night after night. But they never came. They didn't come back until the rainy season started, two months later. If we hadn't come to the village, Naimyakwa would have died of starvation and dehydration.

"The moment we found Naimyakwa was one of the worst things I've ever experienced. At the same time, I felt filled with a great strength to be able to fight on for her right – and other vulnerable children's right – to a good life. There and then, I decided to continue fighting for their rights until I die." 🌐



Anna never lets anyone down

"Naimyakwa came here seven years ago, and she's still here. We never send a child back unless we know that they will be well cared for. And if we're not sure of that, we try to find a new family for them. But it's hard to take care of a child with a severe disability. Even just pushing Naimyakwa's wheelchair on the sandy ground in her home village is almost impossible. Joining the families' migration with their livestock is even harder," says Anna.

There are 30 children living at the centre. Some are awaiting operations, others have had operations and are in rehabilitation (physiotherapy and training). Some children spend a few days at the centre when their boarding schools are closed. And then there are children like Naimyakwa, for whom the centre is home.



6.00 a.m. Good morning!

Naimyakwa and her friends are woken by the housemothers who live in the children's dormitories. When Naimyakwa came here she could hardly use her arms and hands. It was impossible for her to brush her teeth, put her clothes on, or feed herself. After a lot of training, her life is now totally different. Here she is brushing her teeth with her friends Modesta, 13, and Mdasat, 11.

Naimyakwa's day at Anna's centre



7.00 a.m. Breakfast

It's a maize porridge called Uji for breakfast.



8.00 a.m. Morning assembly

Every morning, everyone gathers in the hall for prayers and morning exercises.



8.30 a.m.

Morning rounds

The staff members talk to each child and decide whether they need to go to physiotherapy, the nurse, or straight to the school at the centre.

Naimyakwa has to show that she can put her top on by herself. That helps them to know what kind of physiotherapy she will need to get even better.





9.00 a.m.



1. School

Naimyakwa gets help from her teacher, Flora Moses Kiwelu. When the children's treatment is complete, they get help either to start going to an ordinary school in their village, or to go to specialised schools, like boarding schools for children with visual impairments or mental illness.

2. Physiotherapy

Naimyakwa gets half an hour of physiotherapy every day to help her cope better in the future. She gets help from the physiotherapists at the centre, Eva Paul Mush and Anna Njuu (with plaits).

3. Clinic

Loserian Simanga, 11, is having the wounds from his operation washed and re-dressed by nurse Veronica Kirway.



4. Orthopaedics

Orthopaedist Mireille Eusebius Kapilima tries out new leg splints for Modesta Crypsin, 13. The staff at the centre make their own splints and artificial or 'prosthetic' limbs.



5. Home economics

Neema Mevukori, 11, stands in the kitchen, where she and her friends are cutting a vegetable called sukumawiki. Today it's their turn to help with the cooking.

"I think it's fun to learn to cook. And I'll be able to help my family better when I get home."



6. Disability aid workshop

At the disability aid workshop, Loshilari helps Kadogo Songura to adjust her crutches.

"I got an infectious disease in one leg when I was little. When I came here the leg was so bad it had to be amputated. Afterwards I got a prosthetic leg and started to learn to walk again. It has been really tough, but now it's starting to go well," explains Kadogo.



10.00 a.m. Playtime!

Breaks and playing are important. The children have fun and train their bodies as they make different movements. Naimyakwa tries to catch the ball and throw it again.





12.30 p.m. Lunch
“My favourite dish is beans and rice. We get that twice a week,” says Naimyakwa.



4.00 p.m.
Free time and laundry:



Most people play football, go on the swings or the roundabout, or just talk. Anyone who needs to wash clothes can do that. Doing laundry is also part of the treatment at the centre. The children learn useful physical movements, while also learning an important skill.



1.30 p.m.
School and dishes

Every day some of the children help with the dishes before going back to the classroom. Today, the helpers are Tupiwa Longorini, 12, Rebeca Peter, 16, and Kadogo Songura, 19.



8.00 p.m. The News

Every evening the children watch the news. Anna and the others at Huduma ya Walemavu think it's important for the children to find out what's going on in Tanzania and the wider world. But of course they also get to watch films and fun programmes.

6.30 p.m.
Dinner

9.00 p.m. Good night!

“Sleep well,” says house mother Halima Mkopi, patting Naimyakwa on the cheek. Halima sleeps in the same room as the children so that she can hear if anyone needs help or comfort during the night. There are three dormitories, and there is a housemother in each.



Come on dads!

“I don't like dads who don't take responsibility when they have a child with a disability. Unfortunately, it's very common here that when children are abandoned, it's their fathers who do it. Mothers and fathers need to work together to care for these children, who are particularly vulnerable,” says housemother and cook Martha Lota.



Four-wheeled clinic reaches 51 villages

Huduma ya Walemavu works in a large, sparsely populated area in northern Tanzania, which is made up of savannahs, semi-deserts and mountains. Most of the people here live in small villages that often don't have any roads leading to them.

"Because the families are often extremely poor and can't afford to get to us, we visit the children with disabilities in their villages instead," explains Anna.

The work of Huduma ya Walemavu reaches 51 villages. They have a mobile clinic outreach programme, with nurses and physiotherapists who travel round in a four-wheel drive to reach all the children who wouldn't otherwise get help. It takes over two days to get to the furthest village. Every village is visited once every three months.

Endeshi has no language

Under a tree in a little village sits a group of children with disabilities and their parents, talking to staff from Huduma ya Walemavu. An 8-year-old girl called Endeshi, who is deaf, is there. She has no language, but her mother Nailolie Lebahati says:

"Endeshi's two older siblings Esther and Loito are deaf too, and we have always had support from Huduma ya Walemavu for them to go to a school for deaf children. I know that it is every child's right to go to school, but I can't afford to pay for it myself, so I'm incredibly grateful!

"Now I want Endeshi to be able to go to school as well, and learn to communicate. She has a right to be able to talk to others and explain her thoughts and feelings. And not be isolated as she is now. I came here today to ask Huduma ya Walemavu whether they can help Endeshi too. And they can! I'm so happy!"

Future dreams

Endeshi's big sister Esther, 18, and brother Loito, 15, know sign language, and they explain their dreams for the future:

"I want to be a nurse," signs Esther.

"I haven't decided yet," signs Loito.

Their mother Nailolie gets a bit sad when she sees her children talking about the future.

"Just think – we have no idea what Endeshi dreams of. Hopefully she'll be able to tell us once she's been going to school for a while. I want to know what you dream of!" says Nailolie, giving Endeshi a hug.



Loeku wants to be president

The mobile clinic stops in a village where three blind siblings called Loeku, Tetee and Phillippo live. They are orphans and Huduma ya Walemavu supports them so that they can attend boarding school. Normally the siblings live at school, but right now it's the holidays and Anna wants to check that they're enjoying staying with their grandmother and grandfather. Big brother Loeku explains:

"We would never have been able to go to school if it wasn't for Anna. Both because we have a disability, and because we come from a poor family. If a poor family has two children and one of them has a disability, and they can only afford to send one child to school, then it's always the 'healthy' child that gets to go.

"Most people think there's no point in letting children

Would have had to beg

"If Anna hadn't helped us, our lives would have been terrible. We would have been forced to beg on the streets to be able to eat," says Loeku.

with disabilities go to school, since they don't think the child can learn anything. Many people also think that if children can't see or have some other disability, then there must be something wrong with their heads too. And so they don't believe that children like that will ever manage to work, earn money, and help their families. That's why they think it's a waste of money to send children like that to school. That's how things were for us. The other children in the village were

sent to school, but not us."

Anna gave us the chance

"Then along came Anna and gave us the chance of a better life. We got good health-care and the chance to start attending a school for blind children. Now, Huduma ya Walemavu has supported us financially for seven years. Our grandparents would never have managed that on their own.

"At Anna's centre, we have learned that what we were

subjected to – not being allowed to go to school – is discrimination, and a violation of our rights. All children have the right to go to school. All children are equal! Now I tell that to everyone I meet. I hope that might gradually make life better for children with disabilities here. I hope we'll be treated with respect and have our rights fulfilled like other children. In the future I want to be president, and fight to defend all children's rights in Tanzania!"



Anna supports dreams

Younger siblings Tetee, 16, and Phillippo, 15, dream of becoming teachers when they grow up.

"Without Anna, a dream like that could never have come true. But since Huduma ya Walemavu supports me, I really think it's possible now," says Tetee.



Lomniaki kept in secret



Lomniaki was born with his legs pointing the wrong way. He found it hard to sit up and he couldn't learn to walk. His father didn't want the other people in the village to see him, so he kept Lomniaki locked up. He wasn't allowed to play with the other children or go to school.

"I didn't count. It was as though I wasn't a real person. But then Anna Mollél came and saved me. She gave me a new life, and I love her for it," says Lomniaki Olmodooni Mdorosi, 15 years old.

When Lomniaki was small, he lay alone in the dark house all day, every day. He could hear the other children in the village laughing and playing. The only thing he wanted was to join in. Sometimes he closed his eyes and could almost imagine that he was really playing with them. He was heartbroken every time he realised that he still couldn't use his legs, and he was still lying alone with an earthen wall separating him from the other children.

"I don't really know why my father didn't want other people to see me, but I think he was ashamed that there was a child with a disability in his family. That's why he never let me go out. My mother didn't agree at all, but my father was in charge. My mother didn't have a say in the matter. But sometimes when my father was out with the livestock, she would carry me out in secret and lay me under a tree in the village for a little while. When I was there I saw how the other children played with one another. But nobody played with me, or even talked to me," recalls Lomniaki.

Hated his father

Then, when all the other children in the village started school, Lomniaki's father wouldn't allow him.

"He said I was deformed. And that he couldn't understand the point of me going to school, since I'd never be

able to take care of the livestock anyway, or get a job and earn money to help the family when he got old. What's more, he said that he would



Girls' rights



"It didn't matter that my mother thought I should be allowed to play with others and go to school. My father was in charge. And that was that. My mother's opinions were unimportant. Anna Mollel taught me that that is totally wrong. Boys and girls are equals, and should have the same right to express their opinions and be listened to. We have the same rights. As a lawyer in the future, I'm really going to fight for girls' rights."



be forced to carry me back and forth to school, since I couldn't walk. I hated my father then. I hated him for destroying my life."

Finally, his mother Paulina reached the end of her tether. She felt so bad about how Lomniaki was being treated that she decided to leave her husband. One day, she lifted Lomniaki up onto her back and left the village forever. Paulina walked over the savannah to her parents' village, where they received a warm welcome from Lomniaki's grandfather and uncles and their families.

Might as well be dead

To begin with, Lomniaki thought everything seemed much better. He wasn't locked up in the house, and he met other people who were kind to him and talked to him. Either his mother or one of his uncles would carry him out in the morning and lay him on a cowhide under the big acacia tree, so that he didn't feel lonely. But even though his life was much better, gradually he started to feel lonely, there under the

tree. Lonely and different.

"Since I couldn't join in with their running and playing, the other children quickly tired of being with me. They ran off. And when they went to school, I stayed there under the tree. It was impossible for me to get there, since the school was so far away. The adults didn't really have time for me either. The men were out with the livestock and the women worked hard in their homes in the village."

Besides, Lomniaki needed help with absolutely everything. Getting dressed, eating, moving around, and going to the toilet.

"It was embarrassing not be able to manage on my own, and I got more and more depressed. I often wondered why my father was ashamed of me, and why I had been born like that. Slowly it sunk in that this was what my life was going to be like. I would never be able to play and spend time with the

Tree of life

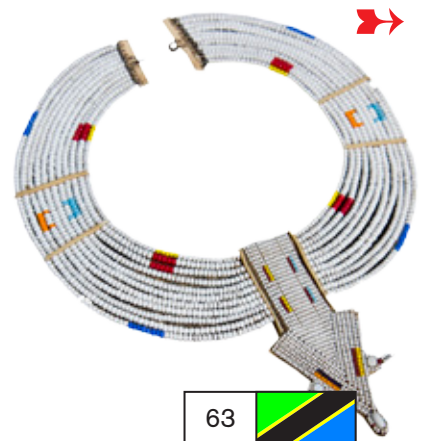
Anna Mollel visits Lomniaki's home. They sit under the big acacia tree and talk. Anna wants to know what his life is like, and whether there is anything he needs.

"Before, this used to be the tree of sadness. This was where I was left lying alone when the others played or went to school. But these days I see it as a great place where Anna saved me and where my new, real life began!" says Lomniaki.

others in the village. And I'd never be able to go to school. Never get a job and never be able to take care of the family's livestock. I thought it was



... and as a Maasai shepherd out on the savannah.



Defence against wild animals

When Lomniaki is out with the livestock he takes his staff, his knife and sometimes a club, in case he has to defend the livestock against wild animals.



unfair – I was worth just as much as others. I felt that I might as well have been dead.”

Anna Mollel

“My name, Lomniaki, means ‘blessing’ but I thought I had been given the wrong name. That name was surely meant for another boy. I was no blessing. I was a curse.”

But there was one person who had heard of Lomniaki, and who thought he was worth just as much as all other children, and who didn’t plan to give up until Lomniaki had a good life. That person was Anna Mollel.

“I’ll never forget the afternoon when Anna came to the village for the first time. I was almost nine and was sleeping alone under the tree. I woke with a start when I heard the noise of a jeep. I had never seen a car before, so I was terrified as I watched it approach. I screamed and cried. A woman stepped out, came over to me and sat down. She smiled and stroked my head gently, trying to comfort me. She said that I

shouldn’t be afraid, and that she had come to help me. Her name was Anna.”

Anna told Lomniaki’s mother Paulina that Lomniaki could have an operation that would make it possible for him to walk on his own. She also explained that Lomniaki could go to school just like all the other children.

“My mother was delighted and wanted Anna to take me with her straight away. But because my uncles weren’t home, I couldn’t go. My mother needed her brothers’ permission, so Anna had to leave without me.”

Third time lucky

Anna knew that the more Lomniaki grew, the harder it would be to fix his legs. If he didn’t get the operation soon, the damage would worsen, and he would never be able to learn to walk. There was no time to lose. So instead of waiting for three months, which was when the mobile clinic was due to visit the village again, Anna came back a couple of weeks later to talk to the uncles. They sat under

Lions and hyenas

“Elephants and giraffes often walk around here, and the hyenas come out every night. I love the wild animals that live here, but to make sure hungry wild animals can’t get at the livestock, we’ve made a barrier of tough spiky bushes right round the village. Closer to the mountains and the forest there are lions, cheetahs and leopards. Once when I was out with the livestock and saw a lion, I was terrified and ran away! When I’m older I’ll get a spear like all the other Maasai warriors. Maybe then I’ll be braver,” says Lomniaki, laughing. Here is his uncle, Simon, practising using his spear.



Together

“When I come home during the school holidays I can now manage to tend my family’s livestock, just like all the other boys my age in the village. We often do it together. Livestock is one of the most important things for us Maasai people, and being able to work with the animals together means a lot to me,” says Lomniaki. Here he is tending goats with his friends Juma (in red) and Musa, both 16.



the acacia tree and Anna explained about the operation and Lomniaki's future to his uncles and grandfather. Lomniaki had never seen anything like it.

"I had never seen a woman who dared to talk to men like that before. And I had never seen men listen to a woman the way my uncles did under that tree. Anna really was different."

Lomniaki's family would contribute some money to cover the cost of some of his food at the centre. Since they didn't have any money at the time, they decided that Anna would come back in three weeks to get Lomniaki.

While he waited for Anna to come back, Lomniaki dared to hope that his life was actually going to change. But his newfound hope died before the three weeks had passed. When Anna came back for the third time, Lomniaki's mother Paulina was in despair as she explained that the family had not managed to raise the money they needed. They couldn't pay.

"I remember that moment,

how Anna turned to me and said, 'Don't worry Lomniaki. It's OK. I'll help you anyway. We'll figure it out somehow!' At first I thought she was joking, but she wasn't."

That very afternoon, Anna lifted Lomniaki into her jeep. His journey towards a new life had begun.

One of the gang

Lomniaki was wonderfully happy at Anna's centre from the word go. As well as Anna and the housemothers doing all they could to make him comfortable, he finally got to start school and learn to read and write. He also learned about the rights of the child. And for the first time in his life, he met other children with disabilities.

"It felt so good to meet everyone. At home I had always felt like the only child with a disability. I had always been alone and felt like an outsider. At the centre I made loads of great new friends straight away. We could talk about everything, since we understood each other so well. And I didn't have to lie on my own like I did at home – one

of my new friends was always around to push me in a wheelchair, so that I could join in with things. For the first time in my life I didn't feel different, I felt like one of the gang. It was a fantastic feeling!"

Two weeks later, Lomniaki had his operation at the hospital in the city. When he came back to the centre, he started doing physiotherapy and learning to walk.

"For the first week my legs were really painful and I fell over all the time. But I gradually got better, and soon I was able to walk with crutches. After a year of training, I plucked up the courage to leave the crutches behind and managed to walk all on my own. That was the happiest day of my life!"

Wants to be a lawyer

After another year, Lomniaki's legs were in such good condition that he was able to leave the centre. Anna helped make sure he was able to go to school. At first they thought he could go to the school in his home village, but soon realised it would be too far to walk there.



Lomniaki Olmodooni Mdorosi, 15

LOVES: Reading and learning about the world. Geography and history.

HATES: Not being allowed to be with others. Being alone is no life at all.

BEST THING: When Anna gave me the chance to get an operation and go to school – the chance to be an ordinary person, a real person.

WORST THING: That my rights were violated when I was little. I was kept hidden away and not allowed to go to school.

LOOKS UP TO: Anna Mollel of course! She saved my life.

WANTS TO BE: A lawyer and fight for all the children who need me.

DREAM: For all children with disabilities all over the world to be able to live a good life and be happy. ➔➔





“My legs were not strong enough for me to manage to get to the school in the semi-desert, and I wouldn’t have had a chance of escaping any wild animals that came along. So Anna helped me find a boarding school in the city instead. Now I’m in Form 1 at secondary school and Huduma ya Walemavu still pay for everything I need. My uniform, my books, everything! And I’m so grateful for that. If they hadn’t

done that I would never have had the chance to go to school.”

Lomniaki loves going home to the village for the holidays, and these days he has no trouble helping with the livestock along with his friends. But he’s still dreaming – this time of studying to become a lawyer.

“I want to be like Anna and devote my whole life to fighting for the rights of vulnerable children, just as she fought

for me. Just think, she made the long, difficult journey across the savannah to my village three times, to rescue me. She really cared about me. I’ll never forget that. If Anna had given up and not come back, I would still be lying alone in that house or under the tree, unable to move. Instead, she gave me a life worth living.” 🌍



Computer technician

Lomniaki’s little sister Naraka, 12, fetches water, milks the livestock and helps to cook every day. But she goes to school too.

“Now I’m starting Year 7, and in the future I want to work with computers,” says Naraka.



Stories round the fire

Lomniaki sits round the fire with his oldest uncle, Karaine (on the left) and a few other men. They are grilling a goat.

“In the evening, every family sits round the fire in their house, cooking food and talking. We often tell stories about livestock and the wild animals we’ve seen on the savannah. I love it,” says Lomniaki.

Born with skeletal fluorosis

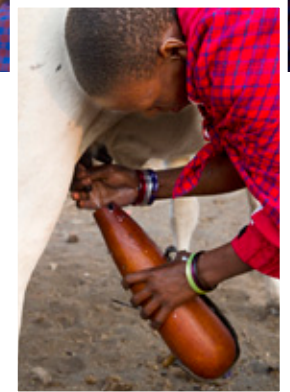
The bone disease that Lomniaki was born with is called skeletal fluorosis, and is caused by too much fluoride in drinking water. The fluoride builds up in the skeleton and can lead to stiffness, pain, distorted limbs and paralysis. It affects millions of people all over the world. Drinking water that is naturally high in fluoride often exists at the feet of high, volcanic mountains, like in the Rift Valley in East Africa, where Lomniaki lives. Many of the areas with dangerously high levels of fluoride are very dry, so the people are forced to drink that water despite the risks. In Tanzania, over 30% of the country’s drinking water has a high level of fluoride.



Beautiful calabashes

When Lomniaki gets home with the livestock, he sits down outside the house and drinks milk with his mother Paulina and younger sister Nashipai, 6. They drink from calabashes that Paulina has decorated with beautiful beads.

“I love my mother because she was brave enough to leave my father. That shows that she really loves and cares about me. I haven’t seen my father since then.”



Anna brought Everyday jump!



“Since the operation, I can dance with the others in the village. Dancing is important for us Maasai people, so that makes me really happy. I never thought I would be able to join in the dance. Never! But Anna made it possible.”

Here Lomniaki dances Longwesi, meaning Everyday. The dance involves the boys challenging each other in the high jump. Whoever jumps the highest is the winner. Here is Lomniaki battling with his friend Babu.

Jacob wants to run!

Jacob Loishooki Lazer is lying in a bed in the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre, with both his legs in plaster. He has just been through the same operation that Lomniaki had. He’s happy.

“It was painful to start with, but it just keeps getting better and better. I’m so happy because soon I’ll be able to walk, and I’ll be able to help my family properly. Before I came here I tried to help take our cows and goats out to graze, but it was a struggle because it made my knees so sore. Soon I’ll even be able to go on long walks with the livestock during the dry season, when they need to search for fresh pastures. And I’ll be able to play with my friends. I’d love to just take off the plaster on my legs and run about on my healthy legs, right now!”

Not alone

Jacob has been in hospital for four days and housemother Neema from Anna’s centre has been with him the whole time, round the clock.

“It’s extremely important that the children don’t feel lonely. I tell stories, read books and comfort them when they need it,” says Neema Eliphas Mollel.

“When you leave here, you’ll have to take care of your leg. It’s important that you keep yourself clean so the wound doesn’t get infected, OK? In six weeks, you need to come back here. If everything looks good, we’ll take the plaster off and you can make a start on physiotherapy and learning to walk at the centre,” says nurse Lilian Michael.



Child rights lesson

It's Monday morning and, as usual, Anna is greeting the children at the little school:

"Good morning everyone, how are you?" wonders Anna.

"Good morning Grandma! We are well!" the class replies eagerly.

"Good! Is it fun to come to school?"

"Yes, Grandma!"

"Good! Do you take care of each other?"

"Of course!"

"Good, that's really important. Can anyone tell me what rights you children have?" asks Anna.

The children's hands shoot straight up into the air. Lots of them want to answer.

"To be able to go to school," says Theresia, 12.

"To be able to go to hospital if you need to," says Baraka, 9.

"To be allowed to play and join in with others," answers Violet, 7.

"Exactly, those are a few of your rights. And what about disabled children's rights?"

"They are just the same, Grandma," replies Violet.

"That's right. Children with disabilities have exactly the same rights as others. To be able to go to school, to get medical care, to be able to play, and to be loved. We are all created by God and must be treated with respect. Don't forget that!" says Anna, smiling with her whole body as she looks out over 'her' children.



Anna's school for all

On a low hill in Anna Molle's home village of Moivo is the small school that she founded in 2009, when she retired from Huduma ya Walemavu and moved back to her village. In Maasai, the school is called Engilanget, which means School of Light. All 25 children come from very poor families. Many are orphans, some have disabilities, and others have HIV. At Anna's school, all children are welcome. Especially those children that nobody else wants to take care of.

"I knew that many children with disabilities didn't get the chance to go to the school that most other children went to. It was too far away, and too expensive. That is extremely unfair, and so I decided to start a school where children with disabilities could study alongside children who are not disabled. A school where the children learn to understand that we're all equal and have the same rights and the same need for love," says Anna.



"No hitting my children!"

"Hitting children is banned at my school. You should never hit a child. You should never frighten a child. Just explain, and love. A child who is hit will go on to hit others. Corporal punishment is common in schools in Tanzania, but if a teacher ever hit one of my children, they would be fired straight away!" says Anna.





Loves football

“At my school everyone is allowed to join in and play. We like each other,” says Fanuel, who loves playing football at break time.



Skyscrapers

“We’re building a skyscraper,” says Fanuel.

“Yes, and when we grow up we’re going to build real buildings like this. We’ve never seen any skyscrapers in real life, only in newspapers and on TV,” says Fanuel’s friend Baraka, 9.

Anna loves all children!

“I am happy when I’m at school. We’re all friends here. It feels like we’re brothers and sisters, and we take care of one another. I’m an orphan and I live with my grandmother. We would never have been able to afford for me to go to any other school. I like Anna so much for letting me come to this school. She has a big heart and always takes care of us, more than other adults.” *Theresia Edward, 12 år*



Theresia in Anna’s vegetable patch

“I grow beans and other vegetables that the children eat for lunch. That way I know that even the poorest students are getting at least one nutritious meal a day,” says Anna.

Anna’s sewing workshop helps children

“Many of the children at my school come from families so poor that they can’t afford school uniforms, books or the small fee that covers my two teachers’ wages. I have a little sewing workshop where I make textiles called koikoi, which I sell. I use the money to buy uniforms, shoes, books, pens and everything else that the poorest children in the class need help with,” says Anna.



Imaginative invention

“This spinning wheel is called a chaka. My son and I made it from an old bicycle wheel. You don’t need to have loads of money or expensive machines to help others. But you do need to be imaginative and inventive! If we just sat around waiting for someone else to give us money to get started, we’d be waiting a long, long time. There are so many children who need our help. So we find our own solutions, in our own way,” says Anna, laughing.

