

Candidates for Decade Child Rights Hero

In 2010, Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel were chosen by 7.1 million children in the Global Vote to be the first *World's Children's Prize Decade Child Rights Heroes*. For the 2020–2021 WCP Program, it is once again time to choose a WCP Decade Child Rights Hero. The candidates are the eight Child Rights Heroes that millions of voting children between 2011 and 2019 have chosen to be recipients of the *World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child*. You can find out more about the Child Rights Heroes and watch films about them at worldschildrensprize.org.



Nelson Mandela & Graça Machel
WCP Decade Child Rights Heroes 2010.

This is how they used the prize money:

Murhabazi Namegabe, DR Congo

Pages 30–37

To help liberate and rehabilitate children who have been sexually exploited and forced to become soldiers.



Phymean Noun, Cambodia

Pages 60–67

For her new school for 450 vulnerable children from rubbish tips and the surrounding community.

Anna Mollel, Tanzania

Pages 38–44

For a school for Maasai children and other vulnerable children.



Manuel Rodrigues, Guinea-Bissau

Pages 68–75

To build a preschool and rehabilitation centre for 150 blind children.

James Kofi Annan, Ghana

Pages 45–51

For a sports ground for vulnerable children and other residents of the community.



Rachel Lloyd, USA

Pages 76–82

To help more girls who have been exploited as children in the sex trade.

Malala Yousafzai, Pakistan & the UK

Pages 52–59

To rebuild destroyed schools for Palestinian children in Gaza.



Ashok Dyalchand, India

Pages 83–89

To enable girls living in poverty to continue their education.

The children are older now!

The texts are taken from when the Child Rights Hero was an award recipient. The children featured in the texts are therefore older today.



WHY HAS MURHABAZI BEEN NOMINATED?

Murhabazi Namegabe has been nominated for his struggle to help child soldiers and other vulnerable children in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

THE CHALLENGE

The war in DRC started in 1998 and is one of the most brutal in the history of the world. At its worst over 30,000 children (currently 16,000) have been forced to fight as soldiers. Tens of thousands of girls and women have been raped by those fighting. A peace agreement was reached in 2003, but the conflict continues in eastern Congo.

THE WORK

Murhabazi and his organisation BVES run 70 homes and centres where former child soldiers, girls subjected to assault and children from areas where armed groups run riot have access to food, clothing, safety, health and medical care, therapy, schooling, security and love. Murhabazi has been imprisoned, assaulted and received death threats. Eight of his colleagues have been murdered.

RESULTS & VISION

Since 1998, 481,500 children have received support from BVES to achieve a better life. Murhabazi and BVES have liberated 34,400 child soldiers and looked after 4,500 girls who have been sexually abused by armed groups and 8,500 unaccompanied refugee children. Murhabazi is also constantly urging the government, all armed groups, organisations and society as a whole to look after the country's children.



PAGES
30–37

CHILD RIGHTS HERO 1

Murhabazi Namegabe

“You’re going to die tonight. Eat your last meal!” Murhabazi read the short message that beeped on his mobile phone. He was in an important meeting with the UN, discussing children who were being forced to become soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Had someone in the room sent him the death threat? Murhabazi has made many enemies during his struggle to help the thousands of children being exploited and tortured in war-torn DR Congo.

“I’m prepared to die in the fight for children’s rights, every day,” says Murhabazi Namegabe.

Murhabazi hadn’t even been born when he received his first death threat. War was raging in Bukavu in eastern Congo in 1964, and his pregnant mother Julienne fled along the narrow lanes. A soldier pressed the barrel of his rifle against her pregnant belly, but one of the leaders shouted: “Don’t kill her! Let her go!”

Two weeks later Murhabazi was born. In Mashi his name means both ‘One who was born in war’ and ‘One who helps others’.

“My mother always says that I was predestined to devote my life to protecting vulnerable people.”

Everyone should have food!

Murhabazi grew up in one of the poorest districts of Bukavu. But since his father had a job, the family always had food and the children could go to school.

“A lot of my friends were always hungry and couldn’t afford to go to school. I thought that was unfair. Every day, hungry children gathered outside our house when we were about to eat. I thought that the children should be allowed to sit with us and eat and told my mother that I refused to eat as long as things remained as they were!”

Murhabazi talked to his

school friends and together they began to campaign on behalf of the hungry children in the district. Every afternoon they went around singing songs about how adults needed to take care of all children. The children explained that they planned to go on a hunger strike until the poorest children in the neighbourhood were welcome at their table.

“Soon there were over seventy of us demonstrating every day after school!”

In the end the hungry children got to eat dinner together with families that had enough food to share!



Protected by the UN

Murhabazi talks to a child soldier in front of a UN Jeep.

“At first we had to go on foot and I often carried out rescue missions to free child soldiers on my own. Today I have UN protection when I travel to various armed groups.”

“When we reported our results to the government, they weren’t happy at all. If anyone said anything negative about the country, like that children were suffering here, it was seen as an attack on the government. If we didn’t stop, we would end up in prison.”

Street children

Murhabazi started speaking on the radio once a week, so that everyone would hear about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and what life was like for children in DR Congo. Every time, he repeated his demand that the government sign up to the Convention.

“The streets of Bukavu were filled with children who had no one to look after them. Their parents were either poor or had died of AIDS. Many people referred to these children as ‘dogs’, but we said that they needed protection and love. In 1994 we opened our first home for street children.”

The rights of the child

The children carried on demonstrating, this time to encourage parents and teachers to stop hitting children, and for the right of every child to go to school. The older Murhabazi became, the more problems he saw for children in DR Congo. He knew that children needed adults to take up their cause, and that he himself needed more knowledge if he was to be able to help children properly. So he studied child development and health at university.

On 20 November 1989 Murhabazi listened to the news on the radio. The news-

reader announced that the UN had adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention stated that all children around the world were entitled to a good life. The newsreader also said that every country that signed up to the Convention would have to consider children’s best interests in all decisions.

“I was so happy. I organised a meeting at my house where we decided that we would do everything in our power to get the government of DR Congo to sign up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

BVES

Murhabazi’s group called itself BVES (Bureau pour le Volontariat au Service de l’Enfance et de la Santé, Bureau for Volunteer Service for Children and Health). They started examining the situation faced by children in DR Congo.

“We often hiked for several days through the rainforest to reach remote villages. At night we slept in the trees to avoid leopards and other dangerous animals.” Murhabazi and BVES started to compile facts about the lives of children in the villages of DR Congo. Terrible facts.

The worst war

- The war in DR Congo is one of the most brutal in the history of the world. It has been going on since 1998.
- More than 6 million people have died in the fighting, or from hunger and diseases as a result of the war.
- At its worst there were over 30,000 child soldiers in the country; today there are 16,000.
- Over 7 million children in DR Congo do not go to school.

MURHABAZI IS CONTRIBUTING TO FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being. Goal 4: All children have the right to an education. Goal 5: Violence and sexual violence against girls must be stopped. Goal 8: A ban on using children as soldiers. Goal 16: Peaceful and inclusive societies.





Difficult to rescue children

“Negotiating with armed groups is not easy. They threaten to kill us when we ask them to release the children. Then it’s difficult to handle the children because they have been so exploited and damaged by adults. And in the end it can be difficult to get their families, neighbours, villages and schools to accept the children when it’s time for them to return to their homes,” explains Murhabazi.

Child soldiers

“We thought we’d seen the worst, but then the war started and life for all children here became pure hell,” says Murhabazi.

In 1996, Bukavu was invaded by various Congolese rebel armies with the support of Rwanda. Children were

directly targeted during the war that followed.

“The fighters destroyed our three homes for refugee children. I had managed to hide the children in time, but my first colleague and friend was killed.”

All the groups that were fighting, including DR Congo’s

army, were kidnapping boys and forcing them to become soldiers, and abducting girls to use them as sex slaves.

“Of course I had experience of looking after tough boys who had lived on the streets before, but child soldiers were a completely different matter. Young boys aged about ten who were on drugs, wearing uniforms and carrying huge weapons. They had been completely destroyed by adults. I wanted to do everything I could to save them,” explains Murhabazi.

First rescue mission

“One day I met a group of mothers in utter despair, who told me that 67 children had been abducted from their village.”

Murhabazi set off with a bag packed with a bunch of bananas and books about children’s rights. Alone.

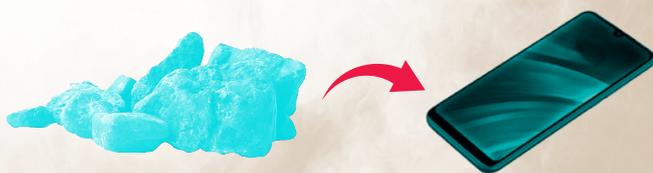
“I took a motorbike taxi without saying exactly where we were going. If I had, I would never have been given a ride!”

When Murhabazi arrived at the rebel army’s camp, he was arrested and taken to the leader, who asked what he wanted.

“I said that in our culture adults always take care of children, but that I’d heard that this army had stolen children and forced them to fight instead of going to school. I said that I was there to take the children back to their parents again. The leader was mad with rage! He ordered his soldiers to tear up my books about children’s rights. Then the beating started.”

Children released

They explained to Murhabazi that he had two choices: to be a soldier in their army, or be executed. The next morning as they were preparing to kill him, one of the leaders



Mobile phones fuel war

DR Congo has enormous riches such as gold and diamonds, but also tungsten and coltan, minerals that are used in mobile phones and computers. The fighting in DR Congo has been driven by European and Asian trade in the manufacture of mobile phones, computers and computer games. Companies from Belgium, the UK, Russia, Malaysia, China and India have been identified because they buy minerals from armed groups that brutally violate children’s rights. Companies are keeping the war going by buying the minerals.



How Murhabazi and BVES work:

- Visit armed groups and inform them about children's rights, so that all those fighting are aware of how children should be treated in war, according to both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Congolese law, for example, the fact that child soldiers are forbidden.
- Organise the release of child soldiers and girls being sexually exploited.
- Visit refugee camps and take care of refugee children and street children.
- Offer freed child soldiers, exploited girls, unaccompanied refugee children and street children protection, a home, food, clothes, healthcare, psychological help, the chance to go to a school that prepares them for returning to ordinary school again, as well as vocational training.
- Trace the children's families and help the children to return to their homes. They always prepare the children's families, as well as neighbours, politicians, religious leaders and teachers in the villages well in advance, so that the children are accepted and welcomed back properly. If it is not possible to reunite the child with his or her family, BVES helps the child to find a foster family.
- Often support the children's families financially so that they can afford to let the children go to school and have enough food.
- Often help freed children with school fees and school uniforms, sometimes up until they start university.

stopped the proceedings. He had been too drunk to recognise Murhabazi the day before. Now he said:

"He's no enemy soldier. I know that this man helps street children in Bukavu."

"The children cried and shouted out that I should help them too. I told the soldiers that they had to release the children. If their plan was to bring down the government and create a better country, then using children as soldiers was not the way to do it. The children had to go back to school! Who else would be able to build the new and better country that they wanted?"

There was a heated discussion between the leaders. Some agreed with Murhabazi. He managed to convince them in the end and the soldiers let the children leave the forest. The first 67 rescued child soldiers ran to freedom!

Prepared to die

That was 23 years ago. Murhabazi has freed 34,430

child soldiers. 2,017 of them are girls who were forced to be soldiers or sex slaves. 481,500 children who have suffered because of the war – girls who have been subjected to sexual assault, unaccompanied refugee children, child soldiers and street children – have been given a better life, thanks to Murhabazi and BVES. BVES has 70 homes, schools and centres where they give children a home, healthcare, therapy, the opportunity to go to school, security and love. Most of the children are reunited with their families.

Murhabazi has many enemies. He gets threatening telephone calls and text messages, and he rarely sleeps in the same place two nights in a row. Eight of his colleagues have been killed.

"There are a lot of soldiers, politicians and businessmen, both in DR Congo and in other countries, who are making a great deal of money out of the war. The more unrest there is

in the country, the cheaper it is for them to rob us of our natural resources, such as gold and diamonds. In the hunt for riches, all armed groups, even the armies of other countries, uses child soldiers, and all of them rape girls. When I fight against this, I make a lot of powerful enemies because I'm disrupting their business activities. They are also frightened of being reported to the UN International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

"Nothing will stop me as long as I know that there are children in an armed group. Not death threats or accidents. When it turned out that it was soldiers who had sent the death threat during the UN meeting, everyone wanted me to stop and leave the country. But how could I leave? I can't let the children down. Every day I'm prepared to die for them." 🌍



Different uniforms

Murhabazi gathers the boys together before they go down to the courtyard where the uniform-burning ceremony will take place. The boys at the home belonged to different armed groups. In the photo – for the boys’ own safety – they do not wear the uniform they used when they were soldiers, but a uniform from a different fighting group.



Good luck!

"Mutiya, you want to start school again and begin a new life. I know that you are well prepared and I wish you every happiness in the future!" says Murhabazi, and hugs Mutiya.

"Thank you, dad, thank you! I will pray for you to help you find the strength to carry on fighting," replies Mutiya.

Murhabazi's bag

Each child who has been at one of Murhabazi's homes gets a bag containing things that will make life a little easier when they go home to their families. The bag contains:



A toothbrush and toothpaste



Soap



A blanket



A towel



New clothes



Shoes



A radio



Mutiya burns his uniform

At Murhabazi's boys' home in Bukavu for former child soldiers, a group of boys is preparing to return home to their families to start a new life. But first they're going to burn their old soldier's uniforms. One of them is 15-year-old Mutiya, who was a child soldier for two years.

"We'd just finished our last lesson one Friday. My friend Mweusi and I were on our way home. Suddenly there were three soldiers standing in front of us, who said: "You can't pass here! If you try and run, we'll shoot you on the spot!". "My parents had been killed by soldiers, so I was really frightened. We started crying and my friend wet himself. We begged them to let us carry on going to school, but they just laughed and said: "We don't care, you're coming with us anyway!".

"The soldiers tore off our school uniforms and ripped them apart. They tore up our school books. After three days of being beaten at one of their prisons, we were given our soldier's uniforms. Just a few days later, I was

sent out to fight for the first time. Then I was trapped for two years. I survived, but five of my friends were killed. I saw so much death and blood.

"I had given up dreaming that I would get to swap my soldier's uniform for a school uniform when Murhabazi came to the military camp and saved my life. He said: "You shouldn't be here. You're going back to school again. Come with me."

"I've started school again here at BVES and now I'm going home to my older brother's, and I'm going back to school in the village. But before we go we're going to burn our old military uniforms. When I go back to the village, I'm going to put my school uniform on instead."

Yes to school uniform!

Before it's time to burn the uniforms, the boys make signs. Mutiya writes 'Yes to school uniform' on his.





Uniforms go up in smoke

"Look carefully at the sign now everyone. It says 'No more soldier's uniform'. You will never wear a soldier's uniform again, you will have school uniforms, don't ever forget that! Now we will burn the uniforms!" cries Murhabazi. Mutiya and the other boys start removing their military clothes with shouts of joy and applause and then burn them.

We're going home!

The big day has arrived. Murhabazi and BVES have managed to trace Mutiya's family and the families of fifteen other boys. Now, finally, they're going to return home after several years of war.



Balls instead of bombs!

"The soldiers took the boys' school uniforms and gave them soldier's uniforms instead. And weapons instead of pens. Bombs instead of balls. But we give the boys footballs to take home with them. Those who live near each other can start a football team and carry on supporting each other," says Murhabazi.

Goodbye friend!

The boys say goodbye to each other. They have become firm friends and helped each other through difficult times, so even if they're longing to get home, it's not easy to part.

**Goodbye!
We're going home now!**



Radio is important

"I am giving you a radio so that you know what is happening in our country and around the world. It's important. Listen to news that tells you about children's rights. The radio runs on solar energy so you don't have to buy batteries."



"This is a really happy moment! My only worry is that new fighting will break out in the areas that the boys are returning to, and that they will be forced to become soldiers again. It happens, and it makes me so angry. One boy was taken three times, by three different armed groups. Each time we freed him," says Murhabazi.



▶ We're going home!



Dreamed of school

"I missed school most of all. I always felt like I was in the wrong place, that I should be in school instead. Murhabazi is going to help me start school again when I get home, and it feels like a dream come true. School gives you lots of opportunities in life. I'd like to be president. The first thing I'd do would be to free all children who were forced to be soldiers. I would help them to find their families and let children start school again. My biggest fear now is that I will be taken by soldiers and forced to fight again."
Assumani, spent 2 years as a child soldier

Wants to laugh and play

"I really miss my friends at home. I hope that they aren't afraid of me now because I've been a soldier. I've really missed just being able to chat and play football and play. I'm happy to be able to go home. It doesn't matter what happens, nothing can be worse than what I experienced as a soldier. Nothing."
Aksanti, 15, 4 years as a child soldier



Misses his mother

"I'm longing to see my mum! I thought about her all the time during the war. I used to help her in the fields and fetch the water before I was forced to be a soldier. I was always worrying about how she would cope while I was away because my dad died when I was little. Now I just want to get home and be near her again. What worries me is leaving all my friends here. We've been able to talk to each other about our terrible experiences, and that's been great. The boys in the village who haven't been soldiers will never understand what I've been through."
Obedi, 15, spent 2 years as a child soldier



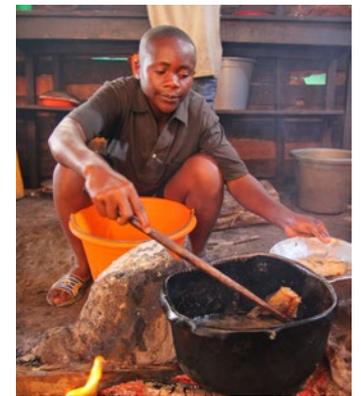
Dreams about good stones

"Those that took me forced me to dig for gold, diamonds and other minerals. I had to give everything I found to my leaders. I was their slave. We attacked others who worked in the mines. I don't know how many people died. We used the gold and minerals to buy weapons from rich arms dealers who came out to the forests. If we hadn't had all these minerals, there would have been peace ages ago. Now all the natural riches are bad for us. But really they should be good. If DR Congo's government could sell the minerals properly, we could build schools, roads and hospitals. I dream of such a day. I also dream of one day becoming a tailor and having a good life."
Isaya, 15, spent 4 years as a child soldier



Longing for peace

"When I was a soldier, there was war every day. Never peace. Apart from my mum and dad, it was peace that I missed most of all. I suffered all the time. It was terrible. I'm happy to finally be able to go home. I'm hoping that my life will be good now. That I'll be able to go to school again and make lots of friends. Murhabazi saved my life. I'm going to miss him."
Amani, 15, spent 2 years as a child soldier



Military uniform – NEVER AGAIN!

School – Yes! Military camp – NEVER AGAIN!



Faida – soldier and slave

When Faida was eleven years old, she was kidnapped by one of the many armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was the beginning of a nightmare that lasted four years, during which she was forced to be both a sex slave and a soldier.

Faida could hear the screams of her friends nearby. They were suffering the same fate at the hands of the soldiers. Faida and her friends had been working in their families' cassava field. No one noticed the soldiers until it was too late. Now two of Faida's friends were dead. When one of the soldiers raised his machete to strike Faida, the commandant shouted:

"Don't kill her! She can be my wife!"

Armed soldiers guarded Faida and her friend Aciza as

they trudged through the field, completely naked.

When they got to the soldiers' camp, it started again.

"The next day the commandant and a few soldiers went looting. "As soon as he'd gone, the soldiers that were left started abusing me."

When the commandant came back, Faida was his alone. But as soon as he was out fighting or looting, she was abused by everyone. Day after day. All day long.

Life as a soldier

"I just couldn't handle being



everyone's slave, despite the drugs they forced us to take." Some of the girls in the camp were soldiers, and Faida had noticed that they were never raped. She asked the commandant if she could be a soldier.

"He agreed, and after two months of weapons training, I was a member of his army."

Early one morning it was time for Faida to carry out her first attack.

"We were given drugs before we left the base. We children were forced to walk at the front. My friend Aciza was suddenly hit in the back. She died."

Faida was constantly thinking about escaping. But she couldn't.

"A little boy tried to escape once. He was shot immediately."

"The first time Murhabazi

Faida hugs her nephew.

"I didn't even know that children had rights until I met Murhabazi. Many girls who have been subjected to what I experienced have been infected with the disease AIDS. Murhabazi took me to hospital for a HIV test, but I hadn't been infected while I was with the soldiers."

Faida lives with her big sister Donia, and here they do laundry together.

"When I was called to BVES and told that they had rescued my Faida, I was so happy. Today she is my daughter and belongs to my family," says Donia.

came, I saw an unarmed man with his arms in the air, saying: "Amani leo!", "Peace now!". He could easily have been killed, but he wasn't afraid," Faida recalls.

Murhabazi said that he was there to take the children home and that children shouldn't be soldiers, they should be going to school.

The commandant refused to release the children, so Murhabazi had to leave empty-handed. A few years later he came back, but it ended in the same way.

Third time lucky

When Faida had been held for four years, Murhabazi came again.

"I couldn't believe it when Murhabazi hugged me and said: "This is your chance! Everything's going to be all right!"

Faida got the chance to start school again at Murhabazi's home for abused girls. 🌍



WHY HAS ANNA BEEN NOMINATED?

Anna Mollel has been nominated for her fight for Maasai children with disabilities and other children living in poverty in rural areas of northern Tanzania.

THE CHALLENGE

The Maasai are herders, but they have become increasingly poor since the start of the 20th century. Their land has been taken and sold to rich businessmen. The Maasai have been forced to move to areas with no grazing for their livestock, and no land for cultivating. Children who are differently abled are often kept hidden away, or abandoned by their parents due to poverty and prejudice.

THE WORK

Anna and her organisation Huduma ya Walemavu give children with disabilities the chance to live a dignified life. They are offered health care, operations, physiotherapy, therapy and access to wheelchairs and other mobility aids, and the opportunity to go to school and to feel safe and loved. Parents are supported and educated, so they are able, and want to look after their children at home. As a pensioner, Anna now runs her own school for vulnerable children.

RESULTS & VISION

Since 1990, around 15,000



CHILD RIGHTS HERO 2

Anna Mollel

PAGES
38–44

Anna Mollel first experienced how difficult life could be for children with disabilities in the Maasai villages of northern Tanzania when she was just six years old. Many years later, Anna arrived at what she thought was a completely empty village. But on the floor of a house, she found an abandoned eight-year-old girl, Naimyakwa, who was unable to move and who would have died had Anna not come and saved her.

Anna, who belongs to the Maasai people, was six years old and playing with her friends in the neighbouring village when she heard a noise coming from inside one of the houses.

“I asked my friend what it was. She said it was her sister, who wasn’t allowed outside. Their mum didn’t want anyone to know they had a daughter who ‘wasn’t quite right’.

“I went into the house and there was a little girl lying there. She smiled when she saw me,” recalls Anna.

Anna meets Nauri

Anna helped the girl to sit up and they started playing. The girl, Nauri, was happy to finally have some company. The next day, Anna returned when Nauri’s mum was fetching water.

“We lost track of time. Suddenly Nauri’s mum rushed in and hit me with a cane. She shouted that I was never to set foot in their home again.”

But Anna came back the next day.

“The other children were afraid, but I said that everyone needs friends and that Nauri was no exception.”

Anna managed to convince



ANNA CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS, INCLUDING:

Goal 1: No poverty. Goal 4: Every child’s right to a quality education. Goal 10: Reduced inequalities. Goal 11: Differently abled people share the same rights as everyone else.



Back to the village

"Our aim is always for the children to return to their village and live their lives like the rest of the family. For them to go to school with the other children and be a part of the community," says Anna.

the others. They took turns to keep watch while the others played, and when the lookout called that her mum was on her way, everyone rushed out. After a few days, Anna helped Nauri to stand up and they practiced walking. Soon Nauri was able to join the others and play.

A few weeks later, Nauri's mum came round to Anna's.

"She said that she knew what I was up to and that she

wanted me to carry on! Nauri had never felt so good and it was a miracle that she was now able to both walk and run."

Anna asked whether Nauri could start school, but her mum would not agree to it.

"So I started going back to Nauri's every day after school and teaching her what I'd learned that day. I became the only teacher she ever had."

Starts fighting for children

Anna trained to be a nurse. One day, a German woman came and wanted to talk to her.

"She knew I was Maasai, and she wanted to find out more about differently abled children in our villages. I explained that it used to be common for children to be killed or abandoned after being born. People thought the disability was a punishment for something they'd done. But I went on to say that the biggest reason was that the Maasai are herders who walk long distances across the savannah in order to survive, looking for fresh grazing areas for their animals. A child who was unable to move was seen

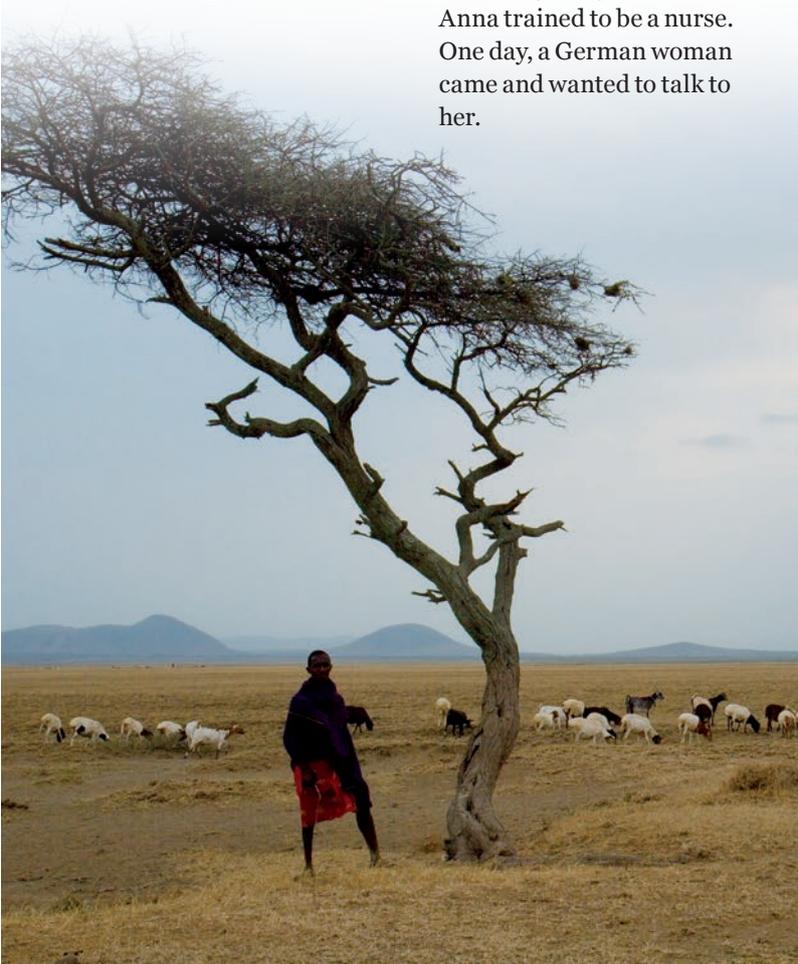
as a major hindrance for the entire group. I explained that these children were still having their rights violated. That they were hidden away, didn't have access to the treatment they needed and weren't allowed to go to school or play."

The German woman asked Anna if she would be interested in helping start up a project for differently abled children out in the Maasai villages, which would be called Huduma ya Walemavu (Care for the Disabled).

"I immediately said yes. This was what I'd been waiting for! Now I could hopefully do more for differently abled children than I was able to do for Nauri when I was little."

Refused to give up

Anna began driving round the villages in 1990, talking about the rights of differently abled children. At the same time, she looked for children who



Vulnerable Maasai

The Maasai are herders. There are around a million Maasai, half of them in Tanzania and half in Kenya. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the areas of land traditionally used by the Maasai as pasture for their livestock have shrunk. The authorities have made large areas of Maasai land available to private individuals and companies for farming, private hunting grounds and national parks for wild animals. In 2009, riot police burned down eight Maasai villages in northern Tanzania because the land was to be used by a private hunting company and tourists wanting to hunt big game there. People were driven from their homes, and over 3,000 men, women and children were made homeless. The Maasai who continued to let their livestock graze in the fertile area were put in prison.

Play is important!

"Being left alone and excluded is the worst thing a child can experience. That's why play and being with others is so important for us at the center," says Anna.

needed help. One of the first children she came across was Paulina, 15, who had lost her parents and was differently abled as a result of polio. She had to drag herself across the ground. Anna thought it would be easy to convince the village leaders that Paulina could have a good life if she could only have the right operation. But Anna was wrong.

"They didn't know that some differently abled children could have operations and get better, and they didn't believe me. Because they lived a long way from hospitals and they couldn't read or afford a radio, they had never found these things out. They thought it would be money wasted. 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 basically have no voice, so they didn't take me seriously."

But Anna refused to give in. Just like as a six-year-old she had challenged Nauri's mum, she now challenged the village leaders. The journey to the village took four hours, but over two weeks Anna travelled there five times! At every meeting she explained about children's rights, and that they had managed to arrange a free operation for Paulina. Finally she managed to convince the men.

Tears of happiness

After her operation, Paulina started practising sitting and standing. After a few weeks, she began learning to walk with crutches.



"She was overjoyed, and I was too! When Paulina went home three months later, and was able to walk into the village herself, people cried with happiness!" Although Anna was happy that Paulina could walk, she knew that Paulina needed an education if she was to be able to support herself in the future.

"Paulina wanted to be a seamstress, so we helped her start a course. She was really good at it!"

Rumours of Paulina spread to other villages. People started openly talking about their differently abled children, and they wanted help. Anna travelled to reach children in remote villages who needed help. On each trip she met more and more children.

"In 1998, our own center in Monduli was ready. We employed physiotherapists and nurses. But also teachers, because I knew that the children we helped almost never got to go to school. There were places for 30 children, but there were times when we had

200 children living there at the same time.

"Even if we didn't have room, we took in every child. The families were so poor that they couldn't pay for the children to be with us, but we never sent anyone away."

It's now almost 30 years since Anna helped Paulina, and since then some 15,000 children have been given a better life thanks to Anna and Huduma ya Walemavu. 🌍

Not just Maasai

"At first we were only working with Maasai children, but now we look after any child who needs our help, whatever their ethnic group or religion. We have Muslims and Christians here, and children who have fled war in our neighbouring countries. The fight for children's rights has no borders!" says Anna.

What does it mean?

Words matter. Over the years, many different words have been used about people with disabilities, words that often make people feel they are worth less than others. Today, we speak about children with disabilities, not disabled children. Sometime s we speak of children who have different abilities. Because we all have abilities, inabilities, strengths and weaknesses. Being a child with a disability means that in some way one differs from what most people in society are able to do. The most important thing is that you and your friends treat all children equally, and make sure that the rights of all children are respected. Together we can fight together to reduce the obstacles for children with disabilities throughout society.

Anna saved Naimyakwa

“When I found Naimyakwa alone in the abandoned village she was eight years old and lying on the floor in one of the houses. There was a strong smell of urine because she had been unable to go anywhere due to her disability. I didn’t think she would survive,” says Anna.

“**W**e were travelling with our mobile clinic to the area where a little orphaned girl with cerebral palsy lived, but Naimyakwa wasn’t to be found with her adult siblings as usual. When I asked if anyone knew where she was, a woman said that the family had moved on with their livestock during the drought to find new pasture.

“I knew how difficult Naimyakwa found it to move, so I wondered how they had managed to take her with them. I went to her village,

which was completely abandoned. We had started walking back towards the car when I heard a whimpering sound.”

A lion?

“I thought it was a lion at first. As we passed one of the houses, we heard the strange sound again. I was afraid, but I carefully stuck my head in and asked if there was anyone there. I heard a little whimper in response.

“Naimyakwa was lying on the earth floor, barely breathing. It smelled of faeces, as she was completely helpless



because of her cerebral palsy. There was an empty calabash next to her that had contained milk. There was a little water left in another calabash.

Naimyakwa was very weak. I was used to families leaving their differently abled children at the center, and never seeing the parents again. But to leave your child like this!”

Naimyakwa rescued

“I leaned close to Naimyakwa’s ear and asked her if she wanted me to take her with us to the center, so we could look after her. She want-

ed to come. I cried. All my colleagues from Huduma ya Walemavu cried too. While I held Naimyakwa in my arms, I thought that even if others had failed to give her the love she needed, I would be there for her and love her.

“Finding Naimyakwa was one of the absolute worst moments of my life. At the same time, it gave me new strength to keep fighting for her right and the right of other vulnerable children to have a good life. There and then I decided to carry on fighting for their rights until the day I die.” 🌍

“Naimyakwa is still here. We never send a child back home unless we’re certain they will be well looked after. Just getting about with Naimyakwa’s wheelchair in the sand at home in the village is almost impossible. Moving about from place to place with the family and their livestock is even harder,” says Anna.

200 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 are entitled to extra support and help to have a good life. Despite this, differently abled children are some of the most vulnerable children, not just among the Maasai and in Tanzania. There are 200 million children with disabilities in the world.



06.00 Good morning!

Naimyakwa brushes her teeth with her friends. When she first came to the center, it was impossible for her to brush her teeth, get dressed and feed herself.



10.00 Break time and play!

The children have fun and exercise their bodies by doing different movements. Naimyakwa tries to catch and throw the ball to the next person.



21.00 Good night!

"Sleep well," says house mother Halima, and strokes Naimyakwa's cheek. Halima sleeps with the children so she can hear if anyone needs help in the night.



Paralysis from brain damage

Cerebral palsy happens during pregnancy, in connection with the birth or before the child reaches the age of two. Common causes are oxygen deprivation and bleeding in the brain. Some children only have mild movement problems, while others are paralysed. Many children with CP have other disabilities besides lack of movement. You can't cure someone with CP, but their lives can be improved with physiotherapy, occupational therapy and exercise.

"CP is common here because it often happens when there are complications at birth. Many live so far from a hospital or clinic that they have neither the time nor the money to get there when it's time to give birth," says Anna Mollel.

Lomniaki

Lomniaki was born with his legs bending the wrong way. He found it difficult to sit up and wasn't able to learn to walk. His dad didn't want the others in the village to see him.

"I didn't count. It was like I wasn't a proper human being. But then Anna Mollel came and saved me. She gave me a new life, and I love her for that," says Lomniaki, 15.



When Lomniaki was little, he used to lie on his own in the dark house all day long. He could hear the other children in the village laughing and playing outside.

"I don't really know why dad didn't want the others to see me, but I think he was ashamed of me. Mum didn't think that way at all, but it was dad who made the decisions. Sometimes when dad was out with the livestock she would secretly carry me out and put me under a tree in the village for a while. Then I could watch the other children playing. But no one played or talked with me," says Lomniaki.



kept hidden

Hated dad

Lomniaki's dad said he couldn't start school.

"He didn't see the point in me going to school because I'd never be able to look after the livestock anyway or get a job and earn money and help the family when I was older. I hated dad then because he ruined my life."

In the end, his mum Paulina couldn't stand it anymore. She felt so bad at how Lomniaki was being treated that she decided to leave her husband. One day, she picked Lomniaki up on her back and they left the village for good. Paulina walked across the savannah to her parents' village, and they were welcomed there by Lomniaki's grandfather and his uncles and their families.

At first, Lomniaki thought that everything was much better. He met people who were kind to him and who talked to him. Mum or his uncles carried him out in the morning and laid him on a cow skin under the big acacia tree.

"But the other children soon got tired of being with me.

They ran off. And when they went to school, I was left under the tree.

"It felt embarrassing not to be able to cope on my own, and I became more and more depressed. I gradually realised what my life would be like. I would never get to go to school. Never get a job. I thought it was unfair, and felt like I was worth less than others.

"My name Lomniaki means 'blessing', but I thought it must have been some kind of mistake. My name was probably meant for another boy. I was no blessing. I was a curse."

Anna came to the village

"I'll never forget the day Anna Mollé came to the village for the first time. I was almost ten years old and lying under the tree. I'd never seen a car before, so I was petrified when I saw it coming closer. I screamed and cried. A woman got out and came up to me and sat down. She smiled and gently stroked my head and tried to comfort me. She said that I shouldn't be afraid and that



TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTOS: TORA MÅRTENS

Jumping in the Everyday dance!

"Since having the operation, I can now dance with the others in the village. I never thought I would ever be able to dance with the others," says Lomniaki.

Here, Lomniaki is dancing Longwesi, which means Everyday. As part of the dance, the boys challenge one another to see who can jump the highest. Lomniaki is battling it out here with his friend Babu.

she had come to help me."

Anna told mum Paulina that Lomniaki could have an operation that would mean he'd be able to walk completely by himself, and that it was possible for Lomniaki to start school like all the other children.

"Mum was so happy and wanted Anna to take me straight away. But it wasn't possible because my uncles were not at home. Mum had to have her brothers' permission, and Anna had to go without me."

Anna came back to talk to

the uncles. They sat under the acacia tree, and Anna explained to the uncles and grandfather about the operation and about Lomniaki's future.

"I had never seen a woman dare to talk in that way to men before. And I'd never seen men listen like that to a woman there under the tree. Anna really was different," says Lomniaki.

Time for the operation

Lomniaki's family would contribute a little money to cover

Lomniaki the herder

"When I come home in the holidays, I can now manage to tend the family's livestock, just like all the other teenagers in the village. Livestock are very important to us Maasai," explains Lomniaki, here looking after the family's goats.





finally got to start school and learn to read and write. He also learned about children's rights at school.

"At home I'd been the only child with disabilities. I had always felt like an outsider. At the center I suddenly had loads of good friends. We could talk about everything because we understood one another so well. I wasn't lying alone like at home, there was always one of my new friends to push me round in a wheelchair so I could join in. For the first time in my life I didn't feel different, I felt like one of the gang. It was a wonderful feeling!"

Lomniaki had his operation at the hospital in the city.

"The first week I had a lot of pain in my legs and was always falling over. But it got better and better, and soon I was able to walk with crutches. After practising for a year, I plucked up the courage to give up the crutches and I was finally able to walk by myself. It was the happiest day of my life!"

Wants to be a lawyer

After another year, Lomniaki was so steady on his legs that he was able to leave the center. Anna then helped him start school. At first they thought of the school in his home village, but soon realised that he would have too far to walk.

"My legs weren't strong enough for me to cope with walking to school in the semi-desert, and I would have



Tree of Disappointment becomes Tree of Life

Anna Mollel and Lomniaki sitting underneath the acacia tree where Anna found Lomniaki, and where she convinced his uncles to let him have the operation.

"It used to be the Tree of Disappointment, where I was left lying alone while the others played or went to school. But since Anna rescued me and my new, proper life began, I see it as a good place," says Lomniaki.

no chance of getting away if I came across wild animals. So Anna helped me start at a boarding school in the city instead."

Lomniaki loves being at home in the village during school holidays, and these days he has no problem helping out with the livestock with his friends. But he still dreams of eventually going on to become a lawyer.

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

for me. If Anna hadn't made the long journey across the savannah, I would still be lying alone in a house or under the tree without being able to move. Instead she gave me a life that is worth living." 🌍

some of his food costs at the center. But when Anna returned, mum Paulina was distraught. She explained that the family had been unable to raise the money that was needed.

"Anna looked at me and said: 'Don't worry Lomniaki. Of course I'll still help you. We'll sort it out somehow!'"

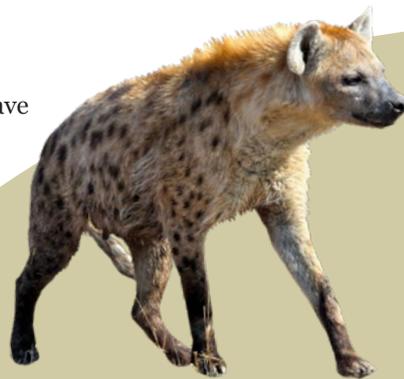
That same afternoon, Anna carried Lomniaki into the jeep. His journey to a new life had begun.

Lomniaki immediately settled in at Anna's center. Anna and the house mothers did everything they could to make sure he was happy, and he



Girls' rights

"It's hard to believe that it didn't matter that mum thought I should be able to play with the others and go to school. It was dad who made the decisions. Mum's opinions didn't matter. Anna taught me that this is completely wrong. Boys and girls have the same value and share the same right to express an opinion and be listened to," says Lomniaki. His little sister Naraka in the photo wants to work with computers.



Lions and hyenas

"Elephants and giraffes often walk right outside here, and hyenas are here every night. I love the wild animals that live here, but we've made a barrier of strong thorny bushes around the entire village to stop hungry predators from getting at the livestock. Further away towards the mountains there are lions, cheetahs and leopards," says Lomniaki.



WHY HAS JAMES BEEN NOMINATED?

James Kofi Annan has been nominated for his work to combat child slavery in the fishing industry on Lake Volta in Ghana.

THE CHALLENGE

James, who was himself trafficked as a child and worked as a slave for seven years with a fisherman, campaigns for children who are forced into slavery in the fishing industry. Parents living in poverty often borrow money from slave traders, who take their children when they can't pay the loan back. Despite child slavery being against the law in Ghana, it is thought that there are almost 250,000 trafficked children working as slaves, and 1.3 million child labourers in the country.

THE WORK

James believes that poverty, which is the basis of slavery, can only be tackled with education. Trafficked children who have been rescued come to James' organisation Challenging Heights' sheltered home first, where the children are given support to process their difficult experiences. When they feel better, they are reunited with their families. Poor mothers are given an education and loans so their children don't end up in slavery.

RESULTS & VISION

Challenging Heights has rescued over 1,000 trafficked children. They have room for 120 children in the sheltered home, and they run a school for 700 children. James and Challenging Heights have supported more than 15,000 children who have been slaves, or who are at risk of being enslaved. Through radio programs, thousands of vulnerable children get to learn about their rights.



PAGES
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CHILD RIGHTS HERO 3

James Kofi Annan

James leaves home at dawn together with four other boys from the village. They have all been collected by well-dressed men. James is six years old, and he doesn't know where he's being taken or that he will be a fishing slave for the next seven years.

A few months earlier, three men had come to the village. They had a couple of boys with them. All of them were dressed in fine clothes made from splendid materials, and wore smart new shoes. The men had walked around the village and spoken to the adults.

Rumours started spreading among the children. If you were lucky and got to go with them next time they came,

you would have clothes that were just as nice for yourself. And you'd get to go to school and have plenty to eat.

James' family was poor, and his mum had 12 children to feed. Sending them to school was impossible. There was no money for exercise books, school bags or uniforms.

Boys start disappearing

After the visit from the smartly dressed men, boys

started to disappear from the village. One by one. "Maybe it'll be your turn next time," said James'



JAMES CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS, INCLUDING:

Goal 3: Good health and well-being. Goal 4: Every child's right to a quality education. Goal 8: Decent work. Goal 16: A stop to forced labour, child slavery, assaults and violence against children.

friends to him. They had seen the men sitting and talking with his dad.

And now he's on his way in a large, battered and rusty old bus. Even the aisle is packed with children.

Evening comes, and the bus jolts along the roads and red sand tracks. Now and then it stops. Every time James thinks they've arrived, but the engine always starts up again. When they need to go to the toilet, they have to have a guard with them. On the third day they arrive at the village of Yeti, at the northern end of Lake Volta. Tens of thousands of children are brought here every year to work as slaves for fishermen around the vast lake. The children are sold for USD 7–25, and they have to work hard for

at least two years. The parents who get the money have often been tricked into thinking their children will get to go to school and learn a profession.

Wants really young ones

There are canoes on the shore waiting, and the children are divided up between them. After a six-hour boat journey, James arrives at the fishing village where the slave owner, who is a fisherman, puts him straight to work. He has to bail out the canoe and prepare the nets. At night he sleeps on the floor deep inside a hut where all the other children bought by the fisherman are lying in a row.

James is woken at three in the morning by having water

thrown in his face. They make their way out in the canoes. James deals with the nets that he prepared yesterday. But it's not as easy today, and the nets get tangled up. When the fisherman notices, he lifts the heavy paddle and hits James on the head with it. From now on he should expect a beating at any time, and for the slightest thing.

The slave owner doesn't want the boys talking about their parents. If the children forget about their parents, it's much easier to get them to do what he wants. That's why he prefers to have really young children as slaves. They forget so quickly.

Dangerous diving

But James doesn't forget. Especially not his mum. And he doesn't stop missing her, even when the days turn into weeks, months and years.

The working days are long, and they always start in the middle of the night. He only gets a few hours' sleep. Of all the jobs that need to be done, the tangled nets are the worst. When they get stuck in branches on the bottom, James has to dive down in the murky water and without being able to see, try and work the net free. It's easy to get into a panic, and boys end up drowning.

One day when James has dived down to free a net that is deep under water, his legs get stuck in the net down there in the darkness. He pulls as hard as he can to free himself.



James almost died when he got stuck in the net.



Trees in the lake

Lake Volta in Ghana is the largest artificial lake in the world. It was formed more than 40 years ago when a dam was built to generate electricity. The dam flooded forests, which is why the bottom of the lake is covered with large areas of dead forest. The trees stick up above the surface, but many of the trees aren't visible.

All the branches everywhere mean that the nets often get tangled in them, and children have to dive down to work them loose. Many trafficked children drown every year, often because they get stuck in the nets and cannot free themselves.

"One in five children die out there," says James Kofi Annan.



It's almost impossible for trafficked children to escape.



Finally he manages to tear the net and get up to the surface with his last ounce of strength.

He just has to get out of here! But there are no roads. Just dense jungle with poisonous snakes, and on the other side there's the huge Lake Volta.

Escape

When James is 13, he gets his chance. A close relative has died and his mum visits the fishing village. It's the first time James has seen her in seven years. His mum eventually manages to convince the slave owner that James must go to the funeral, and it is decided that he will take the boat and then take a bus to the village where the funeral will be held.

James never gets the bus. First he gets a lift with a timber truck, which is heading in the direction of his home village. After seven years as a

fishing slave, James has learned to navigate by the stars. It helps him during the dark nights of his escape. It will be two days and two nights before he gets home. He finds wild mango and gorges himself on the juicy fruit. The sense of freedom carries him for mile after mile, and his steps are light. Soon he'll be home! But it's a bit tricky to find his way. A lot has changed in seven years, and there are new roads and houses everywhere. Will anyone recognise him?

Of course they recognise him! Look, it's Annan's boy come home! James Kofi! How he's grown! People greet him joyfully. James is free and it's the start of a new life.

Taught by little children

James wanted to learn to read and write. He was 13 years old and went round various schools to try and get a place. But they said no. In the end, one school took James in. He could start in year 6.

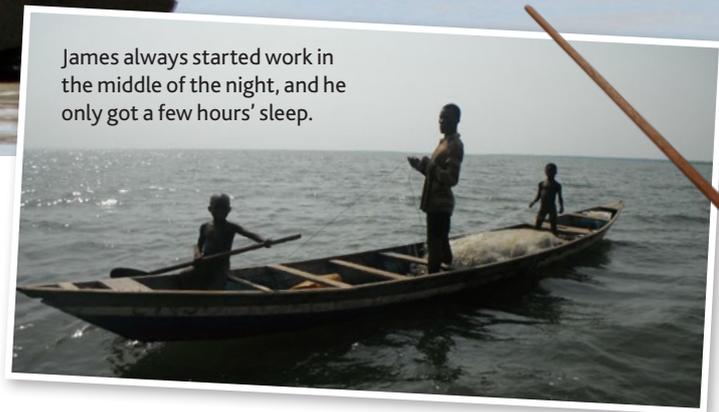
"But I could neither read nor write, and I didn't understand what was going on in the lessons."



James is out on Lake Volta to rescue a boy who has been trafficked.



When the children arrive at James' sheltered home, they are often in a really bad way. But soon they make friends they can play with who share their terrible experiences.



James always started work in the middle of the night, and he only got a few hours' sleep.

James often got beaten with a paddle by the slave owner. Lots of trafficked children suffer this.



There was only one solution. To go down to the first years at lunch and break time and ask for help. And to use their books. "I had to swallow my pride and the youngest children became my teachers."

James soon caught up with his peers. He left school with excellent grades and went on to go to university. In the end he got a job as a manager at a major bank.

James – the saviour of trafficked children

"I was doing well, but every day I thought about the

"The boys who went to Yeti"

There are no words for people trafficking or child slavery in Ghana. Fishing slaves are called "The boys who went to Yeti". It's the name of the village where most trafficked children in the fishing industry end up. Then they are sent out to various slave owners around the lake. Child slavery

is very common in Ghana. The children are sold by their parents or relatives, often by single mothers with lots of children they cannot afford to feed. It's also common for poor people to borrow money from a slave trader for a funeral when someone dies. When they can't pay it back, the

slave trader takes their children instead. Adults receive USD 7–25, and the children then have to work for at least two years, often much longer. There is a law against child slavery, so Challenging Heights can get the police to help when they free children.





The children never got to sleep when they were slaves, but at the sheltered home they can sleep as much as they like.



Challenging Heights' boat has carried many trafficked children to freedom.

When he was working at the bank, James thought about the trafficked children. He founded the organisation Challenging Heights and built the sheltered home for rescued trafficked children.

children who were still slaves and who were suffering as I had."

James started using some of his salary each month to help pay for some children from his village to go to school. After a year he had helped 52 children through school, and his organisation Challenging Heights had been set up.

"Lots of slave traders were angry. We were convincing families to demand their children back, and we taught the children about their rights. The slave traders even threatened my family.

"I had built a fantastic career, but my job at the bank now felt meaningless."

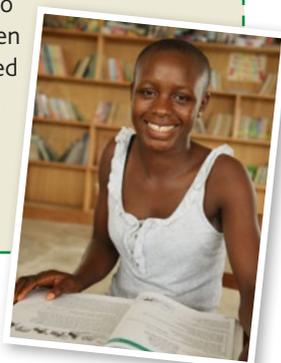
On his birthday in 2007, James sat at his computer at work and started writing his letter of resignation. 🌐

Slave 24/7

When Mabel's mum died, she and her siblings were sent to live with relatives, where Mabel was forced to work hard. At night she was out fishing. In the morning she fetched wood and helped cook maize porridge. Then she made lunch for everyone on the boats. And after that it was time to prepare dinner.

"I hardly slept at all," says Mabel. "Every evening I hoped there would be a storm, so I wouldn't have to work on the lake."

Her relatives had their own children, who were allowed to go to school, but Mabel and her siblings couldn't go to school. One day, Steven and Linda came from Challenging Heights. They told Mabel's relatives that the law states that children have to go to school. "They refused to let us go. So Steven and Linda came back with policemen and fetched us." Mabel is happy to be in the sheltered home, and to go to school there, but she has ugly scars on her back, which she got from being beaten with a paddle.



30 trafficked ch

These 30 children at James and Challenging Heights' sheltered home for trafficked children were slaves for between one and twelve years before being rescued. They have lived as slaves for a combined total of 161 years! Now they are free, and they dream of the future. The most common dream is to be a professional football player, driver, teacher or bank manager. James was a trafficked child and became a bank manager!



Arhinful, 11
Enslaved for 2 years
Wants to be a doctor



Justice, 12
Enslaved for 1.5 years
Wants to be a carpenter



Mprem, 12
Enslaved for 3 years
Wants to be a bank manager



Bortsie, 13
Enslaved for 4 years
Wants to be a tailor



Samuel, 16
Enslaved for 10 years
Wants to be a bank manager



Kobina, 14
Enslaved for 8 years
Wants to be a football player



Kwame, 15
Enslaved for 7 years
Wants to be a professional football player



Children's dreams for the future



Nyeni, 13
Enslaved for 7 years
Wants to be a bus driver



Apreku, 14
Enslaved for 10 years
Wants to be a professional football player



Sammy, 10
Enslaved for 2 years
Wants to be a teacher



Kow, 14
Enslaved for 12 years
Wants to be a bus driver



Daniel, 10
Enslaved for 2 years
Wants to be a tailor



James, 13
Enslaved for 4 years
Wants to be a football player



Kojo, 16
Enslaved for 1 year
Wants to be a builder



Kwame, 8
Enslaved for 1 year
Wants to be a driver



Kweku, 14
Enslaved for 10 years
Wants to be a professional football player



Ekow, 10
Enslaved for 6 years
Wants to be a taxi driver



Portia, 15
Enslaved for 6 years
Wants to be a teacher



Kweku, 5
Enslaved for 1 year
Wants to buy a car



Afedzi, 15
Enslaved for 1.5 years
Wants to be a professional football player



Nkonta, 12
Enslaved for 9 years
Wants to be a taxi driver



Otoo, 13
Enslaved for 2 years
Wants to be a driver



Charles, 12
Enslaved for 6 years
Wants to be a teacher



Junior, 6
Enslaved for 2 years
Wants to be a professional football player



Mabel, 15
Enslaved for 9 years
Wants to be a nurse



Kojo Joe, 6
Enslaved for 1 year
Wants to be a pilot or carpenter



Yaw, 14
Enslaved for 10 years
Wants to be a teacher



Eriel, 14
Enslaved for 10 years
Wants to be a professional football player



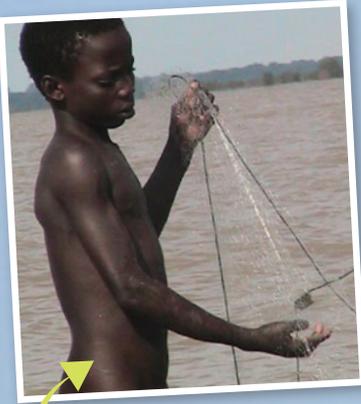
Esiama, 17
Enslaved for 10 years
Wants to be a professional football player



Martha, 14
Enslaved for "several" years
Wants to be a fashion designer



Kwesi was left to die



Challenging Heights found Kwesi when he was pulling up nets. They realised straight away that he was in a very bad way.

When Kwesi's dad died, his mum Yaba had no money for the funeral. A man she knew offered to lend her the money, and she accepted. Just after the funeral, the man asks for the money back ...

Yaba has eight children and tries to support the family by gathering sticks and wood, which she sells. She has no money. The man who lent her the money threatens to call the police and see that she ends up in prison.

Kwesi hears everything. He knows that other families in the village have got money when their boys went to Yeti to fish. He offers to go with the man and work off his mum's debt. "You'll have to work for

three years for the money," says the man.

Whipped with a rope

The slave owner has bought lots of children who work for him. The work starts at eleven at night. That's when they throw out nets and they keep going until six in the morning, when the nets have to be pulled in again. Then they remove all the fish. That takes until the afternoon. There won't be much sleep for Kwesi.

Kwesi often has to dive down into the depths to free nets that have got tangled up in branches. It's dangerous, and one day one of his legs gets stuck in the net, but he manages to free himself. When Kwesi comes back up to the surface, the slave owner whacks him across the face with the paddle. He loses his temper with the children over the slightest mistake, and often uses the heavy paddle when he beats them.



The treetops in the middle of the lake saved Kwesi's life.



This photo was taken from Challenging Heights' boat as it was approaching Kwesi's canoe.

This is what Kwesi's hands looked like when he was rescued. Hands and nails get affected and damaged by all the water. This is what all fishing slaves' hands look like.



One evening, Kwesi is lying awake, thinking about running away. He has tried to run away before, but has always been discovered and then beaten.

Earlier in the day, the slave owner accused Kwesi and another boy of having stolen fish. The fisherman tied them each to a tree and bound their hands and feet and whipped them with thick ropes. The boys cried and screamed from the pain.

Kwesi saved by the trees

One day when Kwesi is out on the lake with the slave owner's sons, one of them pushes him into the water.

"We're going to say that you escaped and we couldn't find you," they say, disappearing with the boat.

Kwesi is alone in the water out on the vast lake, and it's several kilometres to land. Here and there are the tops of

trees sticking up out of the water. Kwesi swims towards the nearest tree he sees. He can hang in a branch and rest until he gets his energy back. By swimming from tree to tree and resting, Kwesi finally reaches land on an island and collapses on the shore.

Kwesi rescued

Kwesi has now been working as a slave for one year and eight months. He has one year and four months left.

One day, a motorboat pulls up by Kwesi's canoe. A woman and a man start talking to him. They say that their names are Linda and Steven, and they ask lots of questions. What's his name? Where does he come from? What's his mum's name? What's the slave owner that he works for called? Kwesi doesn't understand what they want, but he answers all their questions.

Linda and Steven come from James' organisation Challenging Heights, and they've rescued several trafficked children before. They start the boat again and Kwesi watches them go ashore and approach the slave owner's house.

The woman and the man come back and say that Kwesi can be free. That he can come with them to a sheltered home, where he will be taken care of and won't need to work as a slave anymore. Kwesi doesn't know what to believe. But then Steven mentions the name of a teacher that Kwesi really liked at school, before he was trafficked. He then realises that they must have met his mum, and he decides to go with them.

Finally home

Linda and Steven have collected several children and they

have a bus waiting. The sheltered house is high up on a hill, with a view across the jungle and villages, and there are masses of other children. They play volleyball and football, which Kwesi loves.

There's food several times a day. Just like all the other children here, Kwesi puts on weight. He gets to go to school and catch up on everything he's missed. And he can feel safe.

Kwesi stays at the sheltered home for almost a year, until he is well and strong. He has loads of scars on his body. But now he's home with his mum again and he's in year six at an ordinary school. 🌍



Finally home again with mum Yaba.

"I didn't know where they'd taken Kwesi or what a terrible time he was having. He could have died! I'm so happy now that he's home again and going to school."

James was a trafficked child and became a bank manager. Kwesi wants to be a bank manager too.



Three rescued brothers

Brothers Kweku, 5, Kojo, 6 and Kwame, 8, were taken by a slave owner when their mum was unable to repay the money she had borrowed for their dad's funeral. The brothers were rescued after a year and now live at Challenging Heights' sheltered home.



This is Kojo sitting with a life jacket on in Challenging Heights' boat after being rescued.



Kwesi and his friends at the sheltered home playing football with a ball made from plastic bags and string.



WHY HAS MALALA BEEN NOMINATED?

Malala has been nominated for her fight for girls' right to education and a life of freedom, in Pakistan and all over the world.

THE CHALLENGE

In many parts of the world, girls are subjected to brutal violence and cannot live freely. Over 130 million girls are not allowed the education they have a right to today; 5 million of them live in Pakistan. Their rights have been taken away from them due to poverty, war and discrimination.

THE WORK

Malala began speaking openly about girls' rights at the age of 11, when the Taliban prohibited girls from attending school in the Swat Valley in Pakistan. As a 15-year-old, she was shot in the head on her way home from school. The Taliban thought they could silence Malala by killing her. Instead, her voice became even stronger. She and her organisation Malala Fund now support local activists in Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan and other parts of the world where girls are severely affected by injustice and violence. Malala demands that the world's leaders keep their promises to vulnerable girls, and also makes sure they get to tell their stories and demand their rights themselves.

RESULTS & VISION

Malala has created a global movement for girls' right to education and a good life. Together with them, she continues to fight to ensure that every girl receives 12 years of free education in a safe environment, and where girls lead others in their efforts for a better world.



MALIN FEZEHAI/MALALA FUND

On Malala Day 2017, Malala visited refugee children from Syria in Iraq.

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CHILD RIGHTS HERO 4

Malala Yousafzai

It is 9 October 2012. "Which one of you is Malala?" asks the man dressed in white. He hides his face with a scarf. None of the girls in the back of the minibus say a word. The man raises his pistol and fires three rapid shots. The first bullet hits Malala in the head. Malala has fought for a long time against the Taliban in the Swat Valley in Pakistan, for girls' right to go to school. Now, at the age of 15, she is close to death. But by the time Malala regains consciousness, she has become a symbol for girls' right to go to school throughout the world.

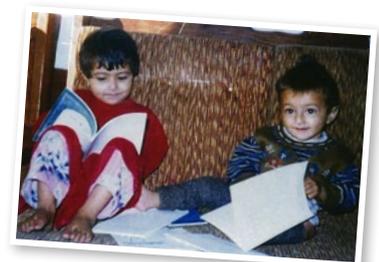
In the book about her life, Malala says that she was born in the most beautiful place in the world.

"The Swat Valley is a heavenly place full of mountains, flowing waterfalls and clear lakes. The sign at the entrance to the valley reads

'Welcome to Paradise.'

In this 'paradise', Malala is set to experience earthquakes and severe flooding that kills many people. But the worst thing of all is when the Taliban come to the Swat Valley.

They threaten and kill people, forcing women to cover their



Malala has started reading, and her little brother Khushal is copying her.



MALALA CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS, INCLUDING:

Goal 4: Quality education, in particular girls' right to go to school. Goal 5: Gender equality. Goal 10: Reduced inequalities. Goal 11: Sustainable communities.



Malala went to her father's school. You can't tell that it's a school from the street.

Malala starts writing a diary about life in Swat under the Taliban. When it is read out on BBC radio it is under a made-up name, Gul Makai, which means cornflower. Her school friends talk about the diary at school, but they don't know it is Malala who is writing it. She talks about how it feels to be afraid, about the ban on girls going to school, and about being forced to wear a burka and hide her face.

When she is filmed for a documentary, Malala says, "They cannot stop me... our challenge to the rest of the world is: Save our school, save our Pakistan, save our Swat." But soon the Taliban close down their school.

Protests cause the Taliban to allow girls up to the age of ten to attend school. Malala and her friends, who are too old, go to school in their normal clothes, hiding their schoolbooks under their shawls. The girls' headteacher calls it 'the secret school'.

Serious threats
In her book, Malala writes that she often thinks about what life is like for girls and women in her country: "We want to be able to make our own decisions and be free to go to school or work. Nowhere in the Koran does it

faces and girls to quit school. They will bomb more than 400 girls' schools in Swat.

Girls suffering
Malala spends a lot of time at her father's school in Swat's biggest city, Mingora. She learns early on how different boys' and girls' lives are, and how men are in charge. But Malala also learns from her father that things don't have to be like that.

When her family go to visit relatives in a mountain village, Malala notices that her cousin Shahida is missing. She is only ten years old, but her father has sold her to an older man who already has a wife. Malala complains to her father about how girls are suffering in Swat.

Arrival of the Taliban
Malala is ten years old when the Taliban come to the Swat Valley. They gather people's CDs, DVDs and televisions and burn them in huge piles on the street. The Taliban also stop young children from being vaccinated against polio. They shut down cable TV channels and ban children's board games.

Then the Taliban set their sights on girls' schools. When Malala's family return from a visit to relatives in a rural area, there is a letter pinned to the school gate. It is a warning to Malala's father not to allow the girls to continue wearing normal school uniform. Instead, they must wear burkas and cover their faces.

No girls in school
It is now 2008 and the Taliban begin blowing up schools – mostly girls' schools – almost every day. Malala is 11 and is interviewed on several TV channels. She speaks out for girls' right to go to school. In a BBC interview in Urdu, the language of Pakistan, she says:

"How dare the Taliban take away my right to education?"
Things go from bad to worse. The Taliban announce that all schools for girls are to be closed. From 15 January 2009, no girl in the Swat Valley is permitted to attend school. At first Malala thinks it can't be possible. But her friends ask who can stop the Taliban?

School for girls under threat

The girls in the picture are on their way home from school in Malala's hometown of Mingora. They are wearing burkas. The Taliban demand that they observe Purdah, which means that women and girls are not allowed to show their faces to men. The Taliban also want to stop girls from going to school. With 185 million inhabitants, Pakistan has the world's seventh largest population. Three out of four women can't read. In rural areas, there are places where only three in a hundred women can read. 5 million girls who should attend school get no education whatsoever.





Malala always went to school by rickshaw during the year before she was shot. Before that she used to walk to school, but her mother was worried after all the threats against the family.



You can't see Malala's school from the street. The girls go in quickly through the iron gate and usually check carefully before they go out onto the street.

say that a woman should be dependent on a man or have to listen to a man."

Malala's father sees on the internet that the Taliban are issuing threats against two women, and one of them is Malala. "These two women should be killed," he reads.

Malala's parents tell her about the threat and her father says that she should stop speaking out about girls' education and against the Taliban, just for a while.

"How could we possibly do that? I've been invited to speak at lots of events,

and I can't just pull out," says Malala.

Dangerous to walk

Malala and her father plan to travel to the villages in the Swat mountains in the next school holidays, to talk to parents and children about the importance of learning to read and write.

"We'll be like education missionaries," says Malala to her father.

Malala's mother will not allow her to walk to school any more. Instead, she always travels by rickshaw. She

travels home with 20 school friends, on the back of a truck with a canvas roof. In the back of the truck there are three long benches. The school bus stops at the steps leading up to Malala's street. These days she is always afraid of the Taliban when she walks up the steps.

Which one of you is Malala?

On the night of 8 October, Malala sits up late studying

for an exam in Pakistani history. The school bus does two runs after school every day. Malala and her friends stay behind and chat after the exam, so they take the second run, at twelve noon.

Suddenly, two young men dressed in white step out into the road, forcing the minibus to make an emergency stop. One of them, wearing a hat and a scarf covering his eyes, climbs onto the back of the bus and bends to look in, near where Malala and her best friend are sitting.



Malala is unconscious, having been shot at with three pistol bullets. One of them hit her in the head.



Malala is carried from the helicopter to a military hospital in the city of Peshawar after being shot.



Malala with her father Ziauddin and younger brothers Khushal and Atal at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham in the UK.



FAREED KHAN/AP

On 14 October 2012, five days after Malala was shot, children demonstrated on the streets of the city of Karachi in Pakistan in protest against the Taliban's attack on her.

“Which one of you is Malala?” he asks.

Some of the girls shout for help, but the man forces them to be quiet. Malala is the only girl who doesn't have her face covered. Nobody says which one she is, but several of them

glance at her. When the man raises his black pistol, Malala squeezes her best friend's hand. The man fires three rapid shots. The first hits Malala in the head.

Awards and the UN

Malala is flown by helicopter to a military hospital, and then on to a hospital in the UK. That's where she is when she regains consciousness a week later. One half of her face is paralysed. But after an

eight-hour operation, the doctors manage to restore her facial nerves.

In newspapers, Malala is included in lists of the most influential people in the world. On 12 July 2013, Malala's 16th birthday, 100 young people from 80 countries have come to the UN to listen to Malala. The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, calls the day 'Malala Day'. In his speech to Malala, he says:

“I urge you to keep speaking out. Keep making a difference. And together let us follow the lead of this brave girl. Let us put education first. Let us make this world better for all.”

“Let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism. Let us pick up our books and pens, they are our most powerful weapons. Education is the only solution. Education first,” replies Malala.

Malala's voice

The Taliban thought they could silence Malala by killing her. Instead they gave her an even stronger voice, which can now be heard all over the world. Malala has continued fighting for girls' rights, and her Malala Fund promotes girls' right to education all over the world. In 2013, WCP's Child Jury nominated Malala as one of three Child Rights Heroes and in the Global Vote, almost two million voting children decided to award Malala the World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child 2014. Later that same year, Malala also became the youngest ever person to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. 🌐

On 12 July 2013, Malala's 16th birthday was celebrated at the UN, in front of one hundred young people from 80 countries. The UN Secretary General called the day 'Malala Day', and gave Malala a leatherbound edition of the UN Charter; something that is usually only given to heads of state.



ESKINDER DEBBE/UN



Malala receiving the World's Children's Prize from millions of voting children, at Gripsholm Castle in Mariefred, Sweden.

KIM NAYLOR/WCF

It is March 2018 when Malala looks out through the helicopter window and takes a photograph with her mobile phone. Soon the helicopter will be landing in the Swat Valley, in the same place that the helicopter took off from with the unconscious Malala six years ago. Ever since she regained consciousness, Malala has dreamed of being able to return to her homeland. Today she lives in the UK and is studying at Oxford University. But she still carries on fighting for girls' rights whenever she can.



INSIYA SYED/MALALA FUND

During her visit to Pakistan, Malala has meetings with Pakistan's prime minister, who gives his support to Malala's education project. In her speech to him, Malala says:

"Pakistan's future generations are the greatest asset we have. We must invest in children's education... so that women can be empowered, work, stand on their own two feet and support themselves."

Visits many countries

"Every day I fight for girls' right to 12 years of free and safe, high-quality education. I travel to meet girls who are fighting poverty, war, child marriage and gender discrimination to be able to go to school. We work at Malala Fund to make sure their stories, just like mine, are heard all around the world," says Malala.

"With more than 130 million girls not going to school, there's a lot to do. I hope that more will join my fight for education and gender equal-

ity. Together we can create a world where all girls can get an education and lead.

"Secondary school education for girls can transform communities, countries and our world. It's an investment in economic growth, lasting peace and the planet's future.

"I never meet a prime minister or a global figure because I want to hang out with them or have a selfie. I always talk about how they are treating people in their country, or how they are not investing in

girls' education or how they are treating refugees. I always think about representing the girls who do not have a voice," says Malala.

Malala helps girls

Malala has her own organisation, Malala Fund, which is working for a world where every girl can learn and lead. Malala's goal is to help more than a million girls. The organisation is currently working in six countries or regions. In places where most

girls don't continue to the end of secondary school, they are investing in supporting local educators who understand the girls' situation best.

Malala Fund is also advocating to hold political leaders accountable – at local, national and global levels – for resources and policy changes needed to give all girls a secondary education.

Malala Fund also helps girls to have a voice.

"We believe girls should speak for themselves and tell leaders what they need to learn and achieve their potential. We amplify girls' voices by bringing them to meet with decision-makers and sharing their stories through Assembly, our digital newsletter."



TESSTHOMAS/MALALA FUND

Malala with girls from Chibok in Nigeria who were abducted from their school by the terrorist group Boko Haram. 112 of the 276 girls who were abducted are still missing.



TOULU ONIBOKUN/MALALA FUND

Focus on girl refugees

During her travels, Malala has met many girls who are refugees, or living in another country. She has put together some of their stories in a new book.

“There are now more than 68 million refugees, the highest number since World War

II. Women and girls are the ones who are affected the most. You can see how vulnerable they are in refugee camps, and how they are subjected to sexual assault and child marriage. I’ve seen that these girls, they prioritise education. They’re fighting for it, and they know that it is

Girls’ education makes for a better world

Malala and Malala Fund believe that it is so important for all girls to have 12 years of education because:

- Secondary education for girls can transform communities, countries and our world. It is an investment in economic growth, lasting peace and the future of our planet.
- Girls’ education strengthens economies and creates jobs.
- Educated girls are healthier citizens who raise healthier families.
- Educated girls are less likely to marry young or to contract HIV, and more likely to have healthy, educated children.
- Each additional year of school a girl completes cuts both infant mortality and child marriage rates.
- Communities are more stable and can recover faster after conflict when girls are educated.
- Education is vital for security around the world because extremism grows alongside inequality.
- Investing in girls is good for our planet. Secondary schooling for girls is said to be the most cost-effective and best investment against climate change.

“I think it’s important for girls to boost their self-confidence first, and then we can work together to tackle the challenges from outside,” says Malala.

She has met Nigeria’s prime minister and explained that policies and money are needed to fund 12 years of free and safe, high-quality education for every girl.

important for them.

“When you become a refugee, you feel like a stranger to the new land, an outsider. But as soon as you feel like you belong, you are an insider, and you deserve the same rights as anyone else in that country. This becomes your home. And you can have many homes.”

Girl Power Trip

“On my Girl Power Trip in 2017, I decided to spend my birthday and Malala Day in Northern Iraq. I met 13-year-old Nayir there, who has been a refugee since ISIS occupied her home city of Mosul and abducted her father. She hadn’t been able to go to school for three years, but now her classroom was in a little tent at the refugee camp. ‘Nothing will keep me from finishing my studies,’ she told me.

“We should not ask children forced to flee their homes to also give up their education and their dreams. We cannot allow girls like Nayir to fight alone.

“Sometimes we think about refugees as victims, that they must have sad stories. And they are sad indeed, but they also show us how much courage they have and how brave they are. They have dreams for their futures,” says Malala. 🌍

Malala supports girls in six countries

- In Brazil, the Fund is improving educational opportunities for indigenous and Afro-Brazilian girls through advocacy and training for teachers and youth leaders.
- In Nigeria, the Fund is helping girls living under the threat of the terror group Boko Haram to go to school, and campaigning for new policies that support 12 years of free, safe, high-quality education for every girl.
- In India, the Fund is expanding access to free secondary school education through advocacy, mentorship programs and re-enrolment campaigns.
- In Afghanistan, the Fund is recruiting female teachers and working on eliminating gender discrimination.
- In Pakistan, the Fund is fighting for education funding, building schools for girls and training and empowering young women to speak out for their rights.
- In the Syria Region, the Fund is using technology to help refugee girls access classrooms, campaigning to ease enrolment requirements and fighting to reduce child marriage.



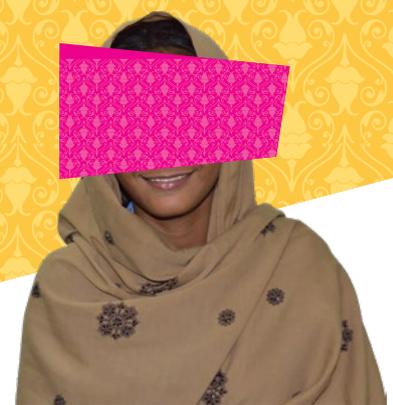
Malala’s newsletter Assembly

Malala’s digital newsletter Assembly publishes original work by girls, for girls from all over the world. Your voice can be heard too. Subscribe now at malala.org!

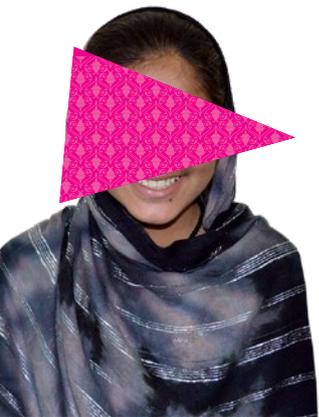
"There is still a great deal to do in my country Pakistan, where 24 million girls and boys cannot go to school. My dream is for all Pakistani children to receive 12 years of free and safe high-quality education, so they can build a good future for my country," says Malala.

Malala is not alone. Just like her, the girls here are fighting for girls to be able to go to school. And Malala is a role model for them all. It can be dangerous for some of them, which is why their faces are covered.

More courage



Bombs stop school



"Education is so important. It changes our lives. Everyone has the right to go to school. When I dream about the future, I dream that I am a teacher, just like the teachers I have. When there are a lot of bombs going off, I can't go to school. I'm happy when it's calm and I can go back to school. Malala is great. She's a role model for us. Everyone knows what she thinks and how she's fighting."

Mariam, 12

Developing our country

"Everyone has the right to an education, just like I've had. Only when everyone gets an education can our country develop. Not everyone knows this, so we have to tell them and remind them. I talk to others who live in our area, and many of their children have since been able to start school. It's so important to me that everyone gets an education, and I try to encourage those who've started that they must continue and work hard. Education for everyone is our goal, so even if we're scared sometimes and we know that many people are saying bad things about us, we've decided to support education and we'll continue to fight! Malala is like us, and she's a role model for us."

Rainaz, 14



Girls can do anything

"Education is everything. It affects your life, and without education I can't do very much. All the jobs in my country that boys can train for, girls can train for too. If I want, I can be a policewoman, a soldier, a pilot or something else. Boys and girls can have the same jobs.

"Politics is also important. Without politics, we cannot develop our country. Everyone has the right to get involved in politics. I want to as well, and when I am in a position of power, I will work to make sure everyone in our country has an education.

"Sometimes things are unsettled in our area, and then I have to stay home from school. I'm grateful that Malala has been so clear about all girls having the right to go to school. There are lots of parents in our area who keep girls at home. My friends and I talk to the children we meet and encourage them to start school. We talk to their parents too. Sometimes they listen to us and their children get to go to school. When I found out that Malala writes a diary, I got one too and I write in it every day."

Asma, 14

Fighting for others

"Those of us who get to go to school know that we also have a responsibility to others. There are lots of girls where I live who come from poor families, and no one has thought about sending them to school. Sometimes I just need to talk to the girls, but sometimes I have to discuss it with the parents. It's led to many of the girls now attending school. We have lots of problems in our area; the Taliban, bombing and unpleasant boys who shout stupid things at girls who go to school. I've decided that I want an education, which means I need to go to school even when it's difficult. Education is like a light; if it starts shining, it spreads. We want that light to shine throughout this whole area where I live, and across our country.

"Malala is so brave. I agree with what she thinks. I'm glad that I've been able to go to a school where I learned how to fight for others. You can't talk about Malala everywhere; lots of people are against her and the idea of girls having an education. But there are many of us who are fighting as she does."

Sofia, 15

ous girls...



Malala is very strong

"Education has helped me understand more about life. Boys and girls here have different lives. My brothers can play at home and at school. I can only play at school. Malala is very strong and didn't lose the fight. She wants all girls in Pakistan to go to school. She's right."

Amna, 12

Praying for Malala

"Education is important for girls. I have such a good teacher, and I really love my school. Malala is a really good person because she supports education for girls. I pray for her every day, to help her carry on."

Zeenat, 12

We're developing society

"Educated women have a big effect on how a society develops. It's really important. Educated women know they have rights, and they share this knowledge with others. Malala knows that all girls have the right to education."

Warda, 15

The whole country must be educated

"It's important for us girls to get an education. I'm learning to read and write, and lots of other things that I wouldn't know about otherwise."

"Malala wanted an education herself, but she also wants all girls in Pakistan to have an education, and for our whole country to be an educated country. She is very brave and an important role model for us all."

Aisha, 12



...support from boys



Voting for equal rights for girls

"Boys and girls have different lives in Pakistan. I think we should have equal rights. It's not like that at the moment, and it can be very difficult to change things. We need to talk about it and then we'll be able to vote on changing the injustices that exist today. We need to vote for good leaders who work to make sure injustices disappear from our society."

Baber, 12

Start talking about it in school

"Everyone should have the same rights; the right to go to school and the right to play. Parents aren't always that well educated and they have learned from their parents that girls mustn't go out. I think that's wrong. We must show everyone the same respect. It needs to be made an important thing that we talk about at school. They don't do that at the moment."

Nazar, 15

Parents' attitudes need to change

"Girls aren't given the same rights as boys. Parents treat boys and girls differently. Our parents have old-fashioned attitudes and we have to do as we're told. Boys can't do household chores, and girls can't go out when they want and how they want to."

Umer, 15

We need to talk to families

"Boys and girls have the same right to an education; it is their parents' responsibility. Us young people are also responsible. We need to talk to families that are not taking responsibility. We must be role models, so that those who refuse to give their girls rights, particularly the right to an education, feel ashamed. Girls can do everything that boys can."

Ubaid, 13

WHY HAS PHYMEAN BEEN NOMINATED?

Phymean has been nominated for her fight for children living on Cambodia's rubbish tips, and their right to an education.

THE CHALLENGE

In Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh, many poor children live and work on rubbish tips and in slum areas. They don't go to school, and instead risk their lives and health by collecting rubbish in order to survive. Many have been injured, and even killed, when they were run over by rubbish trucks or buried in the mountain of rubbish.

THE WORK

Phymean and her organisation, People's Improvement Organisation (PIO), make sure that vulnerable children, including children affected by HIV/AIDS, get to go to school and have their basic needs met. Over a thousand children are given an education, food, clean water and health care. They are encouraged to dream and to develop their interests.

RESULTS & VISION

Since 2002, more than 5,000 vulnerable children have been given a better life through Phymean and PIO, who see education as a way out of poverty. Today the organisation runs three of its own schools and a children's home, where orphaned and abandoned children can grow up in a safe environment.



PAGES
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CHILD RIGHTS HERO 5

Phymean Noun

When Phymean was little, those who were in power in Cambodia at the time prohibited her and other children from going to school. When as an adult she meets the children who work on the capital Phnom Penh's rubbish tips, she understands just how they feel. And that they all yearn to be able to start school. So she starts up a school for them.

Phymean's story begins in April 1975, when she is four years old. Soldiers come waving weapons and saying that everyone has to leave the city. "Just for three days," they say, "then you can all go home again".

The roads are so packed with people that Phymean's family can barely get through. The soldiers urge them on,

further and further away. They can hear rifles going off in the distance. Those who try to turn back are shot.

When the family has been walking for many days, they have to stop at a large farm. They are given black clothes and shoes made from car tyres. This is the uniform that the Khmer Rouge want everyone to wear from now on. The

Khmer Rouge is the name of the military group that has taken power in Cambodia.

School banned

Many of the black-clothed soldiers with big weapons are only 10-12 years old. They like Phymean's mum, and when she asks them not to send Phymean and her big sister away to the camp where



PHYMEAN CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS, INCLUDING:

Goal 1: No poverty. Goal 2: Zero hunger. Goal 3: Good health and well-being. Goal 4: Quality education. Goal 10: Reduced inequalities. Goal 11: Sustainable communities.





Cambodia's terrible history

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Some 45 years ago, the country was taken over by the Khmer Rouge. Over the subsequent four years that the Khmer Rouge were in power, over 1.8 million people died from torture, execution, illness, hunger and exhaustion.

Phymeant, who is standing next to her mum, is just two years old here in 1973, and the family has not yet been forced to leave their home.

“Yes,” says her mum. “You must get an education. Knowledge is the key to a better life. People can take money and things away from you, but no one can steal your knowledge.”

Every evening, Phymeant holds her mum in her arms. One evening her mum whispers:

“Hold on tight to your dreams, Phymeant. Everything you can learn, you can use.”

Then her mum dies.

Keeps on working

Phymeant is now alone in the world, except for her little niece Malyda. All Phymeant has left are the four walls of the house and a bicycle. Every morning before dawn she fetches water from the garden and carefully fills a water

tank. When it's full, she sells the water as drinking water.

Then Phymeant gets a job as a secretary. After work, she cycles to evening class. She has promised herself and her mum that she will go to school, and she intends to, even though she is so tired she often just wants to go to sleep.

Phymeant struggles on for several years with her education. Then she gets a UN job working on Cambodia's first free elections. She moves to the capital Phnom Penh, works in an office, buys a car and has money in the bank. Life is suddenly easy.

Fight over a chicken bone

One day, Phymeant is eating a grilled chicken for lunch. She throws her chicken bones on a

children live without their parents, they allow them to stay.

Many people are killed by the Khmer Rouge, and one day Phymeant's mum finds out that all her 11 siblings and all their families have been killed.

Phymeant turns six, but she's not allowed to start school. The Khmer Rouge don't allow any schools or books. Phymeant's job is to pump water, and it's hard work.

Two years later, soldiers arrive from neighbouring Vietnam and defeat the Khmer Rouge. The family can return home, and nine-year-old Phymeant is finally able to start school. She wants to read every book in the whole world, and quickly moves up from year 2, to 4, to 7.

Mum falls ill

When Phymeant turns 13, everything changes again when her mum becomes seriously ill.

Phymeant's dad has abandoned the family and she has to work hard to look after her mum. One by one, she sells their possessions. First the motorbike, then the sewing machine, a bicycle and furniture. Eventually there's just the little house and a bicycle left.

“You must go to school,” says her mum.

But Phymeant doesn't want to leave her, not even for school, which she loves.

Stand on your own two feet, girls!

“It's quite common in Cambodia for girls not to go to school because the families think it's unnecessary. The girls will only get married and have a husband, who will be responsible for them. The husband is automatically regarded as the leader. But I think that's wrong! Through education, more people can understand that women can also be leaders of their area or their family.

That's why I teach girls to stand on their own two feet, and to work towards their goals!”, says Phymeant.

Focus on girls

Phymeant and PIO help both boys and girls, but Phymeant knows that girls are particularly vulnerable. It is more common for them to be forced to quit school early and start working alongside their parents. That's why it's mainly girls who get extra support from school, for example, rice every month. Their parents have to sign a contract, pledging to support their daughter in her studies and that she does not have to work in the evenings or at night.



Dreams for the future at Phymean's school

5x
8



Wants to build a big yellow school

"Maths is important, particularly multiplication. When I'm an engineer, I'm going to build a big yellow school for the children."
Sokhgim, 13



Wants to talk to the whole world

"English is important, so I can talk to people all over the world. I want to be able to read English books and write to friends on the computer."
Somaly, 14



The children love going to Phymean's school every morning.



pile of rubbish, and suddenly five children appear. They fight and scratch one another to get to the remains of the chicken. Phymean is shocked. The children are fighting over the chance to eat rubbish.

The children say that they have come from the countryside, because their parents are looking for work. But the only work available is sifting through rubbish at the rubbish tip, which is also their home. They explain how they fight every day just to survive.

"How can I help you?" asks Phymean.

"I just want to go to school," says one of the boys.

When Phymean leaves the children, she can't stop thinking about them. They're struggling without any help, just like she did.

The next day, Phymean goes to Phnom Penh's biggest rubbish tip, which is as high as a mountain. She meets children and parents, sees the canvas sheets under which they sleep, the trucks that stick to their routes regardless of whether or not a child gets in the way. She sees open sores that never heal. The stink gets into everything. It's like hell, thinks Phymean.

Starts a school

Phymean resigns from her job, takes all her money out of the bank and starts work at the rubbish tip. Most of the children desperately want to go to school, but the parents

Phymean together with children in the school canteen, where everyone gets lunch.



It is 2002, and the first time Phymean visits the girls at the rubbish tip.



Clothes for collecting rubbish

Srey Nich's rubbish-collecting clothes. The children who sift through rubbish try to wear clothes that are as protective as possible. Preferably with long sleeves and boots, but these aren't always available. Children who work barefoot or in short sleeves often cut themselves.



Phymean's green school building is located at the site of the old rubbish tip, where the goats now graze.



Wants to paint PIO's history

"I like painting landscapes and animals, especially rabbits. I want to be an artist and paint PIO's history."
Pich, 13



Khmer and computer important

"Our language Khmer is important to me, as I want to work in business. Then I'll need to be good with computers."
Kakada, 11



Wants to fly to another planet

"Computers are the most important thing to learn about. I want to be a pilot and the cockpit is like a big computer, or an astronaut and fly to another planet."
Kim, 12

are hesitant. The children have to help support the family, otherwise they'll starve.

On the first day, 25 children come to Phymean's school. Then more and more start coming. Phymean also gets the first tap connected at the rubbish tip to provide clean water. The people living there also need food and teachers.

Phymean is at the rubbish tip every day. She is a teacher, leader, caretaker, social worker – she is everything to the children. Gradually the school gets bigger. More children and more teachers come, and after a couple of years, Phymean opens a second school.

Never give up!

It's now 17 years since Phymean set up her organisation. There are three schools and one children's home for orphaned or abandoned children. The organisation also helps families and whole communities around the rubbish tip.

"Never give up! That's how I think, and I tell the children at school this too. The children here have a tough life. There are gangs, drugs, and it's very unsafe. But we help them believe in their dreams and fight to achieve them," says Phymean. 🌍



Phymean and PIO want

- To help the children find their dreams. Many of the children on the rubbish tip have no faith in the future.
- To give the children hope. By seeing the children's progress and creating opportunities to reveal their talents, Phymean and the teachers show that the children's situation can change.
- To give the children love they can rely on. Phymean and PIO follow the children for many years.

PIO's work for children:

- Three schools on the old rubbish tip and in the slums of Phnom Penh.
- Education in Khmer and English, with a focus on language and computer skills.
- A children's home for orphaned and abandoned children.
- Support to families, so they can send their children, particularly daughters, to school.
- Clean water for all children at the school, and for children and adults living in the area.
- Vocational training for teenagers such as hairdressing or needlework.
- Access to a nurse, doctor and dentist.



Wants to teach tourists

Hin, 13, has been going to PIO's school for three years. He lives right behind the school with his mum, dad and younger brothers. The family worked on the rubbish tip for many years, but now only the parents work.

"I want to be a guide and teach tourists about Cambodian culture and traditions. I can teach them how to do a traditional greeting."

If you're greeting a monk, your hands should be high up above your nose.



You greet your peers with your hands underneath your chin. You say "chum reap sou", instead of the more formal "sou sdei".



When greeting an adult, you keep your hands beneath your nose.



Dream of school com



Kean is standing in one of the many deep holes in the rubbish mountain. Suddenly, she hears a sound that can mean only one thing: the rubbish is toppling! Kean launches herself upwards and manages to get out of the hole before the avalanche of rubbish that has been started by the tractor fills it up right where she was standing.



Both Kean and her little sister Phally worked on the rubbish tip and dreamed of going to school.

A few years earlier, when Kean is eight years old, she and her little sister Phally leave their home village. They have to say goodbye to their parents and squeeze themselves onto a minibus together with their grandmother. Three hours later, they arrive at their destination: Stung Mean Chey rubbish tip in the capital Phnom Penh, where they will be working from morning till evening every day of the week.

Deadly work

Kean and Phally soon find out what happens to children who don't get out of the way in time when the rubbish avalanches start. The first time Kean experiences it, she's standing just a few metres away from a boy, a bit further along the edge of the rubbish mountain. The tractor driver on top of the mountain doesn't see them, and just carries on shovelling the rubbish over the boy.

Kean and all the others who see the boy disappear quickly

help dig him out. He looks petrified, but the next day he's back working at the rubbish tip as though nothing has happened. Kean knows that he has no choice if he wants to eat.

Another time it takes too long to dig a boy out, and he dies.

Just walking over the rubbish mountain is really dangerous. Several times Kean has fallen down into waist-deep puddles that form in amongst the rubbish. If anyone falls into such a hole and can't touch the bottom, they are never found again.



es true



Hand dance

Traditional Cambodian dances feature lots of hand movements, which the sisters practice.



Kean and Phally eating their lunch at school. They were often hungry when they worked at the tip.

Dance clothes

Kean and Phally love dancing both hip hop and traditional dances.



The woman with the school

Kean and her sister look through the rubbish every day. Sometimes they're so hungry that they eat food that others have thrown away. The clothes they wear also come from the tip. One day, Kean and Phally see a woman walking around the rubbish tip, handing out protective masks and talking to the people who work there.

Kean and Phally listen carefully when the woman starts talking about a school. The children are allowed to go with the woman to the school to have a look. When the woman, Phymean, explains that it's free for the children to go there, Phally feels a flicker of hope that she and her sister might be able to start school.

The sisters tell their grandmother about the school visit.

"You have to carry on collecting rubbish, otherwise we will all starve," says grandma.

Phally cries and keeps on at her grandmother:

"I don't want to work on the rubbish tip my whole life!"

In the end, grandma gives in. The sisters can start school.

Every day, after school Kean and Phally go to collect rubbish. When they get home to their little shack late at night, they do the household chores while grandma sorts the rubbish. Then they study. They're afraid they won't be able to keep up in lessons otherwise.

Hunger strike

Grandma, who has tuberculosis, is weak, and they have to go home to the village. Kean and Phally cry all the way. All they want to do is stay at school.

In their village, they plant rice from early morning until late in the evening. Kean often cries. She thinks about the school and all the lessons she's missing.

Kean and Phally's family don't listen to the girls' arguments, so they come up with a plan: to refuse to eat anything until they're allowed to return to Phnom Penh and school. The sisters' hunger strike lasts for several days, and in the end they get their way.

Wonderful shampoo

Grandma goes with them and makes sure they can move into PIO's children's home.

For the first time they get to wash their hair with shampoo.

"It's wonderful. Now I can finally feel completely clean," says Phally.

At Cambodian New Year in April, the sisters go to visit their family. During the celebrations, some children come up to Kean.

"Can you teach us English? And show us how to write the alphabet?" they ask.

Kean is very proud. She's pleased to be able to share what she's learned. Her parents watch as she shows the children how to write the letters, and they smile proudly at her.

"I'm such a lucky girl now, to have the chance to go to school. If I hadn't come to PIO, I don't know what the future would have been like," says Kean. 🌐

PIO uniform

At school, all students wear a uniform that they get from PIO. Phally wears it every morning. When they worked at the rubbish tip, the only clothes the sisters had were the ones they were wearing. Now they have several changes of clothes, and they can swap them with each other!



Loves school

Phally and her friend Pich read books from the library during the final hour of the school day. Phally loves going to school. When her grandmother took her and Kean back to the village, the sisters started a hunger strike so they could return to school.



Long day with school

Langeng, 15, lives with his sister, mum and 17 relatives in a metal shack at the old rubbish tip. His mum is very ill, but she has to work so the family can afford food. Langeng goes with her in the evenings.

It was worse when Langeng was little. He didn't go to school then, but just collected rubbish all day long.

"I was constantly hungry. I picked up bad fruit that people had thrown out, and drank the last drops left in the bottles I found."

Langeng and his sister saw other children with school uniforms and carrying school bags. They begged and nagged, and in the end, they got to start at PIO.

"Football, school and my friends make me happy. But when I think about my mum being ill, it makes me very sad. So sad that I get angry."



6:00 Time to get up

Langeng and his sister Pich sleep next to each other in the family's bed. The mosquito net protects them from the mosquitoes, who thrive in the humid conditions.

6:30 Clean and tidy

Every Wednesday, Langeng cleans the classroom before lessons begin.



9:30 TV break

At breaktime, Langeng and his friends go to the kiosk next to school to watch the news.



11:00 Fried favourites

All the children have lunch on the school roof. Without that meal, many of them would go hungry. Langeng likes it best when they have fried vegetables.



13:00 Switch on the computers

The exciting computer lesson is held in the library.

and rubbish



14:15 So tired, so tired...

Langeng has a nap almost every lunch break, but sometimes he's so tired that he even nods off in the English lesson in the afternoon. He has only had five hours' sleep because his evening job isn't finished until late at night.



Plastic and rubber shoes
0.07 USD/kg



Straws
0.1 USD/kg



Plastic bottles
0.14 USD/kg

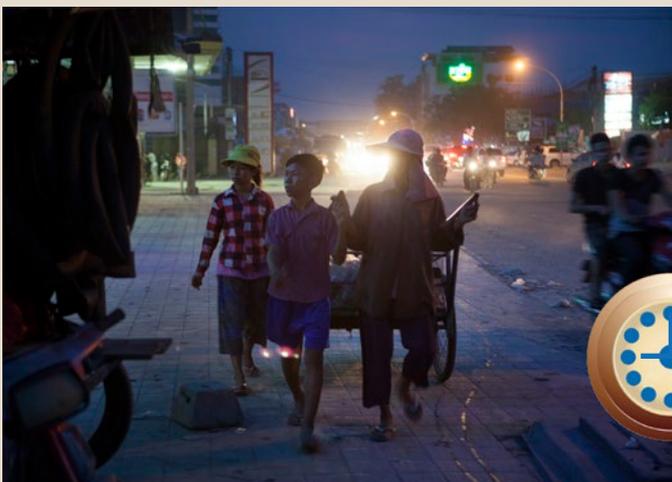


17:15 Evening shift starts

Langeng changes into his rubbish-collecting clothes. Then he heads off to the city centre to collect rubbish.



Cardboard
0.07 USD/kg



21:00 Walking in the dark

Langeng carries on working until midnight.

00:30 Night shower

When they finally get home, Langeng takes a shower. After eating some rice left over from the others' dinner, he goes to bed.



WHY HAS MANUEL BEEN NOMINATED?

Manuel Rodrigues, who sadly passed away in 2020, has been nominated for his fight for blind children and other differently abled children in Guinea-Bissau.

THE CHALLENGE

Differently abled children in Guinea-Bissau are very vulnerable. Often children who are deaf or blind don't get to go to school, and are treated as though they have less worth. Sometimes, particularly in rural areas, they are hidden away or abandoned due to poverty and prejudice.

THE WORK

Manuel and his organisation AGRICE give differently abled children the chance to live life with dignity. They get access to health care and medical treatment, food and a home, and they get to go to school and are given love and a secure environment. Manuel rescues children who have been abandoned or hidden, but also educates their families so it doesn't happen again.

RESULTS & VISION

Manuel and AGRICE have helped thousands of children to have a better life since 1996. Over 300 blind children have received help at Manuel's centre and gone to his pre-school and school specially for the visually impaired. After receiving education and training for a while, most can be reunited with their families and attend a regular school. He fights tirelessly to make sure all differently abled children are granted the same rights as other children.



PAGES
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CHILD RIGHTS HERO 6

Manuel Rodrigues

Manuel gently strokes 9-year-old Adelia's head. She leans against him on the bench where they are sitting. When Adelia was a newborn baby, she was left to die in the forest because she is blind.

"Many people in Guinea-Bissau see differently abled children as worthless, so they don't give them love or let them go to school. My life is all about fighting for these children," says Manuel, who is himself blind.

Manuel knows how much a differently abled child needs care and love from the adults in their life, and not to be let down and abandoned. He himself lost his sight at the age of three.

"There were nine of us, and my mum and dad loved us. My dad and I were best friends. We walked hand in hand to preschool every day, and we played together a lot."

When Manuel was three, something happened that changed everything.

"My eyes, which had been brown, started to turn blue, and everything started to look blurred. I had to stop going to preschool because

my sight was so bad. This made me sad, but my dad was even sadder."

The long journey

Manuel's dad decided to make sure Manuel received the best medical care he could find. But it wasn't in Guinea-Bissau but in Portugal. He started saving as much money as he could from his army pay check. Finally there was enough money to buy a plane ticket that would get Manuel to his uncle in Portugal. But no one else in the family could go with him.

"It wasn't easy for me. I was only four years old, and sad and frightened. But I was lucky.



Manuel with Adelia, who was left in the forest as a baby to die, but rescued by some shepherds.

There was a nun on the plane who helped me, and at the hospital there were two nurses who looked after me.

"After a couple of years at the hospital, they realised that there was nothing they could do to fix my visual impairment. The treatment had come too late."



Home again

At Manuel's centre, Isabel learned Braille and discovered that she can do much more than the people around her expect. She now lives with her family, and every morning her cousin Aua helps her get to school.

School for the blind

Manuel's dad continued to fight for his son. He knew that there were good schools for the blind in Portugal, but there wasn't a single one in Guinea-Bissau.

"My family managed to raise enough money for me to go to a boarding school in Portugal. I learned to count, read and write using Braille."

The years passed, and Manuel began to think that life probably wouldn't be so bad after all. But one day, after six years at the school, he got a life-changing message. His dad had died of a heart attack.

"I was ten years old, and I lost both my dad and the possibility of carrying on at the school because no one could pay my school fees anymore."

When Manuel arrived home, the country was at war. The family took Manuel to safety in neighbouring Guinea. There he was able to attend a school for differently abled children and young people. Six years later, he returned home.

Stopped the president

No one believed Manuel, who was blind, could get a job, but every day he went to the presi-

dential palace and asked to speak to the president. Manuel believed that the president would help him and other differently abled people find work.

"One day I managed to stand in the way of the president's car, so he had to stop! The president's guards took me to him. I explained that I needed help to get a job, since nobody employed blind people. I said that I had learned to work as a switchboard operator. The president was curious, and he let me try out the switchboard in the presidential office. He was impressed

and arranged a job for me at the head office of the postal service!"

Starts AGRICE

Although Manuel was doing well, he didn't forget the blind children in the country who had not been given the same opportunities that he had.

"Many were kept hidden or abandoned. The government still hadn't started up a single school in the country that was adapted for blind students," says Manuel.

So in 1996, Manuel started an organisation called AGRICE (The Guinean



MANUEL CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS, INCLUDING:

Goal 1: No poverty. Goal 3: Good health and well-being. Goal 4: Every child's right to a quality education. Goal 10: Reduced inequalities. Goal 11: Differently abled people share the same rights as everyone else.





On a rescue mission

Sometimes Manuel and his team have to swap their jeep for a donkey-drawn cart to get to a village where they know there are differently abled children who are having a hard time. Manuel is welcomed, and the villagers listen as he explains that differently abled children have the same rights as all other children. He also talks about the causes of blindness and how to protect your eyes from damage. Manuel and AGRICE have 16 field workers who visit villages and communities to look for blind children and other differently abled children. Manuel works with churches, mosques, traditional leaders and local authorities, who contact AGRICE if they know of children who need help.

often lived in mortal danger. We told people about the rights of the child and offered to take care of children who needed help. Soon we had over forty visually impaired children living at home with us!"

White Cane school

At Manuel's place, the children learned how to take care of themselves and help their

families when they returned home. Manuel's goal was for the children to return home and participate in society. They learned to wash clothes and dishes, tidy up, cook and much more.

Manuel knew that the children also needed to go to school. He campaigned tirelessly for the government to immediately start a school

his house into the first safe home for blind children in Guinea-Bissau. The first children to move in back in 2000 were brothers Suncar, 11 months, and Mamadi, 6.

Together with his wife Domingas, Manuel took care of the two little boys. Rumours spread of how well the brothers were treated, and more and more blind children started to come.

"At the same time we started our rescue missions. We visited villages to look for blind children or other differently abled children, who we knew



Association for Rehabilitation and Integration of the Blind), so that people who were visually impaired could raise awareness in society and fight for their rights together.

Through AGRICE, Manuel came into contact with many blind children whose lives were difficult. When his mother died, he converted half of

15-year-old created Braille

Braille was created in 1824 by a 15-year-old French boy called Louis Braille. Braille is a series of raised dots within small squares (cells) on sheets of paper or plastic that you feel and read using both index fingers. Different letters are formed by different combinations of dots in the square. Braille can also be used to form figures and musical notes. World Braille Day is celebrated on 4 January every year, in memory of Louis Braille's birth in 1809.



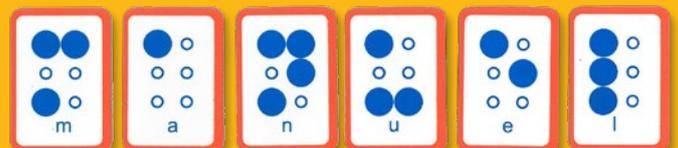
Blind children at Manuel's school learn to read and write for the first time in their lives with the help of Braille.



A plastic template with squares that the paper is inserted into to write with the stylus.



A stylus, used for Braille writing.



This is Manuel's name in braille.



1.4 MILLION BLIND CHILDREN
 There are 19 million visually impaired children in the world. 1.4 million of these are incurably blind.



Just one eye doctor

"It is possible to prevent and treat almost all blindness*, but Guinea-Bissau is a poor country, and there is only one doctor in the whole country who is an eye specialist," explains Manuel. The most common causes of blindness in Guinea-Bissau are:

River blindness

(Onchocerciasis) is a parasitic infection that is spread through the bite of a black fly that lives near rivers. A parasite then produces thousands of poisonous larvae inside the body, including in the eyes. There is a vaccination against this disease.

Trachoma is an infectious disease where bacteria cause a roughening of the inner surface of the eyelids, and scar tissue grows. The infection gradually leads to blindness. It is often spread by flies that have been in contact with an infected person's eyes. It is preventable and treatable through access to clean water, better hygiene, medicine and operations.

A cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye. It can be operated on.

Glaucoma is a disease that attacks the optic nerve. It is not possible to operate on existing damage, but medical care can prevent further damage and protect the remaining vision.

*80% of blindness in the world is treatable or preventable.

Manuel tells the children a story. Abdulai, who is sitting on Manuel's knee, was found a week ago when Manuel was out on a rescue mission.

adapted to the needs of visually impaired children, with teachers trained in Braille.

"The government had no plans to start a school, but they gave me a bit of land to build on."

Manuel's first school was made from bamboo and palm leaves, and the children sat on the ground with no benches.

"One day, the Canadian ambassador came to see how we worked with our students. As we stood in the classroom, a huge snake came slithering towards the children. After the encounter with the snake, the ambassador decided to give us money so we could start building a safer school for the children!"

20 years' work

It's 20 years now since Manuel started looking after the first blind children. Today, Manuel and AGRICE have a preschool and a school, two rehabilitation centres, classrooms, a dining hall and dormitory, library, music room, gym and craft

workshop. Guinea-Bissau's Department of Education helps Manuel by providing teachers. The schools are open to all children, not just those with a visual impairment.

"It's clear to me that we should all learn together. It's a good way to prevent differently abled children from becoming isolated, and to get people to understand that we are all of equal value."

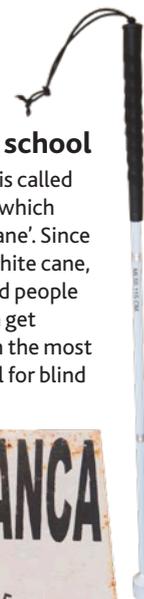
Sometimes Manuel feels exhausted and sad about all the terrible things that happen to children in Guinea-Bissau.

"But then I think about all the opportunities I got in life

thanks to my father. His love for me meant that I got the very best health care and education available. My father is my role model. The way he treated me is the way I want to treat all the visually impaired children who need me." 🌍

White Cane school

Manuel's school is called Bengala Branca, which means 'White Cane'. Since the 1950s, the white cane, which many blind people use to help them get around, has been the most common symbol for blind people.



Lots of friends

"I'm in year 4 at Manuel's school. I work with Braille and the regular alphabet. Both seeing children and blind children go to my school. The seeing children often help the rest of us and explain what's on the board when the teacher has written something," says Samuel.



Helping each other

"I often carry out errands for Manuel. Sometimes I help him when he goes outside the centre. Then he puts his hand on my shoulder and we walk together," says Samuel.

Noisy football!

The children play football with the ball in a plastic bag or with an old soft drinks bottle, so the blind children can hear where the ball is. Samuel's greatest wish is to become a professional football player.



Loves drawing

"I like drawing, but to be able to draw I have to have the paper very close to my eye," explains Samuel.



Samuel got his sight back!

"I was abandoned by my parents because I was blind. But Manuel came to my village and rescued me. Thanks to him I can see in one eye now!" says Samuel, 12, who lives at Manuel's centre.

Samuel was born into a poor family. His older brother, Solomon, had poor eyesight and was going blind. When his dad realised that Samuel was also going blind, he left the family.

"Mum worked in the fields and left me and my brother with neighbours in the village. Sometimes she was away for several weeks at a time," says Samuel. The neighbours didn't look after the brothers very well. "We were hungry, naked, dirty, and they beat us."

Manuel's rescue mission

Manuel found out that there were two little boys who were blind and not being cared for in the village, and he set off on a rescue mission to fetch them. Just like all the other children who come to the cen-

tre, Samuel had to have an eye examination. The doctors discovered that he had a cataract in one eye and wanted to operate on him.

"I was eight years old and I'd been blind my whole life, so I didn't know what anything looked like. Suddenly I could see out of one eye, and the first thing I saw was the ceiling fan above my hospital bed. I was terrified!"

Able to see

When Samuel got out of bed and walked down the hospital steps, he was so happy that he ran round and round the hospital garden.

Manuel had worked hard to stay in touch with the brothers' parents. Now that they know that Samuel can see, and they know how much Solomon has learned, the parents want the brothers to move back home. Manuel's goal is always for children to move back home to their families where possible. But Samuel isn't convinced.

"After the operation, mum came to visit and I didn't recognise her. It was Manuel who looked after me when I needed it. He comforted me when I was sad. He gave me love," says Samuel. 🌍

School for all children

"Samuel and I are friends and we help each other with difficult assignments in maths. Both blind and seeing children go to our school. I don't really think there's any difference between us. For me, it's obvious that blind children should be able to go to school too. The schools here in Guinea-Bissau are hardly ever adapted to the needs of children with disabilities. This is wrong. All schools should be suitable for all children to attend, just like our school. If you don't go to school, it's hard to get a job."

Germindo, 15



Adelia was left to die

"I'll never forget the first time I held tiny newborn Adelia in my arms. She was very weak and covered in dirt, fleas and insect bites. She had been left out in the forest to die, just because she was blind. I was so angry. Adelia is nine years old now and I love her," says Manuel, and he tells Adelia's story:

When Adelia was born and her father discovered that she was blind, he said that she was not his daughter, and left the family. Adelia's young mother didn't know what to do. She left Adelia alone out in the forest. Adelia was naked and completely unprotected from snakes, the rain and the burning hot sun. "Some shepherds were passing the place where Adelia had been left, and they saw her tiny body. Adelia had shouted and struggled for so long, she had no energy left. The shepherds were convinced that the little girl was dead, when she

suddenly made a slight movement. They carefully carried Adelia to a Catholic mission station nearby."

No police help

"The nuns contacted me, and we took Adelia in. We gave her food and water and took her to hospital so that she got the right medicine. It was like a miracle when she came back to life.

"We try to make sure that those who are guilty of crimes are prosecuted. So I went to the police and reported what had happened to Adelia, and I wanted them to arrest the parents. But absolutely nothing

happened. The legal system wasn't working very well, and what's more, sometimes the police don't take crimes against differently abled children seriously."

Searched everywhere

"I tried to find the parents myself. I walked many miles along tracks between small villages and slept where I could. I finally found Adelia's mother, who turned out to be very young. But before we got the chance to reach some kind of solution, she disappeared without a trace. I have forgiven her and I know that we all make mistakes. But this

illustrates the importance of our work raising awareness that blind children, and other differently abled children, have the same rights as all other children.

"The most important thing is that Adelia is alive, and that we can help her to have a good life!" 🌍

Adelia's wardrobe

"Manuel gives me all my clothes. But it's my 'big sister' N'guende who looks after our clothes and our room. This is my favourite dress," says Adelia.

Manuel doesn't let anyone down

"We never send a child back home unless we know they will be well looked after," says Manuel.



Favourite things

"My favourite things are the small pots, bowls and toy cutlery we got for Christmas last year," says Adelia.



"This is how I look when I go to school..."

...and these are my favourite shoes because they're so comfy!"



Adelia's day with

Many of the children at Manuel's centre move back home when they've finished school and their training. But for some children, like Adelia, the centre is their home.

"I feel safe here because it's my home," says Adelia, laughing.



05:00 Good morning!

"Four of us sleep in the same room, and big sister N'guende. We are all blind. First, I make my bed, then I get washed and brush my teeth. I put my school uniform on and N'guende helps me brush my hair," says Adelia.



06:30 Giri-Giri to Manuel's school

"N'guende makes sure we have all our things in our school bags and sees us onto the school bus, which is called the 'giri-giri'. On the bus we sing together," says Adelia.



10:00 Break for breakfast

"I eat my breakfast; bread and juice. The smell of bread is my favourite smell!"

"At break time we play. That's the best thing about school!"

Adelia's classmate, Cadi, agrees:

"We dance, sing and play together, the blind children and those of us who can see because we are all friends!"

08:00 School starts

In Adelia's class there are both blind and seeing children.

"I love school and I want to become a teacher at Manuel's school," says Adelia.



Loves mango!

"Yesterday when papa Manuel came home from a trip he brought some mangos with him. I love the taste of mango!"



12:00 School finishes

"When school is finished, we take the giri-giri home again," says Adelia.



Manuel



This is what Manuel's organisation AGRICE does:

- They carry out rescue missions in villages, look for blind children and other differently abled children and offer them help at Manuel's centre.
- While on rescue missions, they inform the villagers that differently abled children share the same rights as all other children. They also inform people about how to prevent the most common eye diseases, and hand out free medicine.
- They offer visually impaired children protection, a home, food, clothing and security at the centre. At the centre the children also learn life skills to help them look after themselves in the future, and to help their families when they return home.
- They give children medical care and eye operations.
- They run two schools, which are the first in the country that are adapted for visually impaired children, but are open to all.
- They help children move back home again. They prepare the children's families, as well as neighbours and teachers in the villages, before the children return, so they are welcomed in a positive way. If that's not possible, they help the child find a foster family.
- They support children with school fees and school uniforms once they've left Manuel's centre.
- They raise awareness throughout society that differently abled children have the same rights as everyone else.



13:00 Lunch and washing up

"When we get home, we get changed and have lunch. I wash the dishes when it's my turn on the rota."

At Manuel's centre the children learn how to wash dishes, cook, clean and make their beds as part of their training in independent living, and so that they can help their families when they return home.

13:30 Play and siesta

"After lunch, I play with my friends. We are like sibling because we live together. I know what the others look like because I've touched their faces. We play football, dance and sing. Then we have a nap," explains Adelia, here touching Nafi's face to find out how she looks.



18:00 Dinner

"We always get tasty food! My favourite dish is fish with palm oil," says Adelia.

20:00 Evening assembly – Djumbai

"Every evening, we have Djumbai and sing and dance together. Then N'guende always tells us a story, often from the Bible," says Adelia.



17:15 Bathtime

Piloto bit me

"We have a dog here too, called Piloto. He bit me once. He wanted my biscuits! But it's nice to stroke him," explains Adelia.



21:00 Goodnight, Adelia!

"N'guende tucks us in and says goodnight before we go to sleep," says Adelia.



WHY HAS RACHEL BEEN NOMINATED?

Rachel Lloyd has been nominated for her campaign to tackle the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the USA.

THE CHALLENGE

Every year, tens of thousands of children in the USA, including girls as young as 12, are forced to sell sex. Most of them have grown up in poverty and are non-white. Some have run away from home after being abused, or have come to the USA as refugees.

THE WORK

Rachel and GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services) support 400 girls and young women every year by providing secure accommodation, help in getting an education and a job, counselling, legal support and love. Survivors of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) are trained as leaders to help others. Some 1,500 young women are supported with preventive initiatives, and over 1,300 adults including social workers and police officers are trained about the commercial sexual exploitation of children and girls' rights.

RESULTS & VISION

Since 1998, the lives of thousands of girls have been changed through the movement started by Rachel, in which survivors lead change. Millions of Americans have been reached by campaigns to raise awareness about those affected, and to combat prejudice. Rachel has contributed to the creation of more child-friendly laws and systems, including New York's The Safe Harbor for Exploited Children Act, the first law in the USA giving children who have been forced to sell sex the right to protection, instead of punishing them.



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CHILD RIGHTS HERO 7

Rachel Lloyd

Rachel's phone rings one Friday evening, just as she's about to go home. The police have picked up a young girl on the street who appears to have been forced to sell sex. She's refusing to talk to anyone. Maybe Rachel can help?

Rachel waits at the centre for young people, which is where the police take children who are in trouble. After a while, a member of staff arrives with a girl with a ponytail. The girl, Danielle, looks angry.

Rachel explains that she comes from GEMS, an organisation that helps girls in New York who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).

"I'm just here to see how we

can support and help you. I'm not from the cops or child welfare. What you tell me will be confidential. I started GEMS because I used to be in the life, too, so I wanted to have a place for girls who'd been through the same thing."

'In the life'

Most girls are usually curious when Rachel tells them that she was also caught up in the sex industry, or 'in the life' as the girls call it here.

"Can I ask how old you are?"

"Eleven."

Rachel is shocked. She's met many 12, 13 and 14-year-olds who've become victims of child commercial sexual exploitation, but never anyone as young as 11.

Danielle tells her she likes Mexican food and the Harry Potter books. That she writes poems and has a boyfriend who is 29 years old. The man Danielle calls her 'boyfriend'



RACHEL CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS, INCLUDING:

Goal 3: Good health and well-being. Goal 4: Quality education. Goal 5: Gender equality. Goal 8: Decent work. Goal 16: A stop to violence and abuse, sexual exploitation of children and trafficking.

Rachel has been fighting for over 20 years for girls and young women who have been exploited by people traffickers in the USA. Today, many survivors of abuse become leaders themselves, helping other victims. The photo shows a group of survivors with Rachel and other members of the GEMS team.



DIFFERENT NAMES!

Several of the people featured in the stories on these pages about Rachel have had their names changed and their ages are not included. This is in order to protect their identities.

Most of the girls that Rachel fights to protect became victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) at the age of 13 or 14. GEMS offers girls and young women a stepping stone to a better life, providing love and practical support.



is really her pimp, who forces her to sell sex.

Rachel and GEMS have helped thousands of girls to a better life, but there are new victims all the time. Even so, a lot has changed, Rachel reminds herself. Just a few years ago, Danielle could have ended up in prison. Now she's entitled to support. GEMS can help Danielle become a survivor, who can then support others in the future.

Rachel recalls her own story.

Rachel's childhood

Rachel grew up in England. Her stepfather gets mean when he drinks. One evening he hits Rachel and drags her up a long flight of stairs by the hair. After that she keeps away from him when he's drunk. Except when he hits her mum. Then she shouts at him to stop. But no one listens. Instead mum starts drinking too.

Rachel doesn't want to stay at home any longer. She hangs around town with her friends and when she's 12, she starts drinking too.

When Robert finally leaves the family, her mum drinks day and night. She often threatens to take her own life. Rachel tries to comfort her. But in the end, she doesn't want to carry on living either. She takes one of the bottles of wine her mum has hidden under the sink and mixes it with all the tablets she can find at home.

Rachel is taken to hospital and survives. A social worker wants her to move in with a foster family, but she refuses. Mum wouldn't be able to cope on her own. In the end,

What kind of children are bought and sold?

Any child can be caught up in commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the USA, but the majority are non-white children who have grown up in poverty, in particular:

- African-American and Latino children.
- Children who have run away from home and/or are homeless.
- Children who have been taken into care.
- Children who have been victims of abuse.
- Children who drink alcohol or use drugs.
- Children who are differently abled.
- Children from the LGBTQ community.
- Children who come to the USA as refugees or migrants and who do not speak English.



Rachel, 9, in her school uniform.



Rachel, 14, working as a model.



despite everything, Rachel is sent home.

Quits school

Rachel quits school and gets a job at a factory. At 14, she's too young really, but she lies about her age. In the evenings she goes out to bars, drinks and takes drugs.

Rachel dreams of something better, like becoming a lawyer or a journalist. She gets the chance to work as a model for a teen magazine. Then the modelling agent suggests that she pose for

Rachel's job as a nanny made her feel better. Today she says that "they loved me back to life."

The commercial sexual exploitation of children has changed since Rachel's arrival in the USA. Most girls are no longer sold on the street but on the internet.

'sexy' photos, even though it's illegal to take pictures like that of a 14-year-old.

When Rachel is 17, she can't take it at home anymore. She runs away to Germany, and ends up in an area where there are dodgy bars and sex clubs. A red neon sign flashes 'Girls, girls, girls'. Rachel goes down the steps to the dark room.

At the club, Rachel's job is to dance and sit on clients' laps, drunken men who pull at her clothes. In the evenings she spends a long time in the shower, scrubbing herself until it feels like she's going to lose a layer of skin.

Rachel meets a guy in Germany, JP, and she falls in love. JP is nice at first, but he takes all the money she earns to buy drugs. It's not until JP almost kills her that Rachel seeks protection at a church.

Rachel becomes a nanny with an American family in Germany. For a long time, she wakes up every night in a cold sweat, petrified. But the fam-



ily give her plenty of love and she begins to feel better.

Rachel decides to help others and gets involved in the church. One day, she is asked if she'd like to go to the USA and work there, to help women selling sex leave life on the streets. Rachel agrees straight away.

Rachel gives something back During the day she visits shelters and prisons. At night she walks the streets where women sell sex.

"Hi, I'm Rachel... Can I get you a coffee or hot chocolate?"

The girls laugh at Rachel's British accent and teach her American slang, like that the street is called 'the track', and that the girls in the sex trade are 'in the life'. The men who sell them are called 'pimps', the clients 'Johns'. Most of them have been 'in the life' since the age of 13 or 14. Almost all of them grew up poor, with no family support. Some ran away from home,



Need a safe home

In New York, at least 70,000 homeless people live on the streets and in shelters. Some 30,000 of them are children. Most of these children and their families are homeless. Many of the parents work, but they earn too little to afford the city's high rents.

Many girls are drawn into, or find it hard to leave, the life because they have nowhere to go. Girls over 16 can live at GEMS' safe house. Younger girls often live in foster homes managed by the authorities. Rachel and GEMS provide training for both the girls and the staff there, so that the staff understand what the girls need and are entitled to in order to thrive.



Beloved blanket

"I loved the blanket I got the first time I came to the safe house. Then I ran away one time, but I came back. They tried to give me a different blanket, but I wanted mine! It makes me feel safe," says Ginger.



The word 'gem' of course has another meaning in English. For Rachel, all the broken girls she meets on the street are beautiful gems. They just need a little help to shine and discover their true value.



Many stars, like Beyoncé here, support Rachel and the work of GEMS.

lived in foster homes or were kicked out of their homes. Rachel is shocked when she realises that there are girls as young as 12 on the street. She gets angry when they are arrested by the police and given prison sentences.

"You're children!" she says. "You need help, not punishment."

GEMS is born

When Rachel realises that there's no one helping the younger girls, she resigns from her job. She starts her own organisation at her kitchen table, with 30 dollars and a borrowed computer. She calls her organisation GEMS. At first, all Rachel had to offer was love and sanctuary in her

tiny flat in a deprived neighbourhood.

"The girls slept on my sofa, borrowed my clothes and cleaned out my fridge!" Sometimes a pimp came round looking for a girl who'd escaped, and tried to break down the door.

As GEMS began to grow, Rachel opened a drop-in centre with comfy sofas and cheerfully painted walls. She wanted to have a place where everyone could feel safe, with space for everything from counselling, to courses, yoga and bring-and-share parties. She opened safe housing for girls who were particularly vulnerable and had nowhere to go when they left their pimps.

Survivors become leaders

Many of the girls Rachel helped in the beginning have become survivors and leaders who inspire others. GEMS' survivors and Rachel travel around and demand change.

"We meet legislators and politicians, presidents, artists and movie stars. And it's the girls' own stories that get people listening, that make a difference," says Rachel, who herself has given speeches at both the White House and the UN. 🌐

How Rachel & GEMS work

Rachel and GEMS support girls and young women aged between 12–24, who have survived commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the USA, through:

- Leadership training.
- Counseling, discussion groups, creative activities, sports and health activities.
- Help with and advice about education.
- Secure accommodation for vulnerable girls.
- Guidance to help them cope with independent living.
- Preventive work.
- Legal aid and alternatives to prison sentences.
- Campaigning against CSEC, for girls' rights, justice, child-friendly laws and systems.



Shaquana took control

of her life

Shaquana is 15 when she is found unconscious in a ditch. She wakes up in hospital. A nurse gives her a mirror and she looks at her broken face. The last thing she remembers is sitting in a car, travelling along a dark street.

When Shaquana is little, she doesn't understand why her mum is always angry and beats her.

No one has explained to Shaquana that her mum has a serious mental illness.

At high school, Shaquana is one of the school's top learners. She wants to be her mother's pride and joy, but her mum only seems to be able to see the bad things. When she isn't yelling and hitting her, she cries like a baby and wants comforting. Sometimes Shaquana feels like she just doesn't want to live anymore. But then who would look after mum?

Butterflies

Shaquana starts working in a shop. Instead of going straight home after school like she did before, she walks home in the evenings after work. One evening, a boy calls out to her:

"Hi cutie!"

Shaquana quickly walks past. But soon she runs into him again.

"Hey! Can't we just talk?" The boy calls to her every evening until Shaquana stops.

"You're really pretty!" he says. "How old are you? I'm 17."

"I'm 15," answers Shaquana, although she's actually only 14. They exchange phone numbers and she carries on home with butterflies in her tummy. No one has called her pretty before.

Shaquana and the boy start meeting every day.

"Can't you skip school today? I miss you too much," he says sometimes. No one has missed Shaquana before. She starts bunking off school and the teachers are concerned and disappointed.

Starts putting pressure on

One evening, the boy wants to have sex, but Shaquana says



no. He goes on about it every day and in the end, she gives in. But afterwards, the boy stops talking to her and treats her like air. Shaquana now discovers that he's lied about his age. He's not 17, he's actually 29. "I'm a pimp," he says. "If you want to be with me, you have to work for me."

Things move quickly because the pimp had a plan from the first moment he saw Shaquana. He gives her high-heeled shoes and tiny, tight clothes. He explains that the job means she has to go with other men for money.

"If you love me, you'll do anything for me," he says.

At first, the pimp arranges 'dates' with various men. But

after a while she has to stand on the street with other girls. They call it 'working on the track'. When a car stops, the man behind the wheel sometimes asks how old she is. She says what the pimp has told her to say.

"18."

"No you're not, you look 13," say some. But they still buy her.

Early release

One night, Shaquana is arrested by police. In New York, it's illegal to sell sex. It's also a crime to have sex with someone under the age of 15. It automatically counts rape. But the law doesn't apply to girls like Shaquana. She is sentenced to juvenile detention.

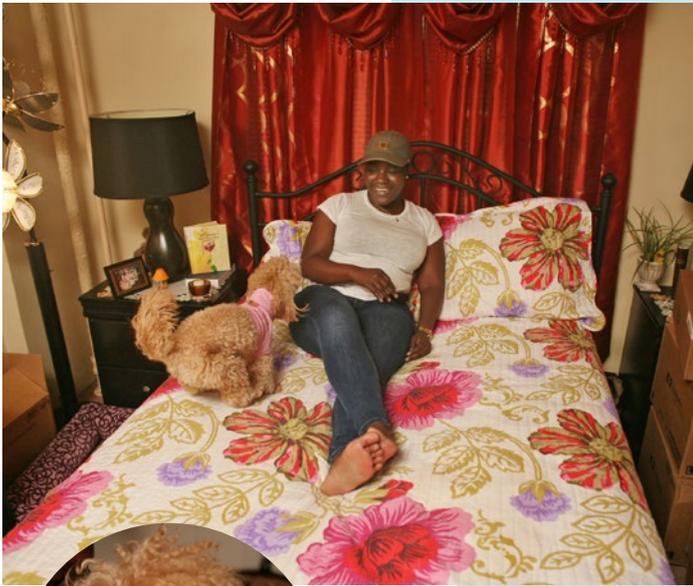
The lad who said he was 17 and wanted

to be Shaquana's boyfriend was

actually 29, twice her age.

He forced her to sell sex to other men.





Shaquana's best friend is her poodle Cherry!

After a few months, Shaquana gets a visit from a young woman called Hailey from the organisation GEMS. Shaquana has six months left to serve, but Hailey explains that she can be released earlier, provided she comes to GEMS and accepts help.

Shaquana gets to know Rachel, and never misses her discussion group. One evening a week, Rachel meets up with the girls, they share stories, cry, laugh and support one another. "You are victims, but you can fight and become survivors, have a good life," says Rachel. Shaquana can hardly believe that Rachel, who seems so strong and professional, has also been 'in the life'. It gives her hope.



Homeless

Shaquana's mum lets her move back home and she starts school again. But soon mum is getting angry with her again.

"Slut! You'll end up back on the streets!"

Shaquana feels broken inside. Maybe she can't be fixed? One evening she comes home late and her mum throws her out.

"Don't ever come back," she yells, slamming the door.

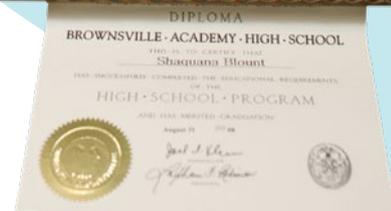
Shaquana only knows one way to survive – find a pimp. Her new pimp has lots of girls living with him. He forces them to sell drugs and sex, locks them in and only lets them out to work.

One rainy evening, the pimp sends Shaquana out onto the street. A few days later, she wakes up broken and bloody in hospital. The last thing she remembers is that a car stopped and she got in. Then everything went black.

Shaquana has given speeches in front of politicians as well as movie stars, and inspired them to campaign against the sex trade. Here she is with Rachel.

When Shaquana was giving her speech on high school graduation day, she ended by sharing ten tips for the future with her classmates:

- Always respect yourself!
- Never look down on anyone.
- When you make it in life, remember the journey you have traveled.
- Know the people around you.
- Never be afraid to admit when you are wrong.
- Live each day as if it were your last.
- Honor the greats before you.
- Never be afraid to ask for help.
- When you fall down know how to get back up.
- Remember that you are the best!



Graduation

Shaquana goes back to GEMS, who help her with housing and school. Three years later and she's standing on stage in a white gown and cap. The principal says:

"And now ... graduating senior and class valedictorian: Shaquana!"

In her speech, Shaquana compares herself with a lotus flower.

"Lotus flowers grow in muddy water and rise above the surface to bloom with remarkable beauty."

Now Shaquana is at university and working at GEMS. She visits shelters, schools, foster homes and juvenile detention centres and tells the girls there about her life, about the commercial sexual exploitation of children and GEMS.

"I want to help others because I don't know where I would be today if it hadn't been for Rachel and GEMS," says Shaquana. "Now it's my turn. I'm living proof to other girls that we can take control of our own lives." 🌍



Safe harbour for young people

When Rachel takes up the fight against New York's unfair laws, she asks the girls who have been affected by them to help her.



Girls from GEMS fighting for child-friendly laws together with Rachel.

Nikki, who is writing her speech, has a large, ragged scar that runs almost the length of her right thigh, from when a pimp stabbed her with a knife. She's been in prison alongside adults several times since the age of 13.

Tomorrow, Rachel, Nikki and a few other girls will travel to Albany, which is the political capital of the state of New York. That's where laws are written and approved. It's the first time ever that young survivors of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) will get their voices heard by those with power, decision-makers.

GEMS and the girls are demanding that American children be granted the same protection as children who have been brought to the USA from other countries and sexually exploited. They want them to be entitled to help and support instead of being convicted and given tough punishments.

Once the girls have finished their speeches, there is absolute silence. Lots of people are crying. Shaquana ends by

asking them to change the law, for the sake of the children. An older man dries his tears and says:

"You are all to be commended. I promise you that I will do whatever I have to do to ensure this bill passes." It took four and half years to get the new law finally approved in New York in 2010. It's called

'The Safe Harbor for Exploited Children Act', and was the first of its kind in the whole of the USA.



Grateful for the men in my life

"It's essential that boys and men are involved in the campaign to tackle the commercial sexual exploitation of children and for girls' rights," says Rachel. "We've launched the 'Male Allies' campaign, which invites everyone to stand by our side."

"When I was growing up I was always hanging with boys. I didn't really trust girls. Then I started developing and boys turned into men, who were interested in me just for sex. Then came the life, where I was sold by a man and bought by men... When I got out of the life, I felt like I could never trust another man ... I expected them all to be the same, but over time I began to meet men who

were more like brothers and friends to me... I began to see men as humans, all different, with different experiences, instead of just these nasty, emotionless, sex-driven robots. It took time though, but I'm grateful for some of the men in my life, and I'm grateful for my friendships with women too."

Farah

WHY HAS ASHOK BEEN NOMINATED?

Ashok Dyalchand has been nominated for his campaigning against child marriage and fight for girls' rights in India.

THE CHALLENGE

Every day, 15,600 girls are subjected to child marriage in India. Girls are forced to quit school and they become slaves in their husband's home. They risk death if they fall pregnant, as their bodies are not ready to give birth to children.

THE WORK

To raise the status of girls and save their lives and to put an end to child marriage, Ashok and his organisation IHMP started Girls Clubs to give girls knowledge and self-confidence and enable them to support one another in convincing their parents not to force them into marriage, but instead allow them to finish school. In Ashok's Boys Clubs, 5,000 boys and young men have learned about child marriage, girls' rights and gender equality.

RESULTS & VISION

Since 1975, some 50,000 girls in 500 villages have learned about their rights and received Life Skills Education. The average age of a girl being married off in the area has risen from 14 to 17. Their age at the birth of their first child has risen to 18 on average, which means fewer young mums and babies are dying during birth. The goal is freedom for all girls and a society free from sex discrimination and inequality.



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CHILD RIGHTS HERO 8

Ashok Dyalchand

"A girl is discriminated against and oppressed from the moment she is in her mother's womb because many parents in India want an abortion if the baby is a girl, even though it's illegal. The worst violation is being forced into child marriage. My job is to put a stop to it," says Ashok, who has been fighting for girls' rights for 45 years.

I grew up in a lovely house and went to the best school in the city. I decided to follow in my mother's footsteps and was accepted onto India's top medicine course. I wanted to be a successful eye specialist, to work at a nice hospital in a big city and earn good money," says Ashok.

While he was doing practical experience, Ashok trav-

elled around with a health-care team to the mountain villages. They carried out eye operations on people who were poor and who would not otherwise have been able to access help.

"I had grown up in luxury and I'd never even been to an Indian village before. I didn't do it because I was a good person. I was planning to

return to the city and my privileged life as soon as possible. But I knew that I'd get plenty of experience in a short space of time, as we were doing 200 operations a week."

Encountering poverty
Ashok was now surrounded by people living in extreme poverty who were hungry,



ASHOK CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS FULFILLING THE GLOBAL GOALS, INCLUDING:

Goal 4: Quality education, for girls too. Goal 5: Gender equality. A stop to child marriage and all forms of harmful traditions, which also contributes towards achieving several goals, including: Goal 1: No poverty, Goal 2: Zero hunger, and Goal 10: Reduced inequalities.

This is the motorbike Ashok used to travel around 45 years ago to talk to people in the villages and find out what they really needed. He was the only doctor in an area with 78 villages.



sick, and who hadn't had any kind of education.

One day, Ashok examined a poor little Tibetan refugee girl. He saw that she had an eye disease that could be cured if she got the right treatment quickly. Otherwise she would go blind. Ashok placed her in one of the hospital beds. But his boss got angry and threw the girl out because the beds were only for patients who were to be operated on.

"When I saw the girl later at the market; she was being supported by her mother. I was devastated when I realised that she had already gone blind. I went and found my manager and shouted: 'You've made a little girl blind! I'm not staying at your bloody hospital for another minute.'

"I never returned. I knew that I wouldn't be able to fulfil

my plan to become a well-paid eye doctor at a nice hospital. That little girl had changed me forever."

Women dying

Ashok decided to offer medical treatment to people living in poverty.

"I travelled around on a motorbike to talk to people and find out what they really needed. I was out every day because I was the only doctor in an area with 78 villages."

Dangerous life for girls in India

- 240,000 girls under the age of five die every year because of discrimination, due to getting less food, medical treatment and care than boys.
- More than 3.7 million girls don't go to school. 200 million women are illiterate.
- 11–16 million female fetuses may have been aborted between 1990 and 2018.



Ashok soon realised that the villagers considered the biggest problem to be the number of pregnant women dying in childbirth.

"The roads to the hospital were bad and transportation was by oxcart. During my first week, two young girls and their unborn babies died because they hadn't got to the hospital in time.

"We realised that many of the problems that young pregnant women had were down to the very fact that they were young. More than 8 in 10 girls in the villages married before they reached the age of 18, with most of them being just 14. The girls were getting pregnant before their bodies were ready to give birth because they were still children themselves. I was forced to put an end to child marriage in order to save lives, but also because the girls lost their own childhoods and had their rights violated."

Girls treated worse

Ashok realised that girls were being treated worse long before the marriage itself.

"From very early on in life,

boys were taken better care of than girls. Sons got more breast milk, food, vaccinations and other health care than daughters. Girls were often undernourished and if they fell ill, they were taken later, or not at all, to see the doctor."

While the boys went to school and spent time with their friends, Ashok saw that the girls in the villages were at home, doing all the household chores.

In 1985, Ashok and his seven colleagues started the organisation IHMP (Institute of Health Management Pachod), a centre that would work on preventive maternity care and health care, and fight against child marriage and in defence of girls' rights.

"Nothing violates a girl's rights more than subjecting her to child marriage. She is forced to quit school to instead become a slave to her husband, give birth to his children and do all the household chores. She is robbed of her family, her friends, her freedom and her dreams. I wondered whether this was what families really wanted for

12 million child brides

- Every year, 12 million girls around the world are forced to marry before they have reached the age of 18. That's 23 every minute.
- 1 in 5 girls in the world are married off before the age of 18.
- Every day, 15,600 girls are married off in India, despite the fact that child marriage is illegal.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits child marriage, but 93 countries allow girls to be married off before they reach the age of 18.
- One of the UN's Global Goals for 2030 is to put an end to all child marriages.



We are members of Ashok's clubs!



Ajay, 17



Anjali, 14



Akosh, 17



Anjali, 14



Akosh, 16



Anyum, 14



Akosh, 17



Anand, 17



Girls who have completed the Life Skills Education Class and continued to attend the Girls Clubs have managed to stop child marriage after child marriage and finish school. They have succeeded in convincing their parents to stop planned child marriages.

their daughters. And besides, child marriage is actually against the law in India,” explains Ashok.

Following discussions with thousands of villagers, Ashok realised that most of the families didn’t want to marry off

their daughters as children, but old traditions, group pressure and poverty left them feeling they had no choice.

Life Skills Education for girls
The villagers and Ashok set up clubs just for girls, where they

could empower one another and learn important things. Together they produced a textbook on Life Skills Education that would help the girls cope better with life. The subjects were chosen based on what the villagers themselves

thought was important for their daughters to learn. It covered everything from girls’ rights, menstruation and health and how to report an assault, to how banks work.

“We had to think carefully about how to go about things in a way that would have the approval of the villagers because girls hardly ever spent time away from the home or school. It was important to find a safe way and a safe place for the girls to meet and learn. The villagers themselves suggested places like the village hall, a temple or a classroom after school. Since the villagers placed great trust in the female state health workers, who are in every Indian village, I felt they would be the perfect teachers for the girls. So we trained them in how to teach Life Skills Education.”

Each club was made up of 25 unmarried girls aged 11–19, who met twice a week.

“The girls’ self-confidence grew as they gained more knowledge and the opportunity to talk to one another in a place that was just for them.

On our way to the Girls Club

50,000 girls have been reached by Ashok and the work of his organisation. Half of them are unmarried girls in 500 villages who have completed the Life Skills Education Class and who now belong to a Girls Club.



Ashawini, 14



Bhimrau, 17



Ashawini, 13



Chetan, 16



Bhagyshree, 14



Koran, 15



Gangasagar, 12



Ramday, 16



Kaveri, 13



Ravi, 16



Baisheli and Arati's big brother is in one of Ashok's Boys Clubs. It's meant he has started helping out at home, so his sisters have time to play and do their homework.

And where their opinions mattered. They shared what they learned about girls' rights with parents and neighbours."

Brave girls

Ashok and IHMP started Girls Clubs in village after village, and before long, things started to change with the custom of child marriage in the villages.

"Girls who had completed the Life Skills Education Class and who continued to attend the Girls Clubs managed to stop marriage after marriage and finish school. The girls had gained knowledge and courage. They had learned to speak up and use good arguments, which helped them convince their parents to stop

planned child marriages," says Ashok.

Although the work was going well, Ashok was still concerned that things weren't moving fast enough. Many girls were still being forced to marry, and many were dying in childbirth. "We started working with newly married couples where the girl was a child, so under the age of 18. We explained to her, her husband and the whole village about all the dangers involved in the girl getting pregnant, and tried to encourage them to delay the first pregnancy for as long as possible."

So what about the boys?

Sometimes teenage boys in the villages threw stones and shouted: "You're teaching the

girls to stand on our heads! Next time you come, we'll stone you!"

Ashok realised that the boys felt left out and that it was a big mistake.

"Obviously the boys had to understand and be involved if we were to stop child marriage. It is after all men who are marrying girls who are too young, and who beat girls and women."

Ashok and IHMP started setting up Boys Clubs. The boys get together once a month and learn about girls' rights, child marriage and gender equality.

Major progress

Some 50,000 girls have been reached by Ashok's work. Half of them are unmarried girls in

500 villages who have completed the Life Skills Education Class and who now belong to a Girls Club. 5,000 unmarried boys and young men have so far been reached via the Boys Clubs.

The average age of a girl giving birth to her first child has risen to 18 in the villages where IHMP works. Fewer mums and babies are dying in childbirth.

"When we started our work, the average age of a girl when she got married here was 14. Now it's 17. It's better than it was, but we won't be satisfied until everyone who marries is at least 18 years old," says Ashok . 🌐



Komal, 13



Rushikes, 16



Manisha, 12



Sagar, 16



Marjika, 13



Sahel, 16



Sandeep, 17



Palavi, 14



Rupali, 12

How Ashok and IHMP work

- Starting Girls Clubs for unmarried girls, who learn about their rights and receive Life Skills Education.
- Starting Boys Clubs for unmarried boys, who learn about child marriage, girls' rights and gender equality.
- Educating newly married couples, where the bride is under 18, about girls' rights and the importance of delaying the first pregnancy for as long as possible.
- Educating parents, police, village councils and social workers about girls' rights and gender equality.



Sagar helps with fetching water and washing clothes, which means his sisters Baisheli, 13, and Arati, 12, also have time to do their homework, meet up with friends and play.

Boys must respect girls!

Sagar, 15, is one of the many boys reached by Ashok's message that girls and boys have the same value.

"The Boys Club meets once a month. It's important that we talk about these things because girls have it much harder than boys here.

"At the club, we learn that it's illegal to force a girl who is under 18 to marry, but that some families do it anyway. If a girl is married off as a child, she has to quit school and look after her husband instead. It shouldn't be like that. If you want to achieve your dreams, you have to go to school first. And also, a

young girl isn't ready to have children. Both the girl and the newborn baby can die during the birth."

A real man

"It used to be that a 'real man' was a big, strong guy who beat his wife. He was the woman's 'boss' and she had to obey him and do whatever he commanded. In Ashok's Boys Club, we learn that a real man respects girls and women, treats them well and sees women as equals.

"A good man gives his sons and daughters the same amount of attention and chances in life. Basically, he's a good person.

"I want to be such a man when I'm an adult, but I'm trying to be like that already. At home I fetch water and wash clothes. I want to help, so my mum and sisters don't have to do everything." 🌐

Sagar's list of how boys abuse girls' rights

- Men force girls and women to do all the work in the home.
- Boys harass girls on their way to school, say stupid things and force them to look at porn on mobile phones.
- Men force their daughters and sisters into child marriages, which means they have to quit school.
- Girls are harassed and abused by their dads and then by their husbands.
- Boys subject girls to rape and other sexual violence.



Boys Club meeting

The boys get together once a month and learn about girls' rights, child marriage and gender equality.



Ashok is a role model

"Ashok is a man who treats girls and women with respect, like fellow human beings. He is an important role model and I want to be like him," says Sagar.

Salia's hunger strike against

"My life would have turned out completely differently without Ashok's Girls Club. I would have been married, forced to quit school and I'd probably already be a mum. My life would have been over," says Salia, 15, gravely.

When I was 13, I was sitting by the fire with my mum, chatting and helping with the cooking when a woman who was close to our family came to visit. Suddenly I heard the woman say:

'I want you to give me your daughter Salia as a wife for my son.'

"I was shocked and started crying. I really didn't want to get married. I wanted to go to school, which I loved. I knew her son was an adult man. It felt surreal."

We put up a fight

"I was a member of one of Ashok's Girls Clubs, and I'd learned a lot about how bad child marriage is. But most of all, I knew that child marriage was illegal.

"I was worried and angry. It felt so strange that my family were sitting and discussing marrying me off. I cried, and the thoughts were buzzing around my head.

"I asked my friends Rojina and Saima for help. They were also in the Girls Club. Together we decided to put up a fight.

"Rojina came home with me after school and told my parents about a girl who had been forced into an arranged child marriage. The girl had been so distressed that she took her own life by drowning herself in the village well.

"My mum got worried when she heard this and talked to my dad."

Hunger strike

"While we taught my mum, dad and the rest of the family about child marriage and girls' rights, I began a

hunger strike. I said:

'I'm not going to eat anything until you call off this wedding. I want to go to school! I refuse to get married!'

"Finally, my whole family realised that I was serious and they cancelled the wedding. I was so happy and I felt free! But the woman and her family were very angry and are still not speaking to us.

"It's thanks to Ashok's Girls Club that I got the knowledge, support and courage to dare to talk to my family and fight against child marriage."



Three generations

Both Salia's mum Sajida and her grandma Jeitun married when they were 12 years old.

"When I was young, girls didn't go to school. I think it's really good that Salia hasn't married yet, and that she'll get to finish school and have a good future," says grandma.



On the blackboard that Salia, Rojina and Saima are holding up, it says:
Learning objectives: What is child marriage? What are the disadvantages of child marriage? What is the legal age of marriage for a boy and a girl?

child marriage

Our Girls Club

"I'm now leading a Girls Club of my own twice a week together with Rojina and Saima. There are twenty of us who meet every Wednesday and Saturday, and I love it! The meetings last two hours. We spend time together and have fun, but we mainly talk about girls' rights.

"Girls suffer many rights violations here. Girls do all the household chores. Sometimes the boys help their dads with farming, but often they don't do anything other than hang

out with their mates. It's not right!

"Now that there are a lot of us, people are starting to listen! We bring both adults and children together at village meetings and we tell them about girls' rights.

"When we last had a demonstration march through the village, there were just forty of us girls when we started, but more joined along the way and by the end of it there were loads of us! We held placards and shouted that child marriage had to stop, and that

Welcome!

"Today we're going to talk about child marriage and girls' rights," says Salia, and welcomes all the girls to the club.



Proud peer leader for girls' rights

"When my girlfriends in the village and I had completed the Life Skills Education Class that Ashok's organisation runs, the other girls chose me to be leader of our Girls Club. I was really happy and proud!"

girls' rights must be respected. We know that what we're doing is right!" 🌍



Education for a better life

"It's really important for girls to get an education! If a girl who has little or no education is forced to marry when she's 12 or 13 years old, it will be easy for an adult man to treat her like a piece of property," explains Salia.

