Features

On the Cover: Armenia
14 Keeping Promises in Gyumri
Sponsorship revives a city in shambles.
21 Land of Second Chances
Special-needs children learn their worth.
26 Children With Disabilities
A global report.

Your World Vision

6 News From the Field
Helping Iran’s children recover after the quake.
8 Glad You Asked
How can I share sponsorship with my church?
10 In the Spotlight
Cyrus Phiri raced against time to fight AIDS.
12 U.S. Scene
Home improvements for a cause.

In Every Issue

5 From the President
Your help is more than “a drop in the bucket.”
28 Where Are They Now?
Against the odds, Sunita became a doctor.
30 Inspiration
God makes sponsorship obvious.
31 Reflections
Hoop dreams in Zambia.

AIDS is the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time. And it’s killing Africa.

As governments worldwide struggle to meet this emergency, American youth are taking matters into their own hands. Through One Life Revolution, they are coming alongside thousands of widows, orphans, and vulnerable children in Zambia, one of the African countries where AIDS is hitting hardest.

With One Life Revolution, people raise money to directly benefit those affected by AIDS. The One Life Revolution catalog lets you choose exactly how you want to help, with options ranging from blankets and health care provisions to new schools and homes.

Call us to learn how you can get involved. And if you know a young person or youth pastor, encourage them to find out about One Life Revolution.

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YOU HAVE ONE LIFE. DO SOMETHING.
Go to www.oneliferevolution.org or call 1.866.952.4453 today.
**A Drop in the Bucket?**

For children like Tun Tun (in hammock),

**GLOBAL POVERTY STATISTICS CAN BE OVERWHELMING**

But the one who sent me.” —Mark 9:37

In light of these staggering statistics, I am frequently asked, “What can one person possibly do to tackle global poverty? Anything I do will just be one small drop in a very large bucket.”

I have an answer for people who feel that way. But first I’ll share a story about a boy I met last year in Myanmar (formerly Burma).

Tun Tun was 14 when I met him, though he looked to be about 7. He was in a homemade wheelchair cobbled together from bicycle parts. I was traveling in Myanmar with some World Vision donors, and our staff had arranged for kids from our street-children program to perform songs and dance acts for us.

It was a marvelous evening as we witnessed how World Vision had taken in homeless children and taught them to perform at a level that any group of American school children would be proud of.

Tun Tun’s little bucket is filled to overflowing.

And he sings like a songbird because he actually has something to sing about. This boy, who was truly a “throwaway,” child, is not a lost cause—not a statistic.

He is precious in God’s sight.

So to those who wonder if their efforts are merely a small drop in a very large bucket, I say, “Think again!” You are seeing the problem the wrong way. Instead of one large bucket, imagine thousands of tiny little buckets that can each be filled to overflowing with just one drop.

Then the question is turned around instead of asking if a small drop can make a difference in filling a large bucket, the question becomes: “How many buckets can I fill? How many will I take?”

World Vision brought this boy to our street children’s home and began to help him. Two spinal surgeries and two years later, Tun Tun no longer has abscesses on his spine. He has regained control of his bowels and is able to move his legs. While therapy, we hope that he will walk someday.

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” —Mark 9:37

Toward the end, this little boy in the wheelchair was pushed onto the stage, where he proceeded, with his winning smile, to sing like a songbird.

Afterward we met Tun Tun and heard his amazing story. Born with a deformity of the spine resulting in an open cavity, paralysis, and a host of other problems, this little boy also had been mistreated by his parents. His inability to walk except by pulling himself along on his hands, plus his incontinence, infections, and resulting odor, were too much for his family. He was eventually abandoned to the streets.

Tun Tun ended up living at the train station, begging for money to survive. World Vision learned of his plight from other street children who took pity on him and insisted that he must be helped.

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**From the President**

JOY HLA GYAW/WORLD VISION

**Clip and return in envelope between pages 16 and 17. Please tell me how I can:***

- **Share World Vision with my family**
- **Bring World Vision to my church**
- **Volunteer through World Vision**
- **Know World Vision’s reason for hope**

**Show World Vision to my company**

**Show World Vision to my church**

**Share my resources with World Vision**

**Volunteer through World Vision**

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News From the Field

Iran > World Vision provided a safe haven for more than 1,200 children affected by the December 2003 earthquake in Bam. Working with the government, Red Crescent partners, and local organizations, World Vision transformed sports halls into “Child-Friendly Spaces” equipped with toys and books and staffed by caring adults. Children ages 2 to 14 could find solace there from the rubble-strewn environment outside. Carol Toms, World Vision’s child-protection officer, said that the Child-Friendly Spaces were part of World Vision’s effort to support children’s return to normalcy after the earthquake. “It has been so encouraging to see the children taking part in activities and enjoying themselves,” she said.

Cambodia > The U.S. ambassador praised World Vision Cambodia for its work to protect children from abuse by tourists. World Vision Cambodia has joined with the U.S. State Department, the Cambodian government, Australian police, and other organizations to combat child sex tourism and to bring sex offenders to justice. “You are helping us in our efforts to prevent U.S. citizens from preying on children,” said Ambassador Charles Ray. “You are helping us bring sex offenders to justice.”

Mozambique > Health officials blame poor sanitation for a cholera outbreak that has killed nearly 90 people. The more than 14,000 cases reported since December 2003 have greatly surpassed the national number of cholera sufferers for all last year. As the disease swept through six of the country’s 10 provinces in February, World Vision responded by assisting health committees in affected areas and providing chlorine for water purification. Cholera spreads through overcrowded, poor neighborhoods where hygiene conditions are hampered by limited access to potable water, poorly maintained drainage systems, and inefficient refuse collection.

Brazil > Heavy rain and mudslides swept through northeastern states in February, killing 91 people and forcing 117,000 from their homes. Although flooding hampered travel in some areas, World Vision staff quickly assessed needs and distributed drinking water, food, chlorine, soap, blankets, medicines, and other emergency supplies to more than 500 families. Later, they restored or rebuilt 250 houses.

Afghanistan > Gray dunes dotting the countryside in northwestern Badghis province signal hope for clean water. World Vision designed these water-collection devices, called dabas, to catch and store rainwater. When full, each daba supplies enough water to last a family for nine months. The collected water is a clear improvement over the region’s salty groundwater, which residents say causes diarrhea and kidney problems. World Vision is building hundreds of dabas in villages throughout Badghis.

Mexico > Handcrafted candles made by women in a World Vision microenterprise project were a hit at a recent international craft fair in Mexico. World Vision helped a group of six entrepreneurs—most of them single mothers—exhibit the candles, made of orange peel and natural flowers, and sell more than 120 of them. The customers were impressed by the design, says World Vision’s Marisol Arangutia. “When we mentioned that the candles were made by a group of women in a marginalized community, their surprise was greater,” she adds. The best buyer was a handcraft export organization, which ordered 200 candles to distribute to stores as a way to support impoverished communities.

World Vision engineer Dieudonne Kasonga (fourth from right, in white) leads Afghans in building a daba for clean water.

Mozambique focuses on Iranian children’s emotional well-being after the earthquake.

Afghanistan focuses on bringing clean water to the children.

>> FAST FACT In Nairobi, Kenya’s capital, 40 percent of the population lives in slums and squatter settlements crowded onto only 5 percent of the land. (UN-Habitat)

fyi Five years of war have had a serious impact on children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Two out of five Congolese children die during infancy. Up to 50 percent of children younger than 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition. In Kolwezi, a former mining town with dramatic hunger rates, World Vision works with UNICEF and the World Food Programme to operate six feeding centers targeting mothers and children.

Afghanistan

Going to the Children > Compassion for HIV/AIDS-affected children is increasing in the United States. Last year, American donors assisted 158,677 children through HopeChild sponsorship in nine countries devastated by HIV/AIDS.

One touching response to Africa’s HIV/AIDS crisis came from a teen in Everett, Wash., with struggles of her own. Michelle Broeckling, 19, was born with Fetal Alcohol Effects and has coped with developmental difficulties all her life. Adopted into a loving home at age 6, she has thrived, becoming a Special Olympics champion in several sports.

When Michelle’s church, Edmonds United Methodist, conducted a project around the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the high-school senior signed up to multiply $10—and she knew just where the profits should go. The Broecklings have sponsored Odong, a boy in Uganda, through World Vision for nine years. “World Vision sent us a letter about HIV/AIDS,” Michelle says. “It was about how there was HIV in [Odong’s] country.”

With her parents’ help, Michelle designed colorful bookmarks on her computer, inscribed with messages such as “God is all around us” and “Jesus loves me.” Then she went on the Internet to research AIDS in Africa on World Vision’s site and created a poster-board display. At a church bazaar, she set up the booth with her bookmarks in front of it, available for a donation.

“The thing that really sold it,” her father, Hank, says proudly, “was that she stood there by this board the whole time, and nobody went by her without her saying, ‘Hey, do you know what’s happening in Africa with AIDS?’”

Michelle’s pitch worked so well that she raised $360 for World Vision’s HIV/AIDS programs. She isn’t surprised by the response. “People are going to give,” she says, “if you’re really nice and you let them know the money is going to children.”

Afghanistan

Hank, Michelle, and Joan Broeckling
How can I share sponsorship with my church?

Sponsorship is a special way to serve God through caring for children. As Ephesians 2:10 says, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” Sponsors value this way to carry out God’s purpose.

Jesus to do good works.” Sponsors value this way to carry out God’s purpose.

World Vision offers an easy way to introduce sponsorship to your church. Through a new program called A Child Is Waiting, you can help find sponsors for thousands of children. You simply share from your heart.

World Vision will do the rest—providing you and your church leader with materials such as videos, brochures, and bulletin inserts.

“I have long believed that child sponsorship is the most effective and direct means for individuals to be a part of healing this hurting world,” says Karen French, who presented sponsorship at Laguna (Calif.) Presbyterian Church. “I also believe that churches can be the major avenue to achieve both hope for the world’s poor children and increased fellowship.”

John Crosby, pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Edina, Minn., says that an initial 100 child sponsors among the congregation “served as a beacon for the next hundred and the next hundred.” He adds, “Our stewardship in the area of missions has just skyrocketed.”

World Vision recommends presenting A Child Is Waiting during the first weekend in June, but you can do your event whenever it’s convenient for you and your church.

To get started, call toll-free (866) 952-4453, or go online to www.worldvision.org/volunteer.
Your World Vision  

PEOPLE & PLACES  

In the Spotlight

Go ing the Distance  > To witness AIDS close-up—to watch loved ones die is tough—but to make a man run away. That’s what Cyrus Phiri did. Only he did it on behalf of his relatives and fellow Zambians suffering with the disease.

In 1989, when most of sub-Saharan Africa had yet to wake up to the crisis in the making, Cyrus fearlessly blazed a 900-mile trail for AIDS prevention and awareness with a marathon across Zambia. Then he went on to raise national alarm bells with other events, hoping to save lives.

But this 43-year-old former teacher, Baptist pastor, and World Vision worker couldn’t save his own. Behind his public battle with AIDS was a private one he lost in December 2003.

Cyrus took up running out of necessity. As a student, he daily ran the 30-mile distance to school because he couldn’t afford bus fare. He arrived with blistered feet, but always on time for lessons.

Later, running again served a purpose when he hit on the idea of an AIDS awareness project called Sankasa—meaning “change”—that rehabilitates former sex workers. He leaves behind his wife, Brenda, and three children.

Cyrus Phiri will be remembered for his passion and courage in the face of a national and global threat. His many friends at World Vision will continue his fight.

—Jane Sutton-Reidar

Context for Christians

While western populations are grasping global age trends are going in the opposite direction, reports Bryant L. Myers in his new book, Exploring World Mission: One-third of the world’s population is younger than 15—and 85 percent of these young people live in the developing world. As many people tend to make faith decisions before age 20, this demographic shift presents a challenge to the Christian church: how to effectively communicate the gospel to the global youth culture.

Exploring World Mission draws from the most current data available to present a meaningful picture of Christian mission in today’s world. Using bold graphics to analyze the latest trends in population, economics, politics, and religion, Myers—a vice president of World Vision International—interprets the Church’s greatest challenges as its greatest opportunity to influence the world with Jesus’ compassion.

Although always pictured smiling and vibrant, Cyrus deeply felt the toll of AIDS in Zambia. Working as a counselor for a World Vision Zambia project called Sankasa—meaning “change”—that rehabilitates former sex workers. He leaves behind his wife, Brenda, and three children.

Cyrus Phiri will be remembered for his passion and courage in the face of a national and global threat. His many friends at World Vision will continue his fight.

—Jane Sutton-Reidar

In a war-torn area of Sri Lanka, the Rev. Roshan Mahesan heeds God’s call to stay and serve his people—even through his entire family has moved away. Both the government and the LTTE “Tamil Tiger” rebels work with the Rev. Mahesan and consider him a man of peace. He has negotiated with both sides to release innocent people wrongly arrested.

The Rev. Mahesan established eight churches in Sri Lanka, five in places controlled by the rebels. He provides special education for youth caught up or forced into the fighting—sharing the good news of God’s love and meeting medical needs.

Dedicated servants like Sister Arousiag and the Rev. Mahesan have been honored through the Pierce Awards.

Winners of a Higher Prize  > Co-recipients of the 2003 Robert W. Pierce Award for Christian Service are a nun serving Armenia’s poorest children and a peacemaking pastor in Sri Lanka.

Born in Syria and educated in the United States, Sister Arousiag Sajonian moved to Armenia to care for vulnerable children after the devastating 1988 earthquake. She helped establish the Boghossian Educational Center in Gyumri, providing physical care, educational programs, and Christian instruction.

To date, more than 6,000 children—many orphaned, abandoned, or neglected—have benefited.

“The children have been very deeply bruised,” Sister Arousiag says, “and we are trying to give them back that self-worth that they are loved. I think they will be able to love in return.”

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Dedicated servants like Sister Arousiag and the Rev. Mahesan have been honored through the Pierce Award since 1980. The Pierce family established it two years after the death of World Vision’s founder, to continue his legacy of supporting unrecognized, faithful Christian workers around the world.
Two compassionate, driven women are changing Chicago’s poor areas, one home at a time.

by Cassandra Wyssbrod

“My work is about touching the people closest to me,” says Josephine LoGalbo. “Helping those around me—that is what I like to do.” For Josephine and her friend Mary Beth Smith, that involves providing high-quality housing to low-income families on Chicago’s West Side.

Josephine grew up in these neighborhoods. Her marriage to a U.S. Department employee then took her around the world. In India, she helped the U.S. government renovate housing for American diplomats. When she returned to Chicago and saw houses worse than what she’d seen in developing countries, Josephine felt she had to do something.

Mary Beth, a mother, pastor’s wife, and retired teacher, also wanted to make a difference. Her way to exhibit the character of Christ is to roll up her sleeves and rehabilitate decaying buildings. The two 50-something women had faith and a sense of mission in common. They teamed up to embark on new careers in home renovation—gutting properties down to the brick.

When the pair first set out to work in the low-income housing sector, government bureaucrats warned them against pouring money into high-poverty areas. They didn’t listen. Rebuilding homes for struggling families seemed the right thing to do.

While starting their first project, the women found The Storehouse to be self-sufficient—often being tough and direct about what they could and could not otherwise afford, to help transform people’s lives.

The Storehouse’s mission is not confined to large cities such as Chicago. Currently, 10 storehouses are in place across the United States, and plans for more are in the works. The Storehouse gives motivated individuals and nonprofits the materials they need to help transform people’s lives.

Josephine and Mary Beth have done more than provide a safe home for Victoria. They bring her to the doctor; they make sure she has food in her refrigerator so that she can take her medications. They also teach her to be self-sufficient—often being tough and direct with her. Victoria doesn’t complain. “They are like mothers,” she says with a warm smile.

Change is underway on Kenneth Street, where Victoria lives. Josephine and Mary Beth have renovated another home there, for a grandmother and her six grandchildren. “At first we were scared when we started our work on Kenneth Street,” Josephine says. Now when they walk the street, they see people picking up trash, planting flowers, and apologizing if their property doesn’t look just right.

Josephine and Mary Beth fulfill their mission one family at a time, block by block—touching those closest to them.

—Cassandra Wyssbrod is a marketing specialist for World Vision in Chicago.
To Armenians, Mount Ararat is everything: a holy mountain and a place of rebirth. Armenian children learn and treasure the story of Noah’s ark landing on Mount Ararat and of God’s mountaintop covenant with humanity.

Today, Armenia needs a new promise—relief from years lived in desperation after communism and from a devastating earthquake. In the shadow of Mount Ararat, the people in the land of Noah need a second chance.
Driving is perilous in Gyumri. The streets are as scarred as the city they crisscross. Traffic moves like a demolition derby, with drivers swerving back and forth to avoid potholes.

More evidence of the plight of Armenia’s second-largest city lies beyond the heaps of uncollected garbage lining the streets. Massive, dilapidated, Soviet-style apartment buildings—unfinished after a devastating 1988 earthquake—stand empty and windowless. Too dangerous to dismantle, too decrepit to inhabit, they’re useful only to the desperate men who sneak in, steal, and then sell the exposed rebar. When communism collapsed two years later, the Soviets left this city half-repaired, turning off the gas heat as if flipping off a light switch when leaving an empty room.
Along the road to Gyumri, huge, empty, Soviet textile and glass factories, their windows shattered, serve as concrete reminders of life under communism. Armenians remember wistfully the years before 1990. Forgetting what they didn’t have then, they focus on what they don’t have now.

During the communist era, Armenia had thrived as one of the leading republics in science and technology. But when the Berlin Wall fell, Armenia was unable to get back on its feet. “Originally there was a lot of hope for a brighter future,” says British-born David Thomson, national director of World Vision Armenia. “But the country, instead of entering a time of amazing freedom, has entered a difficult period of transition.”

It’s not that the hardworking, well-educated people of Armenia haven’t tried. But there have been too many setbacks. The 1988 earthquake crushed homes and hopes, killing 25,000 and leaving 50,000 without shelter. In one neighborhood in Gyumri, 70 percent of the families have at least one disabled family member. In one neighborhood in Gyumri, 70 percent of the families have at least one disabled family member.

What jobs there are, pay very little. “It’s not a real community,” says Shaghik Mahrokian, 34, who directs World Vision’s work in Gyumri. “At first it was difficult to believe World Vision was going to be here for the long term,” says Siranoush Manoukiyan, 36. A powerful woman who lights up her airspace with energy and passion, she bends over, digging with a small shovel, her brilliant white hair shining in the noonday sun. In a beat-up sweater and skirt, Siranoush (see-rah-NOOSH) picks through the dirt, looking for potatoes for dinner and, if she’s lucky, a carrot or a beet. She also collects cow manure to burn for fuel.

Siranoush knows that when the ground freezes, she won’t be able to find any more vegetables. “We’d like to work,” she says, “but we’re stealing potatoes instead.”

A single mother, Siranoush is the matriarch of a clan that includes her son’s family and her daughter, Arax, also a single mother. Before the earthquake, their family did well. They had a home. Jobs. Even jewelry. On that December morning their lives changed. Siranoush (above) takes a break from her backbreaking search for food—including these potatoes, which she gleams at the end of the season. The depth of Armenia’s poverty also shows in the lives of Gohar and her family (left page). They live in this 16-by-24-foot container with two other families—no plumbing, no electricity. Despite the physical challenges, Armenians are free after communism to pursue spiritual fullness. Echmiadzin (below) is the main cathedral of the Armenian church, built in A.D. 303.

Arax (ah-RAKS) and her three girls live downstairs from Siranoush in a one-room apartment. The room has four beds, two tables, and a broken television. Greenish wallpaper peels off the walls. Four pieces of rug nearly cover the floor. Both Sona, 5, and Lilit, 7, sleep in cribs at night, even though Lilit is far too big. The crib is the only bed the family could find for her.

“World Vision helped us to come out from the life we had,” Siranoush says. A devout post-communist Christian, she flips open her Bible to read some favorite verses from Isaiah. In the middle of her Bible is a World Vision bookmark, sent to one of her grandchildren by a sponsor from the United States.

World Vision is planted firmly in the middle of this family’s life. All Arax’s girls are sponsored. Every card, letter, and picture from the sponsors in Florida, California, and Ohio is saved in a gallon-sized plastic bag. “The girls sleep with these things,” Siranoush says. “They put the cards underneath their pillows.”

**SPONSORSHIPS TRUE VALUE**

Sponsorship has been a godsend, especially for little Sona. Before she was sponsored, her hair was falling out in patches. She had become thin and withdrawn. “World Vision made her the girl she is now,” Siranoush says simply. In their poverty, the children drank water flavored with sugar and ate no meat or noodles. Now they have three good, hot meals a day at school.

Arax’s oldest daughter, Mariam, 9, seems to glow from the inside. Her sponsor in Florida is partly to thank. “No one else has ever told this child that she is unique,” Arax says, holding a card.
sent from the United States, her face shining with delight. “I have no
time to say those words to her.”

It is at this moment that sponsorship’s true value to this family
comes apparent: They know they are loved. They have the
letters and cards to prove it.

Arax, like many mothers in Gyumri, is raising her
dughters without a father. Many of Gyumri’s men have gone to Russia,
looking for work. Statistics report that 20,000 people have left since
the earthquake. But officials know that this number is far too low.
Most people leave without notifying authorities. Many, like Arax’s
husband, never return.

World Vision stepped in to help Arax with a job—a cleaning
position at the World Vision childcare center that her daughters
attend before school. “She was so shy,” Shaghik remembers of her
first meetings with Arax. “At that time, she was trying to do some
cleaning for the neighbors and getting a couple of dollars to buy
bread for her children, but the first sight of her was very sad.

“You should have seen her when she got the job. She signed
the contract and said, ‘I don’t need anything else now. I just need
to have this job.’”

Today Arax beams as she peers into a classroom at the childcare
center and watches Sona eating a hot meal or Mariam practicing
embroidery, or Lilit learning about Creation in a Bible study.

She is a woman with new hope.

A COMMUNITY IS REBORN

Child sponsorship has energized this family and many others in
the neighborhood. Evidence of sponsorship is everywhere. World
Vision has built playgrounds for children who, before,
played with dangerous toys—on leftover crates or in falling-
down buildings.

World Vision installed gas pipelines to bring heat to 90 families.
Last year the neighborhood saw a low temperature of 22 below
zero F. The organization also negotiated half-price gas payments
with the government. In Gyumri, heating can cost a family $30-
$40 a month on an average monthly salary of $20.

Children in Gyumri wear boots and jackets provided by
World Vision’s gifts-in-kind program. They carry World Vision-
provided backpacks filled with school supplies. Mariam and
Lilit go to a school that World Vision bought and refurbished last
year. Even the mauve paint on its walls comes in World Vision
paint buckets.

Sponsorship in Gyumri goes below the surface level of need
as well, digging deep into the community’s root problems.
Siranoush works with World Vision’s elderly care program (see
“Connecting Generations in Gyumri”). Through this effort, World
Vision hopes to reconnect the generations that poverty put asunder.

“If their own children are hungry, they can’t care anymore for
their own parents,” Shaghik says. “I’m not trying to justify it; I’m
just trying to explain.”

Along with family ties, faith also waned under communism.
During Armenia’s time as a Soviet republic, baptisms were done
in secret or not done at all. World Vision is part of Armenia’s
spiritual rebirth (see “The World’s Oldest Christian Country”),
organizing baptisms and providing Bible-study curriculum.

In Gyumri, hearts are changing. After years of hardship, women
like Arax are starting to trust again. Mothers like Siranoush are
finding ways to be agents of change in their communities. Children
like Sona, Lilit, and Mariam are learning life skills in school,
knowing that across the ocean, there are families who pray for
them, write them letters, and support them.

And World Vision staff like Shaghik—who moved to this
community when the project started in 2000—are making a
commitment to stay as long as Gyumri needs them.

“I know that eventually I will go back to Yerevan,” Shaghik
says. “I can’t stay eternally, because this program should be
handed over to local people. But I can’t imagine the day I leave.
How will I do it? Gyumri has become my everything.”

These are words that the people of Gyumri need to hear:
words that hold the promise of a better tomorrow.
Mariam Bozaklyan, 6, slipping out of the leg brace that helps her walk. “Don’t help me.” Such persistence kept this tiny girl alive after a trying infancy. “The doctors told us she could die any day,” says her mother, Srbouhi (Sir-boo-HEE), about Mariam’s first months. For 15 tense days in the hospital, the girl languished. She seemed blind, not responding as Srbouhi flicked the lights on and off. Her tongue wouldn’t stay in her mouth. Was it pneumonia? doctors wondered. Meningitis? They advised Srbouhi, 28, and her husband, Nshan.

“I can do it myself,” says Mariam Bozaklyan, 6, slipping out of the leg brace that helps her walk. “Don’t help me.”

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They advised Srbouhi, 28, and her husband, Nshan.
Mariam's condition made life difficult. Money was tight. Nshan's job as a driver in Yerevan's ailing economy paid the bills and bought the family bread, but nothing more. The family went into a tailspin. Although frail, Mariam was demanding. Srbouhi became sick with worry, losing weight. She ignored her healthy son, Hovhannes (ho-van-NES), 8, focusing completely on Mariam.

"I was really upset because I felt that I was the only one who was worried about my child," she says. The stress was too much for the young mother to bear. At one point Srbouhi told Nshan she was leaving. "I'm young," she told him. "I need to have a life too."

Yet she stayed. At wits' end, Srbouhi and Nshan enrolled Mariam in a children's rehabilitation center. To pay for the therapy, even her drawings were angry. She'd pick up one color and scribble like mad, over and over in the same place. Now, Mariam's drawings reflect her joy.

FROM "DEFECTIVE" TO TREASURED

A Soviet republic from 1922 to 1991, Armenia inherited the Soviets' elaborate system of institutionalizing children who were different. During those times, the Soviet specialists—called "defectologists"—convinced parents that their disabled children would never become fully functioning members of society. Today, about 1 percent of Armenia's children, 11,500 in all, are institutionalized. Many more, like Mariam, are hidden away by their parents, not allowed to play or go to school.

"It's a paradox. Armenians adore their children, showering them with affection in public. "I would be surprised if you would find an Armenian mother who wouldn't choose to die and have her child live," says Sister Arousiag Sajonian, last year's Pierce award-winner, who runs an orphanage for girls in Armenia (see story on page 11). And yet, with special-needs children, the leftover Soviet philosophy of defectology prevails. Such children are still largely hidden away.

Mariam's mother never thought her daughter would go to kindergarten. "I didn't even think it was possible," Srbouhi says. "Now I think she'll be able to go on to school, thanks to World Vision."

"She was a closed child," Ani says. "She couldn't communicate. She didn't want to do anything." Mariam was also aggressive with the other children. She didn't know how to share. She bit another child.

A FAMILY CRUMBLES

"I was afraid that somebody would look at my girl and say something," her mother says. Like many special-needs children in Armenia, Mariam was growing up in isolation.

Mariam and thousands of others like her in Armenia needed a second chance—the opportunity to grow up in the open, and to be valued. But much groundwork had to be laid. Experts needed to match special-needs children with opportunities in Armenia's education system. Armenian society needed to change its attitudes. And parents of disabled children needed to learn to fight against the historic stigma until those attitudes did change.

"I was afraid. The only disabled child she had ever known was her own, and she felt protective. A social worker counseled her to overcome her fears and trust the expertise of the staff at the center. Then the work with Mariam began.

"She was a closed child," Ani says. "She didn't want to play. She couldn't communicate. She didn't want to do anything." Mariam was also aggressive with the other children. She didn't know how to share. She bit another child.

Ani worked with Mariam, teaching her new behaviors, coaxing her with love and patience.

"Now she knows how to play," Ani says. "She can hold the other children's hands and hug them." Ani works with Mariam's teacher, Rosa Kazaryan, 21, whose only education in teaching special-needs children has come through World Vision. "In university," she says, "we do not learn anything about inclusive education or children with special needs."

"As Ani teaches Rosa the skills she needs to include Mariam, the little girl teaches her classmates a valuable life skill: compassion. "The other children help her to put on her shoes or get a cup of water," Rosa says, "or take her to the bathroom." Watching Mariam at play with her fellow students is where you see the fruits of Ani and her team's labors. She gallops around the classroom, her thick black ponytail bobbing, a few wispy tendrils curling softly around her face. The teacher's assistant watches her with kind eyes.

EDUCATING MARIAM

Mariam's mother was cooperative at first, remembers Ani Avakyan, 23, the psychologist who works with Mariam. "But when she saw children with greater disabilities than Mariam, she became cautious," says Ani. "She didn't want Mariam to play with the other children."

Srbouhi was afraid. The only disabled child she had ever before known was her own, and she felt protective. A social worker counseled her to overcome her fears and trust the experts at the center. Then the work with Mariam began.

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Primary school will be the next step for Mariam. An Armenian organization, Bridge of Hope, has successfully begun similar programs in Armenian schools after the kindergarten level. As more special-needs children go from isolation at home and in institutions into the happy chaos of these inclusive kindergartens, their families benefit as well.

"Now I am changed," Srbouhi says. "Now I walk down the street and I don't care what my neighbors say. I know if I can accept my child for who she is, others can too."

Just as Armenia itself is struggling for its second chance to recover and grow, Mariam is getting her second chance, and in turn, all those who meet her are learning how very special these special-needs children are.
A n estimated 150 million children around the world are disabled. The majority live in developing countries, where they fall victim to conditions easily avoided in wealthy countries. Only a tiny percentage of these children receive the rehabilitation or education they need to bring out their God-given potential.

What harms these children? And how does World Vision help?

Perils of Poverty

Genetics cause disabilities everywhere in the world. But children living in poverty face additional dangers—many of them preventable.

In the womb

Mothers’ poor diets can harm their unborn children. Micronutrients that are key to physical development—commonly added to foods in western countries—often are in short supply in impoverished countries.

EXAMPLE: Lack of iodine (found in table salt in the United States) in pregnant women’s diets can cause mental retardation in their children.

Poor nutrition

The need for healthy food continues throughout childhood. Children with poor diets and no access to vitamin supplements don’t develop normally and can suffer long-term disabilities.

EXAMPLE: Vitamin-A deficiency, striking about 100 million young children worldwide, causes blindness and immune-system impairment.

Lack of immunizations

Many harmful diseases are easily prevented with vaccines. Children living in crowded slum areas who aren’t immunized are extremely vulnerable to these disabling illnesses.

EXAMPLE: Measles (rare in countries where vaccines are widely available) can cause deafness in children. In the wake of a measles outbreak in western Liberia, World Vision participated in a UNICEF-led campaign to vaccinate nearly 28,000 children.

Environmental factors

Where children live can place them in dangerous proximity to toxins, waste dumps, and degraded environments. Closer to the ground than adults, and consuming more oxygen and water in proportion to their weight, they can be easily exposed to contaminated substances.

EXAMPLE: High levels of lead in air and water leads to problems such as delayed growth and mental retardation.

Conflict

Recent conflicts have injured or disabled millions of children. Long after war’s end, children continue to suffer harm from landmines and unexploded ordnance, which can be colorful and deceptively shaped like toys to attract children’s curiosity.

EXAMPLE: Children in 80 countries are threatened by the presence of landmines.

World Vision: Four Points to Fullness

> Prevention: Attack poverty-related causes of disabilities by helping communities produce healthy food, access clean water, and adopt better hygiene practices. Create health programs to target expectant mothers and children under 5.

> Treatment: Establish special projects to care for children with disabilities, such as schools for the deaf and rehabilitation centers for children with mobility problems. Help children transition into regular schools and non-disabled environments.

> Support: Educate families about the importance of early treatment. Raise awareness within communities of the value and potential of disabled children. In some projects, offer parents specialized training to address their children’s needs.

> Sponsorship: Provide health and nutritional care to all sponsored children and special care for the disabled through the Childcare Ministries Fund—emergency care or long-term medical treatment, plus essentials such as medicine and wheelchairs.


SOURCES:

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The path to success hasn't been easy for this former sponsored child.

By Caleb Mpamei and Jane Sutton-Redner

THE PREGNANT WOMAN ARRIVED at the Banswara Mahatma Gandhi Hospital, bleeding profusely and suffering from critical childbirth complications. But staff at the facility in rural India balked at caring for her. Her problems were beyond their capacity, they said, and they prepared to send her home.

Then a young intern spoke up. Sunita Garasia told the doctors that the pregnant woman was her sister-in-law, Kamala, and she pleaded with them to help her. They immediately complied, working to save the lives of both mother and child. Years later, the intern’s father heaves a sigh of relief at the memory. “If it had not been for Sunita,” Sekhawati Garasia says, “it would have been difficult for Kamala to survive.”

Sunita, 28—now Dr. Sunita—doesn’t take no for an answer. With quiet determination and diplomacy, she has often found a way through seemingly blocked paths. Career aspirations alone came with many complications.

Sunita was born in Banswara district, about 300 miles southwest of Delhi, an area where girls’ education has markedly lower priority than boys. (Recent statistics show girls’ literacy rate at 27 percent, compared to 60 percent for boys.)

Her family is from the Bhil tribe, who are typically farmers and casual laborers. Under usual circumstances, a tribal girl would never have become a doctor. But Sunita’s parents are Christians—missionaries had led all 30 families in Sunita’s village to Christ—and her father was a teacher.

“My father educated all of us,” Sunita says. “In my tribe, those who are Christian are more interested in education.”

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Not that putting Sunita and her three older brothers through study hard and put in my best at whatever I asked friends to explain the meaning of English words. She memorized entire lessons or asked friends to explain the meaning of English words. She memorized entire lessons in English. Sunita studied with the dictionary academically, scoring the second-highest marks academically, scoring the second-highest marks her first year.

During the 1980s, World Vision India instituted a special program enabling sponsored children to pursue higher education or vocational training. Sunita attended college and then medical school through the program. She had set her sights on the medical profession after meeting a woman doctor at the Banswara District Hospital. But first, Sunita had to pass India’s Pre-Medical Test (PMT)—a tough exam only attempted by the brightest students. Sunita took it once and failed. Most students then give up and pursue other careers, but not Sunita. She took the PMT two more times and, on the third try, succeeded. In medical school, academics was just one of the challenges facing Sunita, the odd one out. “Other students came from big cities like Delhi and Agra,” she says, “and they were children of doctors and engineers. There were no Christians.” But she kept reaching out to people and eventually made friends. A bigger hurdle was language. Sunita only spoke Hindi, but oral and written tests were in English. Sunita studied with the dictionary or asked friends to explain the meaning of English words. She memorized entire lessons before tests. And it paid off. “Today, I’m a doctor,” she says. “It’s worth it all.”

Sunita is now married to Hemraj Wilson, 32, also a doctor and a Christian. The couple has a son, Ashish, 2. Sunita works at the Kohala Public Health Center, leading a staff of six who serve a largely poor village population. She’s loving toward the child patients and friendly to the elders, calling them Bano (a familiar term, similar to “Daddy”).

“She temperament is very cool, and she never gets annoyed,” says Dr. Vijay Kumar Vij, chief medical officer at the center.

“I feel good that I’ve come this far,” Sunita says, quickly crediting God’s hand on her life.

She also thanks World Vision: “Many people like me are getting help so we can stand on our own feet.”

*Sunita’s not just standing—she’s moving ahead, making her way to her dreams.*

—Caleb Mpamei is a communications associate for World Vision India.
Divine Matchmaking

SOME OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES are of my father, World Vision founder Bob Pierce, standing before a crowd and challenging them to let their hearts be broken by the need of a single child. “The need is so big, it is easy to turn away, feeling that you can’t possibly make a difference,” he used to say. “But while you can’t do everything for everybody, you can do something for a child who needs you—and what you can do, you must do!”

And the people would respond, flooding to the sponsorship tables.

Today I’m a World Vision spokesperson for child sponsorship, and I have the privilege of telling the stories of the children I have met and the needs I have seen, much as my dad did. Like him, one of my greatest joys is watching people come to the sponsorship table afterward to search for the little face that touches their heart.

In the beginning, I have to admit, I thought this was a random process. After all, every precious child on the table needed a sponsor. Like any mother, I had no favorites, and I hated to see any child left behind. But over time I began to suspect an amazing truth.

Someone would come to the table and ask for a child of a certain gender and age, from a specific country, with the same birthday as their own child or grandchild. The first time this happened I panicked, praying that among the limited folders on the table we would find a child suitably close. But to my amazement, a quick search produced the exact child requested, as if God had planned this happy family reunion.

These happy “coincidences” have happened enough times to lead me to the conclusion that sponsorship is far from a random act of charity, but rather a very specific act of divine matchmaking.

Psalm 68:6 says, “God sets the solitary in families” (New King James Version). There is no more solitary a figure on the face of the earth than a little child left orphaned by AIDS or made homeless by war. When you allow your heart to be touched by the suffering of these children, it isn’t hard to believe that the same God who “numbers the hairs on their heads” would take the trouble to carefully “set” these children in specific families, chosen just for them.

And of course, the matchmaking goes both ways.

Many years ago my sister Robin gave birth to a stillborn baby boy. We all grieved the loss of little Justin. A few months later, my mother felt led to ask World Vision for a new child to sponsor. She gave no specifics other than that she wanted a boy. When the new sponsor packet arrived, she saw that she had been given a little boy from Africa. Tears filled her eyes as she thanked God for his special gift: a little boy named Justin.

Being human, I am still occasionally tempted to dismiss these events as coincidental. But then God reminds me of a story I heard a few months ago. Volunteer Phyllis Lindsay was manning the sponsorship table at a World Vision Artist Associates concert. A woman named Margaret approached her with a puzzled look.

Margaret held out a picture folder and asked, “What is this child’s name?”

Phyllis looked at the folder and immediately understood the woman’s confusion. She explained that, sometimes, developing-world mothers use unusual English words for names. This child’s name was Obvious.

Margaret’s eyes grew wide. “I had already decided not to sponsor a child tonight,” she confessed, “but as I walked over to the table I prayed, Lord, if you want me to sponsor a child, make it obvious.”

Margaret went home with a new child to love and a great story to tell of how God had set this solitary child in her family.

Marilee Pierce Dunker is a child sponsorship advocate for World Vision. Before joining the organization in 2001, she served God in a variety of roles, including Bible-study teacher, retreat speaker, author, and radio personality. She and her husband, Bob, live in the San Diego area and have two grown daughters.
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