



STORIES FROM

GIRLS

WHO
TO

DARED DREAM

MEET GIRLS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
WHO NEVER GAVE UP

STORIES FROM
GIRLS
WHO
TO **DARED**
DREAM

Meet girls around the world who didn't
give up on their dreams, even when
everything seemed against them ...

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Introduction

Right now, a girl is sitting down to do her homework. Another girl is building a fire, ready to start cooking. Another is standing up to speak—around the dinner table, at a village meeting, in a politician’s office—though she’s always been told to sit down and listen. Yet another is staring out the window into the world—curtains open, so nothing can block her view—thinking, planning, and dreaming of her wildest ambition, her big idea, her next move.

Every one of these girls is already beating the odds. In many parts of the world, it’s harder for girls than for boys to do many things: to have the chance to be born, survive childhood, go to school, choose a job, or just choose their path at all. But things are changing.

With World Vision’s presence in nearly 100 countries, we have front-row seats to the transformation that is happening for girls. It’s happening bit by bit—one idea, one conversation, one law, one small business, one life at a time—in homes and communities worldwide. It’s incredible and exciting, and it’s a change we can all help make happen! That’s why we wrote this book.

These are the stories of 10 girls who dreamed big, thought differently, never gave up, and did things that seemed impossible. They’re change makers, writing their own stories in small ways and big ways (and small ways that turn into big ways). Together, these girls, and millions more like them, are revolutionizing the world.

Right now, a girl or boy who’s holding this book is shaping the future along with all the other change makers out there. The future will be all we decide to make it as we grow into our God-given potential. Let’s go!

RIFA, BANGLADESH

Rifa is strong and capable. She has always known it, but now her family and community know it too. Rifa is one of the Shahosh karate girls.

In Rifa's village, in the far west of Bangladesh, girls used to be seen as weak. They were expected to help clean the house and make dinner and think about finding a husband, not a career. If boys called out rudely to them in the market or street, everyone expected girls to put up with it.

But 14-year-old Rifa hated it. She didn't like how girls were treated in her community and was scared to walk home on her own.

So, when she heard about the Shahosh karate course, which teaches the martial art to girls like her, she was desperate to join. Shahosh means "brave" in Bengali. Rifa loved the idea of feeling brave.



Rifa's parents were much less excited. They worried about what people would think or say if they saw her practicing. They didn't think girls in their community should do these sorts of activities.

The headmistress at Rifa's school, however, loved the idea of girls learning karate. She talked to parents and explained some of the benefits—both physical and mental—and many parents agreed to let their daughters give it a go.

After six months, Rifa had learned new skills ... and much more. She learned about being confident, her rights as a girl, and the laws that protect children like her. Best of all, she learned she could speak up for herself and others—and that she should speak up, even if she was criticized for it.

Lots of Shahosh girls have already earned their first belts, and the coach has set their sights even higher, encouraging them to try out for the national karate team and compete on the world stage.



There is a Shahosh Boys Group now too, where boys learn how boys and girls are equal and should be treated that way. They also learn about respect and how to prevent violence in their communities.

“Now, my parents don't worry when I'm out of the house,” says Rifa confidently. “People in my village respect us when they see us going to martial arts class in our uniforms.”

For Rifa, this is just the beginning. She's taught her 13-year-old cousin what she's learned so her cousin can feel strong, too. And pass it on!

Rifa has a new dream for the future—to become a police officer.

“I want to end violence against girls, for good.”



NAHOMY, HONDURAS

The year Nahomy turned 13 and became a teenager, she didn't just celebrate with cake—she decided to run for youth mayor in her city!

It's a big job, because 21,000 people live in her community in western Honduras. But Nahomy wasn't worried—she was excited about taking on the responsibility.

She knew that she could help lots of other kids dream big if she was the youth mayor. Together, they could make big changes in their community.

Nahomy planned to speak up about children's rights and organize the community to work together. She would share her hope that tomorrow would not just be okay, but great!



Nahomy was determined to bring change because she knew just how difficult life in her community could be for children and young people. When she was little, her father had to go far away to find work, so Nahomy lived with her grandparents for six years before he returned.

Like many people in her community, Nahomy's grandparents are coffee farmers. Every day, they work hard outside in the hot sun to afford food and the supplies they need. Often, however, there's just not enough money to go around.

As a result, many kids like Nahomy have to leave school early. They have to help their parents on farms or find other work to help their families survive.

Some girls leave school early to get married, hoping that this will give them more options. But instead of breaking out of poverty, kids who don't get an education have fewer choices for the future.



“To me, being educated means I can take care of my family and my community, especially my grandparents and father, who have sacrificed so much to give me opportunities,” says Nahomy.

After winning twice as many votes as the other candidates, Nahomy won the election!

Now the youth mayor, she's tackling big issues in her community. Nahomy is campaigning hard to stop early marriage and teen pregnancy, and inspiring girls—and all kids—to stay in school.

When a student drops out of school, Nahomy goes to talk to their parents with a child protection officer. Together, they help the family find solutions so their child can finish their education.

Nahomy loves being youth mayor, but she has even bigger dreams.

“I want to be a doctor and start the first clinic in my community,” she says.

And we're cheering her on!



ADDYSON, U.S.

When Addyson was 7 years old, she set herself a big goal: to run a half-marathon. Just one year later, she did it! She finished the 13.1-mile race! But she also achieved a much bigger goal that's helping change everything for a community of kids like her in western Kenya.

Addyson lives in the U.S., far away from Kenya. But she decided to run a half-marathon after she heard about a 9-year-old girl in Kenya named Maurine.

In Kenya, and many other countries around the world, girls like Maurine walk an average of 6 kilometers—about 3.7 miles—a day to get water for their families to drink. The long walk can be dangerous, and it often means girls miss hours of school, homework, and playtime every day.



But worst of all, the water isn't always clean—they often have to collect it from dirty waterholes that animals use too. It can make people really sick.

“I didn't feel it was fair that these kids had to do that,” Addyson says, “while I only have to go to my kitchen sink or refrigerator to get clean water.”

Addyson wanted to take action and help kids like Maurine. But how?

She decided to try to raise \$1,310 to help build clean water pumps in Kenya by running. That's \$100 for every one of the 13.1 miles (21 kilometers) she would run in a half-marathon.

Addyson began training. And she began fundraising. She made bracelets and sold them; at her birthday party, she asked her friends to give donations instead of presents; she had a fundraising event at a local pizza restaurant; and she even carried a jerrycan full of



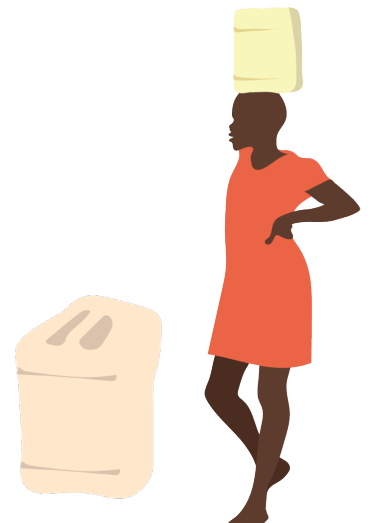
water around her neighborhood, just to show others what life was like for kids like Maurine.

When the day of the half-marathon arrived, Addyson had raised more than she planned—a whopping \$20,000!

“When I felt tired, I remembered those kids and thought, ‘Those kids want me to keep pushing, and they want me to keep going.’ I always remembered their faces, and I always remembered Maurine. I would use Maurine as my motivation.”

Addyson has now run four half-marathons, raised nearly \$200,000 with her family, shared her story on television, and even traveled to Kenya to meet Maurine!

“Don't let anybody take down your big dreams,” Addyson says. “People might tell you that you're too young, you're too small, but don't listen to them. Always go for your dreams and don't let anyone stop you.”



KANISHKA, INDIA

Kanishka lives in a big city in northern India. It's an exciting place full of tall buildings packed with bankers, businesspeople, and technology companies. But it's also full of smog. In fact, it's one of the most polluted cities in India.

Kanishka has grown up choking on the air. Sometimes, the air is so full of smog, it's dangerous to breathe it. People are warned not to go outside, and kids aren't allowed to run around and play.

When Kanishka was 16, she decided enough was enough. She and other kids in her community formed a children's club. They wanted to solve the biggest pollution problems their city faced one by one.



First, they focused on something that's fun and pretty, but also harmful—fireworks. They're beautiful in the night sky, but the large number of fireworks lit to celebrate festivals in Kanishka's city left metal particles, chemicals, and smoke hanging in the air for days.

Changing weather patterns also meant there was less rainfall, so people were short of water. The city needed to find better ways to do things, Kanishka's club decided, and they would tell everyone!

Kanishka and her friends took their message to the streets. They organized big rallies to teach people about climate shocks, telling them to stop letting off fireworks, not waste water, and invest in a safer and greener future.

Kanishka's club then put their words into action, planting trees to help clean up the air and create green spaces for all the kids in their neighborhood to enjoy.

"Children often play in these green pockets in my community. Some children who can't study well at home find it easier to study in our green pockets," says Kanishka proudly.



Things are starting to change in Kanishka's city. People are listening!

Kanishka is now asking the city's authorities to change laws, forcing factories and industries to take better care of the environment or face penalties. She's also spreading the message about water conservation, asking people to collect rainwater so there's enough for everyone to use.

Kanishka dreams of a greener future. Everyone can be part of creating it, she says, even people living in cities like hers.

"I hope city-dwellers will plant more and more trees around them," she says. "Using just your own terrace to set up a garden is one of the most useful ways to combat air pollution. Green pockets are really important."



LENNY, PHILIPPINES

Lenny is committed to fighting an enemy she can't see—the biggest threat she believes her generation is facing.

Lenny, 27, is a nurse working on the front lines to protect people in the Philippines from the COVID-19 pandemic. Dressed from head to toe in protective clothing, she looks like she's ready for anything.

She is in a race against time.

Lenny works at transport checkpoints and monitors people with symptoms in nearby villages to stop COVID-19 from spreading.

Her job is important and comes with plenty of risks, but Lenny is so grateful that she can help others.



“Being a frontline worker is a challenging task, especially as the enemy is invisible,” says Lenny. “I’m worried because I have a baby waiting for me at home. But I need to take on this task because it’s where I’m needed most.”

Lenny has a good job that pays well so she can support herself and her family. Her job is a way to give back to her community too. Because when she was growing up, things were very different.

Lenny is the youngest of three children. Her parents were farmers who struggled to make enough money to feed their family, so they often went to bed hungry. They didn’t have enough money to pay for things like medicine when their kids were sick or to send them to school.

One day, Lenny and other kids in her community received practical help from some adults there, which included support to go to school.

Lenny couldn’t believe how generous these helpers were. They volunteered their time and their big ideas to help Lenny and her friends learn new skills, grow in confidence, and dream of a bright future.

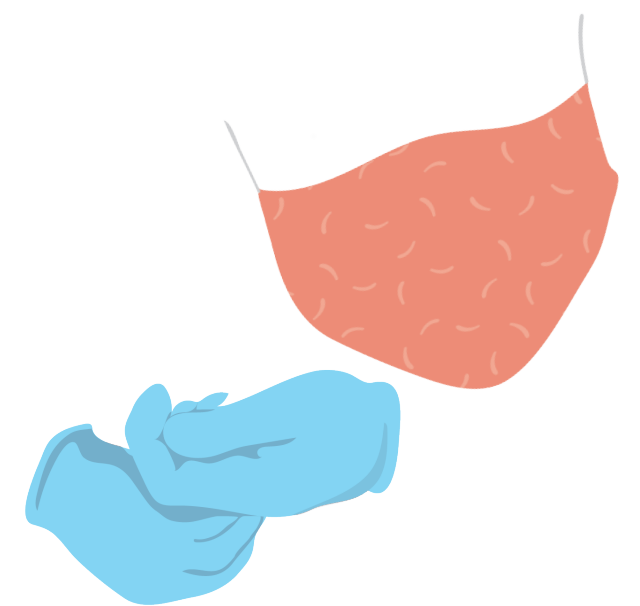
That’s when Lenny decided she also wanted to be a helper so she could show others the same kindness she had received.

After Lenny finished school, she studied nursing and midwifery (midwives are special nurses who help babies be born). Before the pandemic struck, she worked as a health worker in remote and rugged areas where people don’t have doctors or nurses nearby.

Like us all, Lenny hopes that her country will “recover from this pandemic and everything will get back to normal,” she says.

“For now,” she adds, “I will do my part.”

What a germ-fighting superhero!



MWILA, ZAMBIA

When girls grow up, some want to be astronauts, others want to be teachers or artists. Mwila wants to be a nurse, but she almost lost her chance and became a child bride instead.

Mwila lives in Nyimba, Zambia, where one in three girls gets married before they turn 18. This can change everything.

Instead of playing with their friends, learning at school, and generally doing “kid stuff,” girls are forced to grow up quickly. Often, they have babies while they’re still children themselves.

A girl who marries young usually stops going to school and, rather than chasing her dreams, she can become trapped in poverty for her entire life.



Mwila was a teenager when COVID-19 shut down her school, cutting off her access to education. The virus's impact also stopped her parents from working, so it was hard for them to pay their household bills or buy food for Mwila and her four brothers and sisters.

Mwila couldn't see how her family would ever pay her school fees so she could finish school and become a nurse. Her only choice, she thought, was getting married to someone she didn't even know yet. If she got married, her mother and father would have one less child to feed at home. But Mwila would also have to let go of her education.

Just when she was about to give up on her dreams, Mwila went to a class run by local youth and community leaders for girls like her. The class helped her understand that she could choose what she wanted her future to be.

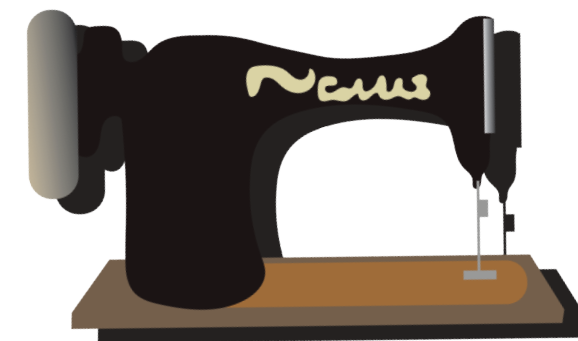
Mwila learned how precious she was because she is loved by God, and had always been, even if she hadn't known it sooner. She found her confidence. She remembered how to dream again. She realized she had other options. And she decided to act.



Those classes changed everything for Mwila. Inspired by her mother, a seamstress, Mwila decided to teach herself to sew. She studied tailoring, and used her mother's sewing machine to make dresses in beautiful, colorful prints and patterns. Her creations started to stand out from the crowd. With her determined smile, so did she.

People from all over town started to buy Mwila's clothes. She helped her family with money for food and household bills, and saved some to pay for her nursing studies. Mwila's future had changed, and she herself was the reason why.

Now, with hope and hard work, Mwila is sewing herself a bold, bright future, one outfit at a time.



XIAOBING, CHINA

At 12 years old, Xiaobing writes poetry, painting glorious, colorful pictures in words. Her poems are even more amazing because Xiaobing has never seen the world she writes about: She was born blind.

When she was little, Xiaobing lived with her parents, brother, and sister in a town outside of a big city. For a little girl who couldn't see, the streets outside felt scary.

When she was old enough to go to school, Xiaobing was shy. She got used to special caretakers looking after her and didn't learn to take care of herself. She couldn't feed herself using chopsticks or a fork and spoon, she wouldn't speak to strangers, and whenever she faced a problem, she would cry.

So when her support center moved away and she had to go to a new one, Xiaobing was terrified.



Her new teachers didn't do everything for her. Instead, they helped her practice finding where she wanted to go and moving there by herself as she listened for cars to decide when to cross the street, used a cane to check if the path was clear, and learned how to walk down stairs.

She also learned how to recognize coins by their sizes so she could buy things herself, chop and cook vegetables safely, eat with chopsticks and a spoon, and wash her own clothes.

She even learned Braille, a system people use to read with their fingers in which raised dots represent words and phrases.

Xiaobing started learning math and other subjects, and then, for the first time, she went to school.

The other students hadn't met a vision-impaired person before. In the beginning, they would wave their hands in front of Xiaobing to check if she really couldn't see. But with help from Xiaobing and her teachers, the kids learned to honor her disability and consider her needs.



Bit by bit, Xiaobing learned to value and believe in herself. She gained the confidence to try new things. She even dreamed about what her future might look like—what job or adventures she might have.

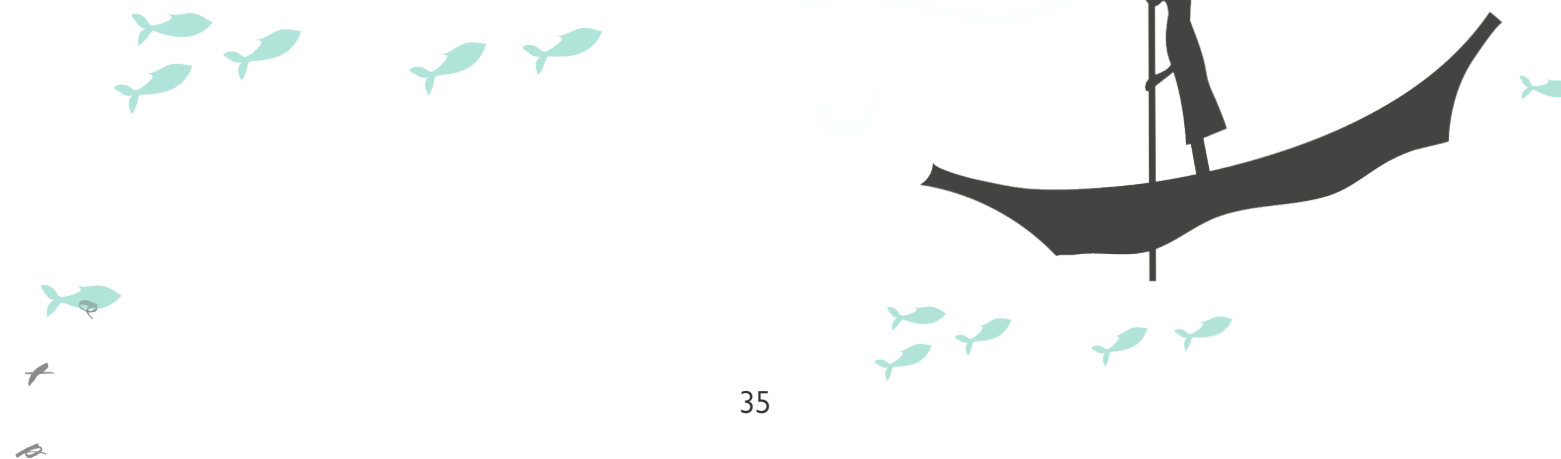
“I want to be a kindergarten teacher when I grow up,” says Xiaobing. She already volunteers to teach “simple math to little children” and helps teach her younger brother and sister.

Xiaobing also writes poetry and loves it! When she writes, the world sounds beautiful, which it is because that's how Xiaobing now sees it.

By the Riverside By Xiaobing

The wind from the river breezes slightly,
the water is so clear that the river bottom can
be seen.

The boat is rowing on the river,
while the hills stand still by the riverside.



AKHI, BANGLADESH

Not all heroes wear capes, but sometimes they do wear a mask! Akhi is 17 years old and a real-life hero who doesn't just wear a face mask. She makes them!

Akhi grew up in a big city in Bangladesh. She lives with her parents and two sisters in a small, one-room house, crowded together with many other patchwork houses.

Akhi's dad worked in a shrimp-processing factory, until he had a bad accident and could no longer work. With no money to buy food or pay the bills, Akhi was forced to work in the factory with her mom and older sister.

The factory stank and the chemicals they used there made it hard to breathe. These chemicals often gave Akhi a headache and her hands had sores from the hard work.



Even though they worked from 5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Akhi's family still couldn't earn enough to eat three meals a day.

Worst of all, because she had to work, Akhi missed her last three years of school. Without an education Akhi didn't know how she could leave the shrimp factory. But she knew she had to try.

One day, she heard about school catch-up classes being held at a community center. She loved these classes and, with help from the center, she decided to apply to return to school. Multiple schools rejected her because of her age. "You're too old," they all said.

Akhi could have given up, but she didn't. She thought, "What else can I do?" and settled on becoming a business owner. She learned to sew and started her own tailoring business from home. She dreamed that one day she would own an entire garment factory!

A few months later, armed with training, a sewing machine, and a pile of fabric, Akhi was working hard on her dream.

"I kept receiving orders for shirts and children's dresses," says Akhi. "And from social media, I learned to make flower vases, mats, and small bags with recycled paper and beads."

People loved her creations, and Akhi's business was booming. With the extra income, her family could finally afford meat, fish, and delicious fresh fruit.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

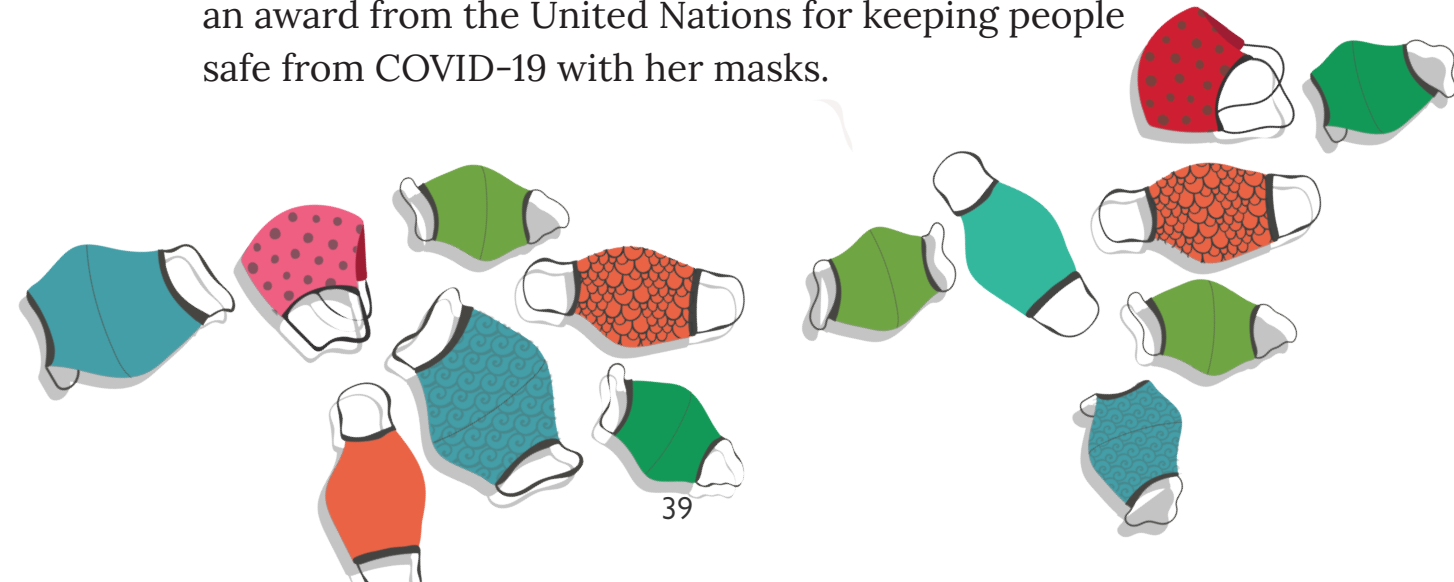
"Everything came to a standstill. My mom and sister couldn't work at the shrimp factory, and I couldn't keep my store open," Akhi says.

Still, Akhi didn't give up. She looked for a new opportunity.

"The market had no face masks, and masks were expensive to buy from stores. Many people in our community couldn't buy them," says Akhi.

"I decided to make masks and sell them for a low price, so everyone could afford them. If people have no money, I give them masks for free."

That's how Akhi became a real-life hero. She even won an award from the United Nations for keeping people safe from COVID-19 with her masks.



ELIZABETH, UGANDA

Elizabeth never skips class or wakes up dreading school—because for a very long time, she wasn't allowed to go.

When Elizabeth was growing up in her village in Uganda, families sent boys to school if they could afford it. If parents had extra money, girls could go too.

Elizabeth wasn't one of those lucky ones, however. Even though her parents wanted to send her to school, they didn't have much money and couldn't afford the fees.

She'd watch kids walk past her each day on their way to class and wanted to go with them. She wanted to wear the uniform, pack a bag, play lunchtime games, and learn to read.



Elizabeth also watched adults drive their expensive cars to good jobs and wanted to be like them.

“I told myself, I will work hard to get myself a better life.”

She knew education was her ticket to a different future. She wanted a job, an income, and personal success—and she knew good grades would get her there.

Her dad got an extra job to try to pay for her school fees, but it still wasn't enough. Over time, Elizabeth began to lose hope.

“It was really hard. I would never get the kind of life I hoped for; I thought, no matter how hard I worked.”

Then she met a lady called Aunty Anne, who helped struggling children and families in the community. Aunty Anne was a smart lady. She knew many practical ways to help families support their children, earn more money, or get extra help when they needed it. One way was to have a dairy cow. So on her birthday, Elizabeth chose a cow for her present!

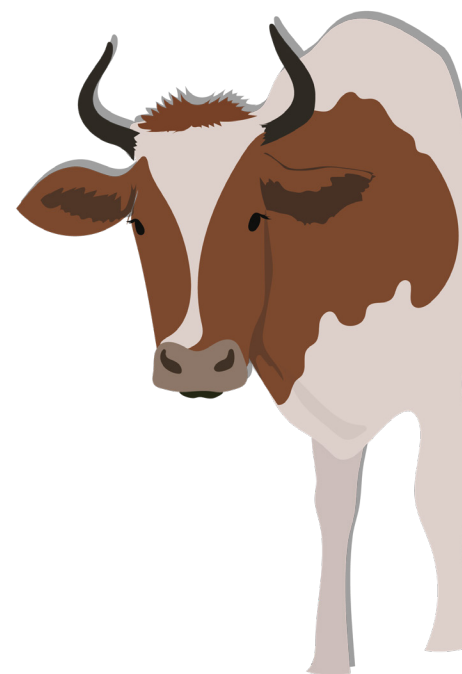
Who knew a dairy cow could change a person's life?

Cows make healthy milk that you can drink and sell for money. They also have calves that you can sell for more money. Soon, Elizabeth was on her way to school, and there was no way she was going to miss even a single class.

Today, Elizabeth is all grown up. She finished school, went to university, and became a teacher herself. In a community where girls don't always get the chance to go to school, Elizabeth is a role model. She encourages her students to aim high, especially the girls.

“I feel extremely humbled to have students who look up to me,” she says. “I have seen how education can change your life.”

Sometimes, all you need is someone to believe in you. And a dairy cow.



LINA, CAMBODIA

Lina is 11 years old and loves soccer and reading. But it wasn't always that way. In fact, her mom used to think she might never learn to read at all.

When Lina's family moved to a community in northwestern Cambodia, life was hard for her and other children. Most parents were farmers, but they struggled to grow enough food to keep everyone fed and have extra produce to sell to buy things like clothes and medicine.

Because children didn't have enough to eat, their bodies grew weak and they got sick. Often, kids were too sick to go to school. Even when they went, it was hard to concentrate and learn. Their teachers weren't trained and their schools didn't have books for them to read or safe places to play.



Lina and her friends didn't have much, but one thing they had was a passion for soccer. They played whenever they could, using whatever materials they could find to make goals and a ball (they didn't have the money to buy them from a store).

When a new soccer training program started in their community, lots of kids, including Lina, couldn't wait to join. At every session, they would join a team and play.

Maybe Lina and her friends didn't realize it, but they weren't just playing soccer, they were learning. During games, their coaches would ask them to think about their plans for their future; they talked about how choices they made today could affect what happened to them tomorrow.

Lina and her friends were encouraged to step up on the field—and off it—so they could make good things happen for themselves, their families, and their community.



At the same time, their schools were helped with new libraries and playgrounds. For the first time, Lina and other students could borrow books and take them home to read at night.

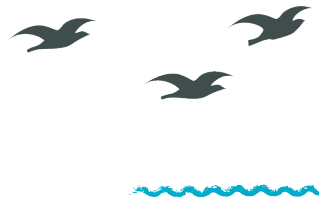
Teachers and parents received training on how to help kids learn. And kids could go to afterschool clubs to practice reading. Lina made a discovery—she loves reading almost as much as soccer!

“Now, I always borrow books from the library. I read them with my best friend and with my sister at home,” Lina says.

“Lina is an outstanding student,” says her mom proudly. “When we first came here, I didn't think she could be a good student. But now, she's the top of her class!”

Reading has opened up a whole new world for Lina. Now, she believes anything is possible.





Acknowledgements



Thank you Rifa, Nahomy, Addyson, Kanishka, Lenny, Mwila, Xiaobing, Akhi, Elizabeth and Lina for sharing your personal stories with the world and reminding us to never give up on our dreams, no matter what circumstances come our way.

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All the girls featured in this book were impacted by World Vision's child sponsorship and other programs, where donor partners empower children and their communities to break free from poverty, for good.

With over 70 years of experience, we know that ending extreme poverty starts with equipping people with the tools they need to lift themselves out of poverty. And for change to last, empowering children is essential too.

We empower communities, guide them to set their own goals, and equip them so that progress is sustained long after we've left.

Through World Vision's work, every 60 seconds a family gets water, a hungry child is fed, and a family receives the tools to overcome poverty.

They said YES! when others said NO.

- Akhi • Elizabeth • Lina • Mwila • Nahomy •
- Rifa • Addyson • Xiaobing • Kanishka • Lenny •

They spoke up, stood tall, tried again, or found another way. The one thing they didn't do was give up. They wanted something better and believed they could make it happen. And with a little help from friends around them, they did just that.

These stories are for the dreamers, the curious, and the brave. Be careful ... you might be changed forever when you read their stories.

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