
CHILD VOICE

2022 ANNUAL REPORT ISSUE

STILL STANDING

Displaced women and children
in Burkina Faso find hope

Child marriage

A tale of two girls in Ghana

It all adds up

The sum of your generous support



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From FaceTime to face time



© Meeting with children in a classroom in Burkina Faso. Photo: Karen Homer

Finally meeting the children and families we serve

Nothing beats talking to people face-to-face. I realized that yet again while speaking with sponsored children and their families in Burkina Faso and Nicaragua this spring – my first post-pandemic trips overseas as CEO.

In Burkina Faso, I visited vibrant classrooms and communities near Ouagadougou, the capital, where I met some of the 4,500 children sponsored by Canadians. Ten-year-old Marina, a sponsored child, and her parents welcomed me into their mud-walled home.

Marina's father, Pierre, 44, is a millet farmer who struggles to provide for his wife and three children. But his hope and optimism are infectious. "I'm so proud of my daughter," Pierre told me. "It's important to educate girls. Marina is not going to be poor like her parents. She will be able to get a job. My wife, Maria, and I are dreaming she'll become a teacher."

Next, I travelled north to Kaya. This small town now shelters about one-quarter of the 1.8 million people driven from their homes by violent extremist groups and militia over the past five years. I'm proud of Children Believe's innovative, life-saving humanitarian work that I saw first-hand here. Last year, in partnership with UNICEF, we provided mental health support for 26,600 children and youth who survived unspeakable violence. Hearing the stories of survivors Habibou, a mother of two, and Sohaibata, a displaced teen, (who you will read more about in this issue) was a moving, humbling experience.

In Nicaragua, I met children and parents who face very different challenges, but share the same determination as their Burkinabé peers. Arlen, the 13-year-old girl I sponsor, talked to me about her plans to study medicine and become a plastic surgeon, inspired by an uncle in the profession.

I also enjoyed hearing the ambitions of many passionate young adults. They shared how they overcame economic hardship to become thriving entrepreneurs with support from our small-business training program, funded largely by the Government of Canada, and your donations.

Nothing beats talking to people face-to-face – be it the communities we serve or our donors here in Canada. Until we meet, let me thank you for your generous support that is changing lives in Nicaragua, Burkina Faso and beyond.

Sincerely,



Fred Witteveen is Children Believe's chief executive officer. ceo@childrenbelieve.ca

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Cover: Fleeing with her family, Sohaibata escaped violence in Burkina Faso and now attends a Children Believe-supported child-friendly space (p. 8).
Photo: Philip Maher

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OUR VISION

We dream of a world where every child has a voice and the ability to achieve their full potential.

OUR MISSION

Children Believe creates a future of hope for children, families and communities by helping them develop the skills and resources to overcome poverty and injustice. For 60+ years, we have followed the example of Christ by serving the poor regardless of their faith, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

OUR VALUES

Across our work, we aim to uphold the values of results, respect, integrity, teamwork and excellence.

Member of
ChildFund
Alliance

ACCESSIBILITY

We seek to recognize and remove the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities. All communications are available in alternative formats upon request.

What's happening



Preparing the next generation of global citizens

More than 1,200 youth in Burkina Faso, Ghana and India are exploring contemporary global issues together – including climate change, gender rights and action against hate speech – as part of Generation Global, a joint youth education program by Children Believe and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

Generation Global prepares youth ages 13 to 17 to embrace the future, equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to become active, open-minded global citizens. The program offers quality training for educators, as well as free, flexible teaching resources on global issues, to support the development of young people's global citizenship.

"This [program] will be very good for our students," says Brenda Amadu Amoah, a teacher at Kanvilli Junior High School in Tamale, Ghana, who took part in a recent educator training session. "They'll be exposed to other ideas and ways of being, and they'll gain confidence and be able to better express themselves through the dialogue practice." Read more about the Generation Global program at childrenbelieve.ca/youth-to-become-global-citizens.

© Ghanaian teachers Odette Kuunaa Dery (left) and Brenda Amadu Amoah are proud to participate in Generation Global. Photo: Philip Maher

As easy as 1, 2, 3: Jacksons headline *Strangers in the Night* Toronto

Rock 'n' roll royalty, The Jacksons, headlined *Strangers in the Night Toronto*, a gourmet charity gala organized by Children Believe and three local partners on Sept. 9. The first event of its kind in Toronto drew 500 guests.

Hosted by CP24 anchor/reporter Shanelle Kaul, the evening of music and dining also featured performances by local rock icons, Honeymoon Suite, and Juno-nominated jazz singer Alex Bird. "We are thrilled at the tremendous show of support for our work with vulnerable children worldwide," says Aki Temiseva, chief marketing and development officer for Children Believe.

Event sponsors were Air Canada Foundation, Eska, Holland Marsh Wineries, Hôtel Bonaparte, Karlo Estates, The Lab, Marketing Kitchen, The Nock Academy, Sleeman Breweries, Spring Mill Distillery, Summer Seltzers and The Westin Harbour Castle.

The proceeds raised from the event will benefit Children Believe, Believe to Achieve Organization, Canadian Health Champions and Your Support Foundation, a Ukrainian relief charity. To see more from the gala, visit childrenbelieve.ca/strangers-in-the-night-toronto.



© The Jacksons headlined the *Strangers in the Night* Toronto gala. Photo: Meg Matera Photography



Prescription for success

Sending much-needed medicine to families worldwide

By Karen Homer

Feeling under the weather? Not to worry, quick relief is nearby for most Canadians. With 11,814 licensed pharmacies operating across the country – one for every 3,216 Canadians, according to the National Authority of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities – we don't have to go far to find a drugstore well-stocked with safe, effective prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

But that's not the situation for children and their families in many communities worldwide where Children Believe serves. Healthcare facilities in low-income countries frequently battle serious shortages of essential medicines and medical supplies. Health staff must care for patients, working with extremely limited resources. On top of this, many parents, already struggling to provide enough food for their children, cannot afford to buy medicine or pay for healthcare services. The poorest and most vulnerable people are often forced to choose between food and medicine.

Since 2019, Children Believe and Health Partners International of Canada (HPIC) have worked together to help change that fact – one box of donated medicine at a time. To date, we have delivered medicines and medical supplies worth \$2.2 million to five countries (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Iraq/Kurdistan and India) reaching over 1.5 million emergency-affected and internally displaced persons.

Canadian pharmaceutical companies donate medicines to HPIC, the only charity licensed by Health Canada to handle donated medicines. Children Believe covers the shipping and handling overseas by air freight or sea. The medicines are then distributed by local

📷 *Dr. Robert Kargougou, Minister of Health and Public Hygiene, speaks to the press at a ceremony in May in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso along with Fred Witteveen, CEO of Children Believe, who presented a shipment of medicines donated in partnership with Health Partners International of Canada. Photo: Philip Maher*

ministries of health to facilities in communities where we serve. Children Believe and HPIC collaborate carefully with national and local health officials to ensure the medicines meet their identified needs.

“Our partnership enables us to reach more people who are most in need at less cost,” says Dr. Feleke Tadele, director of program effectiveness and resources management at Children Believe.

Most recently, Children Believe and HPIC delivered the last of three shipments of mebendazole, valued at \$519,356, to Burkina Faso's Ministry of Health. The drug is used to treat parasitic worm infections, which is a common public health problem, particularly among children living in socially and economically deprived rural communities. The infection is often caused by lack of access to clean water and adequate hygiene facilities. **More than 469,350 women and children, including sponsored children and those displaced from their homes by ongoing violent conflict in Burkina Faso, will benefit from the medication.**

“Thank you to Children Believe and its partner, Health Partners International of Canada, for your support,” said Minister of Public Health and Hygiene, Dr. Robert Kargougou, formally accepting the donation during a May ceremony in Ouagadougou. “This very useful donation comes at the right time and will allow us to help relieve illnesses affecting children, who, along with women, are most affected by this crisis.”

“My heart breaks when I see the suffering.”

Our team responds to the escalating humanitarian crisis across the country

By Karen Homer

One of the fastest-growing, violent displacement crises in the world – and one of the most forgotten.

That is how the United Nations describes the escalating situation across Africa’s Sahel region, spanning Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger.

Over the past five years, more than 2.6 million civilians and 1 million refugees in these countries have fled indiscriminate attacks by armed groups, who now control the Sahel region – an epicentre for conflict. Sadly, we hear little about this humanitarian catastrophe in Canadian news.

In Burkina Faso alone, where Children Believe has

served since 1987, a reported 5,000 people have been killed and over 1.9 million people displaced from their homes. More than half the victims are children.

UNHCR reports that 6,695 schools and 289 health centres are non-functional due to insecurity and violence, depriving millions of children and adults of education and health care. Families are on the brink. Driven from their communities by terrorists, they are also suffering the COVID-19 pandemic’s poverty-inducing ripple effects, including soaring food prices. Drought has compounded the conflict situation, with 7.3 million people currently facing severe food shortages.

Across the country, women and children huddle in makeshift roadside shelters or camp in farmers’ fields, surviving on handouts from already resource-strapped neighbours. As the situation deteriorates, such community hospitality is nearly exhausted, and tensions between groups over water, food and land are rising.

Children Believe is responding to this humanitarian crisis, focused on providing education in emergencies and child protection in displaced communities. Over the past three years, 82,939 children have benefitted from mental health and psychosocial support services, provided in partnership with UNICEF. Families have received cash transfers so they can buy essentials, along with skills training to help them start small businesses, such as selling vegetables and raising livestock. And with funding from the European Union, we engaged 3,050 people in awareness sessions and dialogues to help the displaced families and host communities live together peacefully.

“My heart breaks when I see the suffering of peace-loving communities in my own country,” says Children Believe’s West Africa Director, Christelle Kalhoule. “But I am continually moved by the resilience of the displaced Burkinabé children, women and youth I meet. It’s a resilience honed in the midst of adversity, uncertainty and tragedy. They inspire me and our team to be resilient ourselves and to stretch further to support them more.”





Habibou's hope

Burkina Faso means “the land of upright people.” It’s an aspirational name given to the country by its visionary former president, Thomas Sankara, commemorated as a hero after being assassinated in 1987. His dream and determination live on today in Burkina Faso’s brave people – women like Habibou. Habibou and her family are among the 1.9 million displaced people in Burkina Faso. This courageous mother of two shared her story of survival with Fred Witteveen, Children Believe CEO, during his visit this year to Kaya, a town in the Centre-Nord region that borders the conflict zone. The region is now home to 679,000 uprooted Burkinabé.

“Armed men came one day and they stole our livestock. We were a wealthy family with land, a large home, and many cattle, sheep and goats. We lost everything but the clothes on our backs. Several days later, they came back to kill us. They murdered my two brothers, their wives and their sons. They killed many people that day.

My husband, my two children and I escaped to the nearest safe town by riding in the back of a delivery truck; we were stuffed in with all the goods. But

Ⓞ Habibou (left), her neighbours, Fati and Mouzeima, age 2, are rebuilding their lives with support from Children Believe. Photo: Philip Maher

somehow my husband was separated from us. He became trapped in another area and armed groups were blocking the road. I haven’t seen him for two years. He is blind and I worry about him constantly.

When we arrived in the town, I went house-to-house offering to wash clothes or anything else to earn money to feed my children. It was humiliating. In my village, I had my own successful business as a trader, selling clothes in the market.

Fortunately, I was able to join a women’s savings group [run by Children Believe]. I got a loan that enabled me to buy some goods to resell children’s clothes and shoes. It helps me because when I am idle, I think too much about my husband and my children – what will become of them. I pray hard for peace to return, especially for my children. They were doing well at school at home, but here they are failing because of the trauma they have endured. I want them to be educated. If you are not educated you are in darkness and anyone can do anything to you.”

Stitching together a new future

The rhythmic clicking of her knitting needles seems to soothe Sohaibata as this soft-spoken 14-year-old girl recounts her difficult story.

“Life in my village was beautiful,” recalls Sohaibata, her eyes downcast, focused on the yellow ball of yarn in her lap that she is fashioning into a scarf. “My family raised animals and we grew our food. My father was a farmer and I used to walk in the hills with him. One day, when we can go back, I want to keep knitting and start a small business selling things.”

Sohaibata is suitably proud of her new skill that she learned in one of Children Believe’s 55 child-friendly spaces for displaced children and youth in Kaya, Burkina Faso. The scarf taking shape between her fingers symbolizes progress and hope. For Sohaibata – who has never been to school and can’t sign her name – her knitting is something to show for time lost during her family’s year on-the-run after their community was attacked.

☺ *Sohaibata hopes to turn her new knitting skills into a small business. Photo: Philip Maher*

“The shooting started in my village at about 11:00 a.m.,” says Sohaibata, her expression stoic. “We ran into the house, grabbed some clothes and our cooking pots, and fled. I have a big family of about 15 people. We all escaped, except my uncle who stayed behind. People in a nearby village took us in, but soon the men came hunting for them, too. My family ran from village to village for almost a year until we ended up here in Kaya.”

Sadly, Sohaibata’s story is not unique. Of the 1.9 million people displaced in Burkina Faso, more than 61 percent are children. According to Children Believe research, one out of every two children in the six most-affected regions have experienced or witnessed violence. Of these children, 82 per cent are girls.

To begin to recover and regain a sense of normalcy, these children need psychosocial care and support, educational and recreational activities, and protection services. Children Believe’s child-friendly spaces are safe havens where children can play, learn and enjoy a sense of routine and stability – so critical for their long-term well-being.

In the centres, adolescents also learn vocational skills, such as sewing and carpentry, that are therapeutic as well as a means of generating income. “I started coming to the centre for something to do. The teacher taught me and the other girls how to knit,” says Sohaibata, holding up her finished yellow scarf with a satisfied smile. “Now I can make hats, scarves and shawls. I think I can sell them back in my village. I hope I can go home soon.”



Children Believe and UNICEF

Since 2018, we have worked together to protect the rights and well-being of displaced children in Burkina Faso’s most conflict-affected regions.

- > **38,490 CHILDREN, INCLUDING 19,576 GIRLS** without documentation, received birth certificates, giving them legal existence so they can fully enjoy their rights, especially to education and healthcare.
- > **82,939 CHILDREN, INCLUDING 42,708 GIRLS** in emergency situations, benefited from psychosocial support, including counselling, care and skills building.
- > **1,380 HOUSEHOLDS, INCLUDING 8,329 CHILDREN**, received cash transfers.

Remembering a classmate who never returned

By Dr. Belinda Bennet

In my rural primary school in Tamil Nadu, India, my Grade 5 class had 16 boys and two girls. Two months into the academic year, my sole girl peer dropped out. Our teacher matter-of-factly told us that our former classmate got married.

As a 10-year-old, I couldn't believe what I heard and didn't understand why this happened. By the time I reached college, I learned that early- and forced-marriage was "normal" in my community. Over the decades since, as a development specialist, I have spoken with many girls who believed they had no choice but to get married.

In India, at least 1.5 million girls are married before the age of 18 each year (UNICEF, 2019). Globally, that number is 12 million (UNICEF, 2020), and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, up to 10 million more girls are at risk of becoming child brides over the next decade (UNICEF, 2021).

Girls forced into marriage endure unfathomable hardships. Why does this happen? Child marriage is an outcome of poverty, gender inequality and harmful traditional practices, all issues amplified by the pandemic. Child marriage is illegal in many countries, but often laws to protect children are not enforced.

Children Believe works to protect children's rights, including access to education. Girls with no education are three times more likely to marry before age 18 than girls who attend secondary school or higher (Girls Not Brides, 2022). A key to ending child marriage is changing the attitudes and behaviour of community leaders,

Ⓞ Child brides in India face many hardships due to poverty, inequality and harmful traditional practices. Photo: Tatevik Galstyan

government officials, teachers and parents.

We start by ensuring that government-established child-protection systems are effective by making children aware of their rights and involving them in decisions that affect their lives. We engage men and boys (who traditionally hold the power), and empower women and girls, raising awareness that child marriage is a form of violence against children, particularly girls.

No single organization can end an issue as complex as child marriage. To foster lasting solutions, Children Believe builds alliances across every level of society.

Slowly, change is happening. I am encouraged by recent stories from India and from other parts of the world, like Amina's. Amina is former sponsored child who was supported by her family and her community to continue her education, rather than being married early (see her story on page 11). But, our work is far from done. Like my childhood schoolmate, millions of girls remain at risk. We welcome you to join us to end child marriage so that every girl can reach her full potential. Visit childrenbelieve.ca/end-child-marriage



Dr. Bennet is Children Believe's chief international programs officer.

Education or the altar?

A tale of two Ghanaian girls who faced life-changing choices

By Crystal Lee

Child marriage is a complex global issue that impacts girls disproportionately and is exacerbated by poverty. Nearly 40 percent of girls in the world's poorest countries are married as children, twice the global average (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

The stories of Khadija and Amina, one a child bride and the other a graduate student, illustrate how easily it is to fall into that statistic. Read on to learn about the challenges they faced, the value of support and the essential role of education.

Khadija

Khadija's world changed forever the day her father died in a motorcycle accident in 2019. She was just 13. Alina, Khadija's mother, now widowed with six children, struggled to support her family by farming a small plot of land by their rural home outside of Tamale, the capital of Ghana's Northern Region. Alina has no formal education, but understood the importance of her daughter finishing secondary school. Khadija, still mourning her father, began failing in class and lost her confidence.

"I got 80 percent in math, but in other subjects I couldn't understand or remember what the teacher was saying," explains Khadija in Nanunli, her native language, as she arranges firewood in the small outdoor pit where

Ⓞ Khadija, 16, here with her mother, Alina, faced hard choices after her father was killed in a motorcycle accident. Photo: Philip Maher

she cooks. In Ghana, many children in rural areas drop out of school as early as Grade 3, when classes switch from their local language to English. Parents who are illiterate, unable to speak English, or lack formal education are often unable to help their children with their studies.

Not wanting to waste her mother's meagre resources on school expenses, Khadija reluctantly dropped out in 2021 to look for a job. "My goal was to find a good job and take care of my mother," she says.

Without a high school certificate or skills, this proved difficult. Khadija travelled 600 kilometres by bus to Accra, the capital of Ghana, to look for opportunities. After months of earning little by selling water on the crowded streets and washing dirty dishes on the curb for street food vendors, she turned back home.

Khadija decided to become a seamstress, a profitable profession in Ghana where most clothes are handmade. She shared her plan with her boyfriend, Hakim, 21, who promised her a sewing machine as a dowry if they wed. At 16, Khadija was under the legal marriage age of 18, but her uncle, Fusheini, approved the union, fearing she might become pregnant and be shunned by the community. He hoped the sewing machine would allow Khadija to develop new skills and find employment.

Khadija and Hakim married in February 2022. Khadija has yet to get a job or her sewing machine. Hakim, who

dropped out of school in Grade 8 and is now a carpenter's apprentice, is saving what he can from his small earnings so he can deliver on his promise.

Children Believe and our local partner have since connected with Khadija, offering to enrol her in an all-expense paid three-year nationally certified tailoring course that would give her the skills she needs to become a seamstress. Upon graduation, she would receive a sewing machine to support her business.

Access to education, whether it be school or vocational training, has the greatest ability to promote the rights of girls. For Khadija, it will empower her to be self-sufficient and generate her own income. For Amina, it removed a possible fate as a child bride.

Amina

"Marriage? I will get married someday. But, I need to establish my career first," says Amina, 23, a confident, English-speaking graduate student at the University of Development Studies in Tamale, Ghana.

Like Khadija, Amina lost her father, Mahama, in a motorcycle accident in 2015, but not before he made a lasting impression on her. "I was inspired by my late dad," Amina reflects, admiration and sadness discernable in her voice. "He said education was the only thing he could offer his children and encouraged us to get degrees so we can earn a living for ourselves."

Amina's father was the first in his family to attend school, completing agricultural training college. As an agricultural extension officer, he made a good salary that enabled him to take care of his family.

After Mahama's tragic passing, Amina's mother,

Barichisu, scraped by selling dried grains at the local market to support her three children. Although she did not go beyond primary school, she reinforced her husband's wishes that Amina and her two brothers continue their schooling. Barichisu's community supported her efforts. As sponsored children, Amina and her brothers attended a local school and benefited from the services of a health clinic, both supported by Children Believe. Barichisu joined a village savings and loans association, taking a loan to advance her business, which created valuable income that helped cover some of Amina's educational costs.

On-track to completing a six-year doctor of medical sciences program, Amina is one of the few women in her class. On average, girls in rural Ghana complete four years of school, often dropping out as a result of early marriage, pregnancy, poverty, sexual harassment and various other barriers. "Many families prefer investing in their sons' education because traditionally they remain at home, while daughters eventually leave to live with their husbands' families," Amina explains further.

Amina is thankful for her parents' commitment to her education and the support her family received.

Children Believe, together with our partners, generous donors and the communities which we serve, works to empower young people to overcome barriers preventing them from accessing education, staying in school and pursuing their dreams. We believe education is transformational and will continue to reach girls like Khadija and Amina so they can change their lives and their world.

☺ *Amina, 23, is a graduate student at the University of Development Studies in Tamale, Ghana. Photo: Philip Maher*





A reason to smile

A new dental clinic means so much to families in Blás Garay

By Rosanna Menchaca and Javier Mendoza

Nine-year-old Marilen has only good things to report about her first visit to the dentist.

“I was not afraid. I was sure the dentist was going to help me so my tooth wouldn’t hurt any longer,” says Marilen, a young patient at the recently-opened dental clinic in Blás Garay, an underserved rural community located 100 kilometres west of Asunción, Paraguay’s capital. “I had a tooth extracted and a cavity cured.”

Like most of the 10,000 residents in Blás Garay, Marilen and her family don’t take dental care for granted. Until last year, they travelled long distances to find a dentist or simply went without treatment due to the unaffordable cost of private care. Now, thanks to the combined donations of Canadians who purchased dental and healthcare items through Children Believe’s *Gifts for Good* catalogue, families in Blás Garay are benefiting from the services of a well-equipped dental clinic close to home, open three days a week.

“It is very difficult here in the countryside to get to a dental clinic of this quality,” says Lourdes, mother of

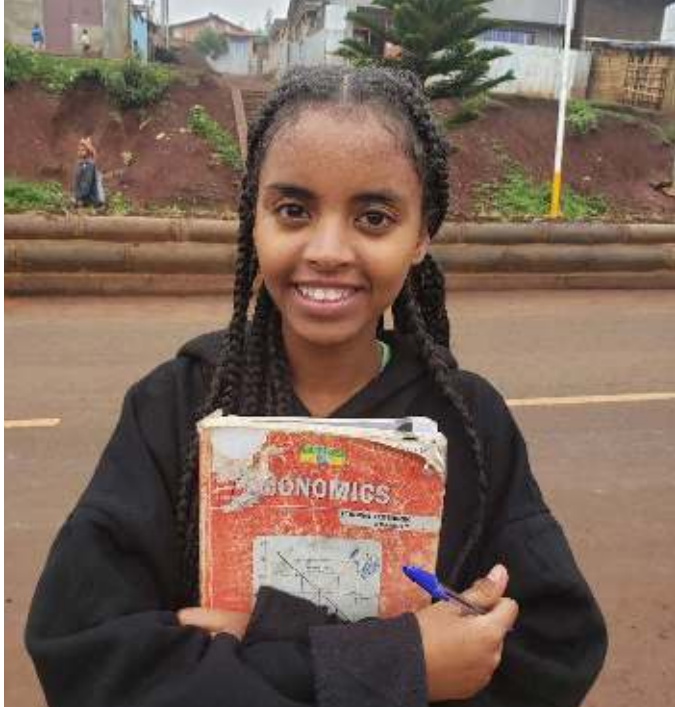
© Dr. Cirilo Congo chats with a young patient at the new dental clinic, made possible by Canadians’ donations to Children Believe’s *Gifts for Good* catalogue. Photo: Javier Mendoza

Antonella, 13, and Cielo, 6, who were recently treated at the new clinic. “Many people in our community can’t travel to another city so there are some who have never been to a dentist.”

Many patients arrive at the clinic suffering with chronic toothaches or even tooth loss. Lack of dental care has made it almost the norm for rural residents to be missing some or many teeth, which greatly affects their general- and mental-health, self-esteem and even job prospects. Low-income families are among those most affected. Now, patients can receive affordable care and learn about the importance of preventative dental hygiene.

Built in the existing Blás Garay Family Health Unit, the clinic was opened in collaboration with Paraguay’s health ministry, which provides the dentists. It boasts a modern dentist’s chair, X-ray machine, instruments, sterilization equipment and other supplies – all in a freshly painted venue with new washrooms and accessibility ramps.

“For children, we promote prevention strategies and healthy habits, daily brushing and frequent dental visits,” says Dr. Cirilo Congo, a dentist at the clinic. “We see the most immediate impact of our work with the adults. Many have lost job opportunities due to the poor condition of their teeth, so the restorative procedures we do are life-changing for them.”



Ⓐ Biruktawit, a Grade 12 student, is making a difference in her community through her advocacy for child rights.

Speaker of the house

This teen MP advocates for change from her seat in Ethiopia's children's parliament

By Gezahegn Gebremariam and Moges Molla

Biruktawit, 17, is choosing to stand up, be heard and make a difference for children across her country as a founding executive member of Ethiopia's first national-level children's parliament. Established in March this year, the parliament is enabling children to voice their concerns, exercise their rights, and ensure that policies, strategies and laws regarding children's rights are executed at all levels.

"I am thrilled to be part of this parliament, and to know that we have a country, people and government that listens to us," said Biruktawit during the swearing-in ceremony. "Together with the concerned ministry and government bodies, we can now bring about the change we aspire to see."

Biruktawit, who lives in Sodo, is quickly emerging as a seasoned young politician, encouraged by her father, a policeman, and her mother, a housewife. The Grade 12 student is gaining advocacy skills through participation

in Children Believe's training programs for youth on child rights and child protection, equipping her to get involved and take action.

Last year, Biruktawit was elected as speaker of her state-level children's parliament in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region in southern Ethiopia. She boldly lobbied for children's rights at high-level, inter-agency meetings involving senior adult officials.

"Biruktawit is a strong leader at meetings where her activism is appreciated by police, justice, health and education officials," says Bereket Tomas, head of the Women and Children Affairs office in Sodo.

Earlier this year, Biruktawit and her fellow child parliamentarians convinced local municipal officials to establish child-protection units in police command posts in their district. They also campaigned to stop the sale of *khat* near schools across the city. A potentially addictive substance increasingly used by youth, *khat* is a flowering plant that contains cathinone, a natural stimulant.

The plant is legal in Ethiopia, where chewing the leaves is a social custom dating back thousands of years. However, *khat* use among students has been linked with mental, physical, social and psychological problems. Police are now enforcing the ban of *khat* sales around school compounds, thanks in large part to Biruktawit and the young lobbyists.



Ⓐ Biruktawit addresses Ethiopia's national children's parliament, of which she is a founding member.

Hope floats for Nicaraguan youth

How Deyra navigated her family tour boat business to success with training from a Canadian-funded youth employment project



By Enmanuel Castro

Deyra was a promising industrial engineering university student in Managua, Nicaragua’s capital, when her scholarship funding abruptly ended in 2019. Unable to continue her courses, Deyra shifted her focus to her family’s boat tour business in Granada – one of the country’s biggest tourist destinations – on the shores of Lake Nicaragua.

“I learned to drive boats, and guide tourists around the lake and the islets. That’s how I was earning an income to support my family and save for school,” says Deyra. “It was a challenge for me because, in my culture, this is considered men’s work. I knew I needed to make money but I was ashamed of my job.”

The business was struggling in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic devastated tourism in Nicaragua. The number of foreign visitors dropped by more than 67 percent, and tourism income fell by 61 percent between 2019 and 2020, according to a Central Bank of Nicaragua report.

With fewer tourists visiting the lake, Deyra knew she couldn’t save enough to go back to university any time

Ⓐ *Considered men’s work by many in Nicaragua, Deyra says she is breaking gender stereotypes and enjoys her job, captaining her family’s tourist boat. Photos: Juan David Granda Aranda*

soon. She had to find a way to improve her employment situation, but she faced difficulties. Youth in Nicaragua are affected by numerous barriers to employment, including skills deficits, a lack of knowledge, expertise and information about job opportunities, as well as discrimination based on social status, ethnicity and gender.

Fortunately, Deyra learned about Children Believe’s innovative youth employment project known as EMPUJE, (“push” in Spanish). Today, she is one of the 12,000 Nicaraguans aged 15 to 30 (including 7,200 women) who are being trained and prepared to find jobs and develop small businesses. As a result of the project, participants have established or expanded 115 small businesses in the last two years, including chicken farms, esthetician services, traditional fast food outlets and tourism services, like Deyra’s family boat tour company.

A five-year initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada, EMPUJE leverages local training, technology and trades. The project provides youth with business and life-skills training,

as well as technical vocational training, and it is implemented by Children Believe in collaboration with the Nicaraguan National Institute for Vocational Education and other local partners. The tailored activities enable project participants to grow and thrive in their own communities, break gender stereotypes, create networks and connect with opportunities offered by local corporations and businesses.

“I found myself, thanks to the project,” says Deyra, who is now 26. “I learned that women can do any job, and I started to enjoy my job at my family’s business. Now, I’m breaking gender stereotypes through the work I do.”

As part of the project, Children Believe created an online platform where participants can take free training from anywhere their computers or mobile phones have an internet connection. Leadership, assertive communication, time management and stress management are among the valuable topics covered in the 13 training modules offered.

EMPUJE will also soon launch Krezco (“I grow” in Spanish), an online platform set up for project participants where they can access exclusive employment opportunities with companies that support gender equality and inclusive policies for youth.

“Private companies want to be strategic partners for

youth trained through EMPUJE, as these young people will be the next leaders, the next managers,” says Ulises Tapia, the manager of a popular restaurant that offers opportunities for EMPUJE participants. “We want to help them gain experience in the labour market and better understand gender-inclusive policies. This program prepares youth to build a better Nicaragua.”

Deyra is convinced that she now has the skills needed to grow her family’s small business. She plans to improve the boat garage, expand the tour operation and promote the business internationally.

“The biggest impact the project had on my life has been getting to know myself and my abilities,” says Deyra. “My parents are proud of me because they know that I don’t give up despite challenges. My story is an example for other young women that there are no gender limitations when you want to do a job.”

For more information about EMPUJE and Children Believe’s global work empowering young dreamers to access education, overcome barriers and be a voice for change, visit childrenbelieve.ca.



☺ Deyra has made a success of her boat tours and has plans to grow the family business.

Education: our first and best answer to helping children build a better future

Children's education is at the core of what we do at Children Believe. Education equips children with skills that position them to be more confident and ambitious, enabling them to live and dream fearlessly. Unfortunately, the global pandemic disrupted children's education worldwide. Today, more than 635 million students remain affected by full- or partial-school closures, resulting in a seemingly insurmountable scale of loss to children's learning.

During the pandemic, our teams stepped up and overcame unprecedented challenges to keep children learning inside and outside the classroom. The result: over 465,200 girls, boys, parents and educators across our six operational countries benefited from sustained access to inclusive, quality education.

We also saw remarkable success in other areas of our community development work. For example, in October 2021 we celebrated the completion of our five-year project in Central America directed at preventing irregular migration. Funded by Global Affairs Canada, the program improved the lives of more than 119,000 people through skills training and small-business development opportunities, empowering them to stay in their countries and work locally.

In 2021, Children Believe also initiated many firsts, even in the midst of the pandemic. For example, in partnership with UNICEF, we extended our humanitarian assistance work across conflict zones in Burkina Faso – a new component in our 35-year record of community development in this country. The outcomes were

significant. More than 100,000 children displaced from their homes by violent conflict received psychosocial care and other support to help them begin to rebuild their lives.

We are grateful for the increasing recognition and support that Children Believe's programs have earned from governments, international donors, fellow development agencies and – most importantly – the many community members we serve. We will continue to respond to the elevated tensions of this world to optimize outcomes in those communities.

Our service to the less fortunate has only ever been possible because of you – our faithful sponsors, donors and partners – whose commitment never wavered throughout the pandemic. Your dedication and generosity inspire Children Believe teams worldwide to do more and to do better every day.

Thank you for believing that change is possible and helping to empower children to change their world.

With gratitude,



Gabriel Olivier is Children Believe's chair of the board.

Our Board of Directors

As of September 1, 2022

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Through the generosity and support of our many donors and partners, Children Believe creates a future of hope for children, families, and communities by breaking down the barriers to education and allowing children to dream fearlessly about the future – to stand up for what they believe in – and to be heard.

Summarized Statement of Revenue and Expenditures

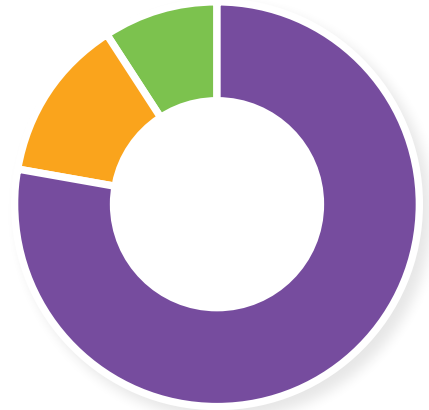
Year ended March 31, 2022

[in thousands of dollars]

	2022	2021
REVENUE		
Cash donations	21,437	22,264
Grants	5,042	8,201
Gifts-in-kind	2,504	3,161
Investment & other income	415	1,858
TOTAL REVENUE	29,398	35,484
EXPENDITURES		
Programs		
Education	12,450	12,104
Health and nutrition	5,730	8,760
Sustainable development	3,766	3,801
Emergency response	214	1,703
Total programs	22,160	26,368
Fundraising	3,706	4,289
Administration	3,023	2,991
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	28,889	33,648
Excess of revenue over expenditures	509	1,836

☺ Youth in Children Believe India's program were provided access to a laptop to help continue studies online during classroom interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expenditures



78% Programs
13% Fundraising
9% Administration

This chart is based on a five year average of our annual expenditures.

CHILDREN BELIEVE is an independent, autonomous organization that directly funds programs and projects in our country offices, working with trusted national partner organizations. We proudly support local communities, employing passionate, highly qualified national personnel to manage and lead our work.



Thank you to our valued supporters for helping to make a lasting change in the lives of children.

It all adds up

Your support improves the lives of children and families worldwide



OVERALL REACH

1,224,181 vulnerable children, families and other socially vulnerable members of target communities were directly reached through our child-rights centred, and family-focused community development programs.



ADVANCE CHILD RIGHTS AND PROTECTION

11,000 at-risk children and youth (60 per cent girls) were supported to continue their education.

768 school communities were equipped with extracurricular and recreational facilities so that pupils, notably female students, could enjoy a safer learning environment.

119,000 girls, boys and young adults received training to prevent irregular child migration and child trafficking.

390 partner organizations were engaged in programs to protect children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence.





SUPPORT THRIVING COMMUNITIES

465,200 boys and girls, teachers, caregivers and parents benefited from sustained access to inclusive and quality education.

101 classrooms and libraries were reconstructed or renovated and **32,877** school supplies provided.

45,232 children (between ages 36 to 59 months) gained access to early childhood education and care services.

14,164 young women and men received vocational or life-skills training and access to employment opportunities.

54,641 births were attended to by skilled health personnel.



PROMOTE EQUALITY FOR GIRLS

195,594 children, youth, parents and caregivers received training to stand up for the rights of girls and women, to take legal and community-focused preventive measures to avoid child marriage and other forms of gender discrimination.

429,848 targeted family members and community leaders were enabled to strengthen favourable attitudes to the wellbeing of children, including positive parenting, violence prevention and gender equality.

24,452 women assumed leadership roles and participated meaningfully in community/public decision-making to influence gender equality.



PARTNER WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH FOR CHANGE

146,629 children and youth were enabled to participate significantly in community actions and contribute to grassroots decision-making.

26 local development partners were supported to strengthen their organizational capacities and improve their work in addressing child rights and facilitate changes in fragile and underdeveloped communities.

264,092 community members, families, girls, boys and adolescents received training to improve awareness and develop positive child-protection practices.



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