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# CHILD VOICE

SPRING/SUMMER 2022

## HOW YOUR SPONSORSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE

**Kpabi, Ghana: a community transformed**

**Children with disabilities overcome obstacles to education**



[childrenbelieve.ca](http://childrenbelieve.ca)

# Sponsorship in the spotlight

*Thanks to you, children are  
achieving the extraordinary*



Amazing things happen when caring supporters, brave young dreamers and Children Believe's team of unabashed idealists come together to help children break down the barriers to education.

**I'm proud of Children Believe's  
successful track record as an innovator**

**in child sponsorship, working for 60+ years in communities around the world. But it wouldn't be possible without you – our dedicated child sponsors and other amazing supporters. You make a huge difference for children, families and communities and we can't thank you enough for your ongoing support.**

As I write, Ukrainian children urgently need our support, too. According to UNICEF, more than two-million children – half of all Ukrainian refugees – have been forced to flee their country as the war rages on. Another 2.5-million children are internally displaced within Ukraine, many trapped with their families in makeshift bomb shelters.

Working through our partner agencies, Children Believe is responding by delivering emergency aid to children and families in Ukraine. Your generous donations are enabling one of our ChildFund Alliance partners – ChildFund Germany – to provide essentials, such as food, baby formula, diapers and cash vouchers as well as psychosocial care for children needing stability, protection and a sense of belonging in this terrible time of uncertainty. And we are proud of the work of another partner, We World Italy, who are helping thousands of refugees escaping into neighbouring Moldova.

Children Believe is committed to helping children everywhere – whether they are escaping a conflict zone or battling a global pandemic at home – to access education, which is crucial in providing stability and normalcy for them. We are grateful for your faithful support that makes this possible.

Sincerely,

Fred Witteveen, CEO  
ceo@childrenbelieve.ca

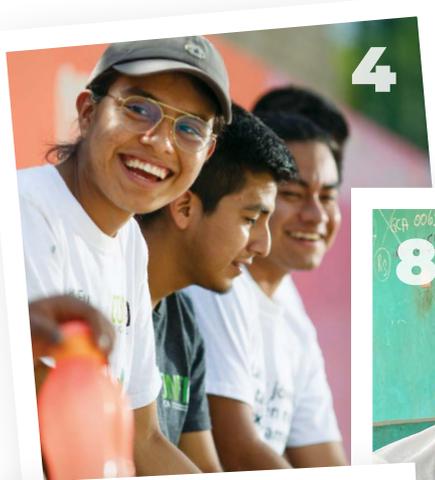


Ⓐ In March, Children Believe partner agencies transferred nearly 100 orphans by train from Lviv to an orphanage in eastern Ukraine for their safety.

Photo: Giovanni Diffidenti/WeWorld

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Cover: A young boy in Burkina Faso stops playing for a moment to share a smile. Photo: Juris Kornets

# CHILDVOICE

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**YOU ASK. WE ANSWER. HAPPILY.**

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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.

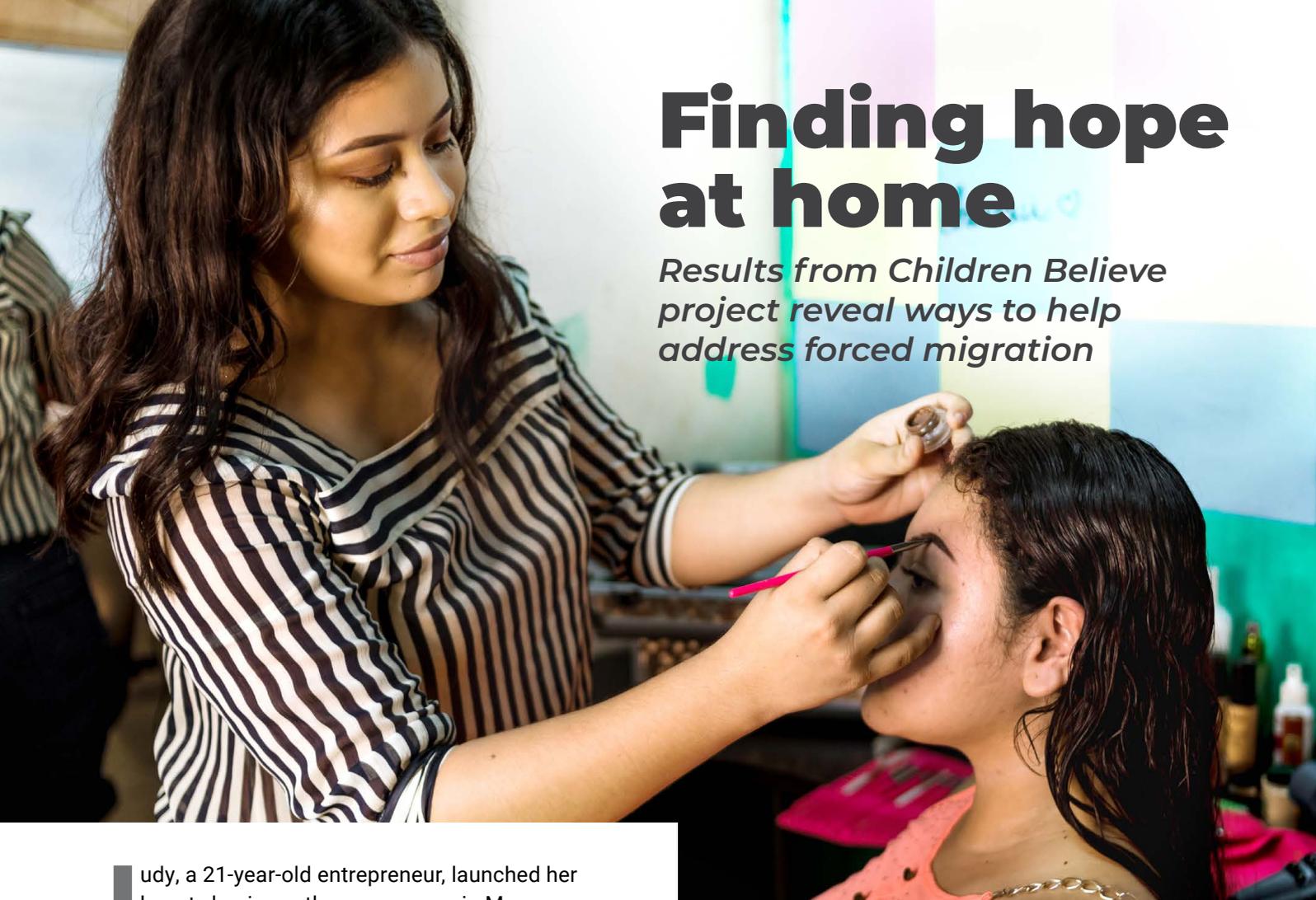
## OUR VALUES

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.



# Finding hope at home

*Results from Children Believe project reveal ways to help address forced migration*

**J**udy, a 21-year-old entrepreneur, launched her beauty business three years ago in Managua. Today, she is celebrating her success, grateful that she wasn't forced to leave Nicaragua just to survive.

Judy is one of more than 620,000 youth from five Central American countries, as well as 180,000 vulnerable children and 483,000 adults, who were supported by Children Believe to remain in their communities. Over the past five years, our innovative project—*Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America (PICMCA)* — has improved the lives of families at risk and removed many of the factors pushing them to leave their countries.

"Through PICMCA, I was able to start my own business as a make-up artist and become economically stable," says Judy. "I saw a positive way forward in my community, instead of believing that leaving was my only option."

More than 281 million international migrants are on the move at any given time, many of them vulnerable women and children. Alarming, according to UNICEF, one-in-five migrants is a young person and 36 million are children.

For most, leaving their homeland is not desirable, but they see no other option. They go in search of basic human rights, such as jobs, education, healthcare,

🕒 *Judy gained support from the PICMCA project to start her own business as a make-up artist.*

food and safety. Classified as irregular migrants, they lack proper documentation or legal status, becoming stateless and in danger of various forms of exploitation. Families risk everything — including separation, incarceration and even death — in search of a better life.

**"Children are trying to cross borders without a parent or guardian as a last resort, but it doesn't need to be this way," says Fred Witteveen, CEO of Children Believe. "These children deserve protection, and the opportunity to grow up safely and happily at home. PICMCA has proven this is possible."**

Led by Children Believe and in collaboration with its ChildFund Alliance partners, ChildFund International and Educo, PICMCA engaged children and youth in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Mexico. The five-year \$15.2-million regional project was designed to improve the well-being of children and youth who are at risk of irregular migration. The Government of Canada contributed \$12.6 million to the project.

Judy described her big ambitions, now that her



business is thriving. “I want to go to university and my small-business venture will help me achieve that,” she explained. “I want to become an architect.... become a professional and provide my family with a better life.”

Recently, Children Believe hosted a virtual global panel, held in partnership with the ChildFund Alliance and Canada World Youth, to further examine solutions and lessons in addressing the irregular migration of children in Central America and Mexico. Moderated by CBC News senior correspondent, Susan Ormiston, the panel brought together representatives from civil society and government, as well as youth from the Central America region.

Watch the complete panel discussion on Children Believe’s YouTube channel, [bit.ly/irregular-migration](https://bit.ly/irregular-migration).



## Top PICMCA project results

- > **85 PERCENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE** agreed the project improved their living conditions, due to youth skills development, employment training and mentorship programs.

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- > **15 PERCENT DECLINE** in young people’s perception of irregular migration as a means of achieving a better life. Creating awareness among children and youth about the dangers of migrating irregularly, and the alternatives offered by their country, proved successful. By the end of the project only 44 Percent of youth still believed their lives would be better if they migrated to another country.

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- > **91 PERCENT OF YOUTH** participants said they now feel safe in their communities, compared to 84 percent at the beginning. This improvement was achieved by strengthening child-protection services, promoting child rights and gender equality, and improving prevention strategies for children who are victims of child labour, discrimination and violence.

- Ⓐ Youth committees and youth-led forums helped to engage participants in PICMCA programs.
- Ⓒ Manuel, right, was interviewed on community radio about PICMCA, talking about the risks of irregular migration.

# What's happening



Photo by Giovanni DiIfranti/WeWorld

## The time to act is now

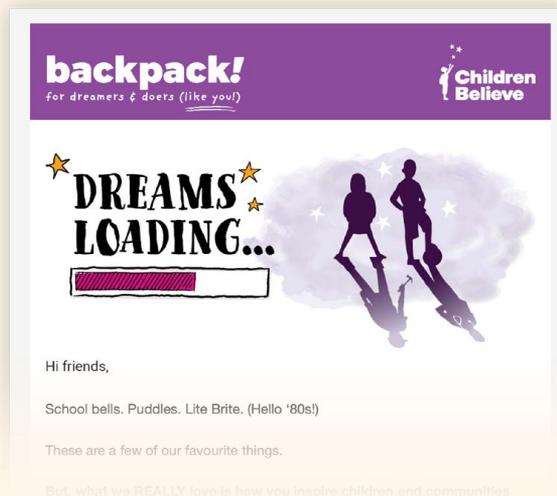
As tragic events continue to develop in eastern Europe, Children Believe is standing in solidarity with our ChildFund Alliance members to ensure emergency aid is available to affected children and families in Ukraine following the Russian invasion.

Alliance partners are providing relief in Ukraine through ChildFund Germany and they continue to need our help. Many are coping with little food or water, no electricity and no heat. Learn more about the relief efforts and how you can help, by visiting [childrenbelieve.ca/help-ukraine-kids](https://childrenbelieve.ca/help-ukraine-kids).

## Unpack your backpack!

Earlier this year, we launched a shiny, new email newsletter we affectionately call, *Children Believe backpack!*

Once a month, we light up your inbox with feel-good news about brave young dreamers (and fabulous folks, like you!) busy changing the world. If you haven't had a look yet, we hope you will. And if



you aren't receiving it, just let us know you'd like to be on the email list by contacting [askus@childrenbelieve.ca](mailto:askus@childrenbelieve.ca).

Why did we call it *backpack!*? Well, tucked inside school bags are tools children need to change their lives and the world—as well as clues to the engineers, teachers and entrepreneurs they were born to be. So be in the know and connect with us so you, too, can get your monthly *backpack!*

## Let's get social

Have you visited Children Believe's social pages lately? If not, you don't know what you're missing! Find us on popular social media sites to read regular posts about how we help children achieve their potential.

We would love to have our donors comment, like and share our posts to help spread the word and invite more people to join our global movement for change.

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# Sponsorship

*Powered by donor love*

**Many children have big dreams, but face big hurdles on the path to achieving them. Children Believe sponsors help them access education—inside and outside their classrooms—so budding biologists, aspiring child-rights advocates and eager engineers-in-the-making can pursue any goal they choose.**

Sponsors believe in the potential and possibility of every child, and help them believe it, too. That can take them anywhere.

As we've seen during 60+ years of work in communities around the world, children are incredibly capable when our community of sponsors—and other supporters and partners—help them trust in themselves and their dreams. Because of caring people like you, children are busy imagining and achieving the extraordinary.

**In the following pages,  
read more about how your  
sponsorship is making a  
difference in the communities  
where we work.**





◀ Mashoud and her mother, Aisha.

Nuhu believes his future is to be a doctor. ▶

# A community transformed

*Lives have been changed in Kpabi*

By William Anim-Dankwa

**W**hile individual children benefit greatly from Children Believe's sponsorship program, the impact on communities can be just as profound.

In Kpabi, an area in Ghana's Nanumba North Municipal District, child sponsorship began in 2002 as the community was recovering from a major conflict that displaced many people. According to the Ghana Statistical Service, Kpabi counted among the country's most deprived communities. Schools were in poor physical shape with limited educational materials and numerous girls were not enrolled.

Since then, significant changes implemented by Children Believe's partner, AG-CARE, have improved life for all. Healthcare facilities were renovated, medicines provided and staff received annual training. New water and sanitation facilities were created and hygiene training provided to the community, creating a cleaner, safer environment.

Raised in Kpabi, Aisha witnessed the positive changes gained from sponsorship for her community and family. Stirring a pot of par-boiled rice, which she is drying to sell for income, Aisha explains that she purchased it with credit she received as a member of the Village Savings and Loans Association, implemented by Children Believe.

Aisha's daughter, Mashoud, was sponsored at age six and is now ready to attend university. Mashoud doesn't think she would have completed all levels of school and been able to attend university, if not for being sponsored.

**"Sponsorship provided for most of my needs, which included school bags and textbooks, as well as furniture in our classrooms and a school (building) for the community, which will be enjoyed by many children after us," says Mashoud.**

Like Mashoud, Nuhu and Abdul, two local youth, also completed high school and are taking steps to attend university. Nuhu's goal is to be a doctor, while Abdul wants to be a pharmacist. They agree that sponsorship benefitted the entire community and created pride among its people.

Rufaida, a fierce activist for gender equality, learned how to advocate through her participation in children's clubs supported by sponsorship. She and her friends collaborate to educate parents in the community to not treat boys better than girls.

Mr. Abukari Alhassan, head teacher of the Kpabi school, says, "The sponsorship program has transformed our community. Soon we will have young people with various skills, who will come back to build this place."

# Bold and brave

*When children know their rights, positive change is possible*



*By Ramki Shanmugaraj and Pamela Vijay*

“Attempt great things and if you succeed, it is success; if not, it is still experience,” says Durga, a university student living in rural southern India. She quotes a proverb that she first heard at a children’s club she attended as part of Children Believe’s sponsorship program. “Those words echo in my mind and I practice that thinking still today. It helped me to want to know more about life and how I could be a visionary.”

At the club, operated by Children Believe’s partner, People’s Action for Development (PAD), Durga and other children learned about their rights and how to advocate to make their voices heard in the community, at school and even to government. PAD has worked in Durga’s region, Tamil Nadu, for many years to champion children’s rights and help communities gain access to education.

As the secretary of a child rights protection forum and later a leader, Durga also learned how to identify and address abuse and violence against children.

Those who knew Durga, now 20, when she was younger would hardly recognize this self-assured young woman today. A once-shy girl born with a partial right

⌚ *Durga points to encouragement from sponsors as one reason children in her community have thrived.*

arm, she was nervous to leave her village alone. Durga, who says she used to suffer from an inferiority complex, gained the confidence to prove herself in education and extracurricular activities among her peers.

**Durga says the child sponsorship program inspired her passion and courage to question abuse, and to boldly stand up for the rights of marginalized children. She now shares that confidence with children in her community.**

“Without the sponsorship program, girls would end up getting married before completing their schooling,” says Durga, who is currently in her final year of studies toward a Bachelor of Commerce degree. “Today, we are who we are because of the nurturing that took place through the trainings, encouragement, motivation, and continuous messages and support from sponsors.”



🕒 *Sintayehu feared her schooling would end after a serious injury, but with help, she continued her education.*

# Willing and able to learn

by Gezahegn Gebremariam

**E**ducation is unquestionably the most powerful tool that children need to change their world. But for Ethiopian children with disabilities, the societal and environmental barriers they face can sometimes seem insurmountable.

At just eight months old, Mihret was assessed with a speech disorder and mental disabilities. Now age 8, she also lives with hand and leg impairments. Her parents help Mihret to eat and dress, and to get around in her wheelchair.

Mihret's mother, Almaz, describes the family's difficult life due to stigma and discrimination in the community related to cultural beliefs, which have for generations construed disability as the result of sin, a source of shame.

Several years ago, Children Believe conducted a "community conversation" awareness campaign as part of its sponsorship program. In time, Mihret's parents and others came to better understand the rights of children, including and especially those with disabilities, to access education.

"Thanks to the child sponsorship program, with door-to-door counselling about inclusive education, now there is no more discrimination and stigma," says Almaz, who looks back with some regret at how her family used to

hide their daughter at home to avoid discrimination.

"Children love Mihret and help her in the class, and they chat and play with her. We are now happy with all the changes we are observing, especially in Mihret's academic performance."

Fifteen-year-old Alazar is in Grade 10 and dreams of being a doctor. He has already experienced several tragedies in his young life. As a one-year-old, Alazar's legs were amputated due to medical complications. At age 10, his mother died, which left his father to raise Alazar and his two younger sisters alone. As the sole breadwinner, the only work his father could find to support them was as a daily labourer.

**As a sponsored child, Alazar has the help he needs to overcome many barriers. "I've faced so many challenges to pursue my academics," he says. "Children Believe provided a wheelchair, school materials, nutritional support and covered all of my medication costs."**

Successful in school, Alazar is determined to get the highest marks in all his subjects. He is on track to reach his goal of supporting his father and two sisters when he completes school and begins a professional career.

Children Believe has long made access to education a top priority in its work, embracing inclusion in all forms, as

## Living with disability in Ethiopia

- **NEARLY 7.8 MILLION PEOPLE** in Ethiopia are estimated to live with some form of disability, or 9.3 percent of the country's total population. (UNICEF, 2019)
- **ABOUT 30 PERCENT** of all people with disabilities (2.3 million) are children and youth under the age of 25.
- **CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES** are much less likely to start school than peers without disabilities. The most recent enrolment figures show only 11 percent of children with disabilities enrolled in primary school and 2.85 percent in secondary school (Ethiopian Ministry of Education 2019).
- **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES** and their households are more likely to live in poverty compared with the rest of the population. In urban areas, the extreme poverty rate is 41 percent higher among people with disabilities than among their non-disabled peers. Children with disabilities in particular, had the highest risk of extreme poverty.

an intentional approach.

"Children Believe strongly promotes inclusive education as we reach out to many less-privileged children who live with physical impairments," says Aynalem Abraham, country director of Children Believe Ethiopia. "We recognize the need to work towards a 'schools for all' approach, where everyone is welcome and we celebrate differences, support learning and respond to individual needs."

Attitudes toward children with disabilities are slowly shifting, as Sintayehu, age 12, learned recently. Life

changed two years ago for her after she fell into a pit, breaking her hips and legs. Her serious injuries meant medication costs, doctor's bills and the need to purchase more nutritional food. Her ability to move freely was severely limited, including going to school.

Sintayehu's fears after the accident were very real.

"I thought I would remain out of school and stay at home or end up as a beggar on the roadside," she says. "My mom and dad were daily labourers and were unable to cover my medication and school fees."

**With help, Sintayehu kept up with her school work. Today, she is with her classmates, fully healed, and supported by friends and family. "Now I am back in school, and I can still pursue my dream to be a designer and women's dressmaker," says Sintayehu.**



Ⓐ *Alazar is achieving academic success given the chance to go to school.*

Ⓑ *Mihret can now attend class and has many new friends.*



# A new computer opens a world of opportunity for Esteban

By Juan Lezcano and Rosanna Menchaca

Like most students in Paraguay during the COVID-19 pandemic, Esteban, 11, has studied remotely. He uses textbook photocopies supplied by his teacher, while following lessons on the family's mobile phone. It's been hard.

"The screen was broken and I couldn't see well. Sometimes I couldn't even hear. I was always worried that my teacher would ask something that I couldn't hear," explains Esteban, a Grade 6 student. "[Before the pandemic], my favorite classes were mathematics and Spanish. But now, the most difficult for me is math."

Undeterred, Esteban had a lofty goal—one he was prepared to save for until he achieved it.

Driven by his ambition of becoming a businessman after he graduates, Esteban dreamed of buying a computer.

◀ Esteban and his mother, Lourdes.



By putting away 1,000 *guaranies* a day (about CDN 17 cents), Esteban had saved CDN\$30 by the start of this year. He did this by helping his mother with her food pantry sales. Even knowing he had far to go, he refused to give up.

"All this time, we were checking computer prices, but we were aware we couldn't afford one," says his mother, Lourdes. "With the pandemic, my husband's carpentry work stopped and our only income came from the food I prepare and sell."

Esteban and his family, including his 23-year-old sister, Luz, and seven-year-old brother, Emilio, are supported by Children Believe's local partner, Fundación Alda, as one of 1,730 sponsored families.

As a sponsored child, Esteban often sends letters to his sponsor. What he wrote recently as a simple comment about his goal of saving for a computer turned into an unexpected miracle. The next letter from his sponsor came in a package much larger than an envelope.

**"I got very excited. I couldn't believe it," says Esteban, proudly describing the laptop he received. "If I could see [my sponsor] now, I will tell her that I love them so much, and that nobody has ever given me a gift like this."**

Esteban says he is amazed that a person so far away could care about him and his family. "I keep all of her letters in a place where they can't be ruined. My sponsor always tells me that I should do my best and keep studying."



# Standing up and being heard

*Fatima raises her voice for herself and her peers*



Ⓐ *Fatima is a serious student, intent on earning a degree in mathematics.*

potential to make her voice heard, not only in matters affecting her life, but in those of others, too. Through the adolescents' and youth network, she and her peers learned about their rights in a safe space.

**"We discussed a lot about the prevention of teen pregnancy, as well as preventing bullying and drug use," says Fatima. "This helped me to see the future with optimism and to believe that I can achieve my dreams."**

Currently studying for a bachelor's degree in mathematics, Fatima's ambition is to be a doctor. Determined to succeed, she travels two hours by bus to and from classes on Saturdays, part of her four-year commitment to graduate.

Fatima's mother, Glenda, a community leader, inspired her to be involved in Children Believe youth groups, and to develop her vision for their community, which has limited access to basic services.

"I love working with other children's parents to raise awareness about the importance of encouraging their kids to believe in themselves and to be a support to help them achieve their dreams," Glenda says.

By Enmanuel Castro

**E**mpowered. The word is at the heart of child sponsorship and is revealed in the success of Nicaraguan youth like Fatima, 18, who stands up for what she believes and goes after her goals fearlessly.

Raised in a rural community in northern Nicaragua, Fatima joined the child sponsorship program at age 8. Today, she is known as being easygoing and quick to smile. Fatima says she has much to smile about.

"Being sponsored changed my life," she explains.

In Nicaragua, families often struggle with the costs of sending their children to school. Children Believe's support helped Fatima, and children in her community, with their primary and secondary education by providing school kits, including backpacks, notebooks, pencils and supplies.

Fatima says the program also gave her a place to connect with other children. She realized she had the



Ⓐ Salomon not only has a successful business today, he employs youth and gives back in his community.

# The sweet sound of success

By Wendkouni Abel Fifou

Salomon Ouédraogo is living his dream. Married with two young daughters, Salomon owns his own business, Global Electronics, where his expertise as a sound engineer is in high demand. Salomon says being sponsored at a young age had a big impact on his success.

**“Without the support of Children Believe, it would have been so much more difficult for me to reach my goal,” says Salomon. “I encourage [your supporters] to continue, because there are always children who live in difficult situations and are in need, especially in this period of (political) insecurity.”**

Salomon’s father, a farmer, struggled to provide for his six children, including paying for their education. The children were often expelled for not paying their school fees. Sponsorship helped Salomon to complete his primary and secondary education, a relief for his parents. Thankfully, sponsorship included providing his school fees, a uniform and supplies, as well as food and medical care.

The sponsorship program also supported Nioko, Salomon’s community located in central Burkina Faso, in a number of ways. Along with the construction of an elementary school and installation of clean drinking water, youth groups were formed to provide a safe

space for children to learn how to address issues of discrimination, social exclusion and violence.

Over the years, Salomon saved the cash birthday gifts from his sponsor to pay for audio-visual training courses after completing secondary school. Today, as a successful business owner, he employs more than 10 people, and trains them in audio-visual management, as well as sound-equipment sales and rental.

Salomon’s former teacher, Cyrille Kabore, recalls his student’s passion for the art of sound when he was young.

“When Salomon was little, he sat next to the sound technician in the church,” says Cyrille, who is now the communications lead at the Christian Organization for Relief and Development, a Children Believe partner working in Nioko. “So it was no surprise he chose to enter the field of audio-visual arts. Salomon worked hard for his success.”

Cyrille adds that Salomon is a source of inspiration for children in the community. He is admired because of his achievements and sought after by music festival organizers in Burkina Faso for his sound expertise. Salomon’s success has also enabled him to support some of his community members with food and clothing.

# Louis Ariano:

*Celebrating a life of kindness and generosity*



Children Believe is fortunate to have a long list of generous supporters, many of whom have been with us for a number of years. We appreciate every one of you. So it is always sad to hear of a friend's passing, including Louis Ariano, whom we lost last year at the age of 87.

A beloved husband to his wife, Elizabeth, and father to his son, Gino, Louis was a faithful child sponsor with Children Believe, who understood the power of education.

Retiring in 1989 to live in London, Ontario, Louis diligently worked part-time to obtain a BA from the University of Manitoba, at age 56. He often said to his children and grandchildren, "Education is something they can't take away from you."

Louis served for 38 years with the Royal Canadian Air Force and was appointed to Canada's Order of Military Merit in recognition of his outstanding dedication.

Helping others was important for Louis and his family.

"My parents were always focused on trying to give back," says Gino. "My dad



made philanthropy a focus, especially later in his life. As an example, he volunteered at the food bank in London, Ontario for many years. He was always touched by those who seemed to have to struggle, and sought to help."

**Louis cared for the vulnerable both at home and abroad. He liked being able to help individual children and learning about their progress, says Gino.**

"Before my Dad died, we discussed the most meaningful charities he had contributed to," says Gino. "Children Believe was important to him, as was the organization's precursor, Christian Children's Fund. He asked us to leave a legacy gift to Children Believe on his behalf."

We at Children Believe are deeply grateful for Louis' lifetime commitment to vulnerable children worldwide, and to the Ariano family for sharing his life story with us.



Ⓐ *Louis Ariano, pictured with his wife, Elizabeth, served in the Royal Canadian Air Force for 38 years.*

# Leaving a legacy for children *will make you feel almost as warm and cozy as this hug!*

And by including a gift in your will for Children Believe, you'll leave a legacy of hope, helping future generations of children achieve their dreams.

If you don't have a will or need to update it, we can help. Children Believe continues to partner with Willfora, a simple and secure, online platform to help you create a legal will for free.

In 20 minutes or less, you can protect your loved ones AND support causes that are important to you – leaving you more time for hugs!



**Willfora**

\*Offer not available to residents of Quebec.

◀ **Visit [childrenbelieve.ca/free-will](https://childrenbelieve.ca/free-will) to get started today.**



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