

At-risk children: How getting an education changes lives.

[Personal stories]

When Ye Win [***not his real name**] was a child he was taken over the border to Thailand and locked up in a fruit canning factory where he was forced to work between 12 to 18 hours a day with armed guards making sure there was no escape.

“I was a frightened trafficked victim and I was scared out of my wits,” Ye Win recalls.

Getting an education was something Ye Win was determined to get, but it seemed like an impossible dream.

In China’s Sichuan Province, 14-year old Yihan [*****] used to fall over almost every day and she seldom spoke and could hardly write. Diagnosed with cerebral palsy, she found school to be difficult and dangerous; she used to injure herself falling on the stairs and in corridors. Her parents could not find a school that would accommodate her disability.

Unfortunately Ye Win and Yihan’s experiences are not unique. Today, there are 58 million children that are not in school because of obstacles like forced labour, poverty and discrimination—among many others. The obstacles that prevent children from getting an education are complex and interconnected, which makes it difficult to come up with a simple solution for this global problem.

[Background/context/history: the why behind childrens’ right to education]

In 1948, the United Nation adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which applies to every state in the world. Article 26 (1), states, “Everyone has the right to education.”

It seems obvious that education is a fundamental human right, no matter where a child lives, what gender or ethnicity they are or what social class they belong to.

It’s been proven that education ends generational cycles of poverty and disease and provides a foundation for individuals and communities to thrive.

Education equips children with the knowledge and skills they need to adopt healthy lifestyles, protect themselves from diseases like HIV and take an empowered, active role in social, economic and political decision-making.

The ripple effects of education reach beyond children and extend to the next generation. Educated children are more likely to have better economic opportunities, raise smaller and healthier families, and make sure that their children also go to school.

So if education is an established human right and that's been recognised globally for over 67 years, why is it that some children still don't have access?

[Three barriers]

There's no one answer: These are just some of the complex and interconnected barriers:

[Child labour] Ye Win's situation is not unique. More than 85 million children are subjected to physical labor, exploitation and trafficking, and nearly 170 million children in the world work to help support their families. Every day, millions of children are denied their fundamental right to education.

[Poverty] Poverty is the biggest and most pervasive barrier to education. Many children have no control over the larger forces in their lives. They are born into cycles of poverty that have yet to be broken or faced with personal tragedy that leaves them alone, scared and vulnerable.

[Discrimination]

Disabilities: Children like Yihan who have disabilities are often stigmatized in their communities—sometimes even by their own families. When they reach school age, their families discover that the schools don't have the necessary funding or resources to help disabled children receive an education. Many of these children end up confined to state institutions or end up living on the streets.

Gender: Over 50% of all out-of-school children are girls. They have additional obstacles that prevent them from getting an education. Some girls start school only to drop out when they start menstruating, because there are no school bathrooms, or they are inadequately equipped or have no running water. In some countries there is pressure on girls to marry early, leave school and start families.

[Solutions]

But global humanitarian organisations like UNICEF and Save the Children are doing something to overcome these obstacles.

UNICEF's Child-Friendly School (CFS) model takes the well-being of the whole child as its starting point. Child-friendly schools are inclusive and gender-sensitive. They have adequate resources and competent teachers who use child-centred teaching methods that make learning fun. They provide clean water, suitable sanitation facilities and school-based nutrition services—including canteens and school gardens.

Save the Children works to give children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. They also fight for national child welfare reform—helping to prevent the placement of boys and girls into government-run facilities. In fact, many

children who had been confined to institutions are now being reunited with their families and are back in school.

By working with communities, local organisations, national governments and international agencies, UNICEF and Save The Children are able to unravel the complex barriers that are unique to that part of the world and offer education programmes that have measurable aims and objectives. They also offer something that's intangible and impossible to measure: hope.

When children like Ye Win and Yihan realise they can change their own future it's like a light bulb gets turned out. Sometimes all it takes is an idea or a book or one caring teacher. But first the obstacles have to be identified and removed.

Now that Yihan is in a special education school—part of a Save the Children project that's funded by the IKEA Foundation—she benefits from having a resource centre and teachers trained to support children with disabilities.

"I have learned so many practical teaching methods that help children like Yihan," her teacher Xue says. "We regularly have vocal exercises, where we use the sounds that are difficult for her to say in new ways."

And Ye Win, now 19 years old, was able to escape months of child labour and go back to school.

"Save the Children and the child protection group literally saved my life and now I have a decent job and I can support my family."

More children need help, and that "light bulb" moment that can change their lives. And they need it now. We have the chance to ensure that every child in the world gets an education – the one they, we, everyone, deserves.

[End title]

The IKEA Foundation believes that every child has a right to education and is in partnership with organisations like Save the Children and UNICEF that are creating positive changes. Find out more at XXX.org.