

## Case Studies: UNICEF and Children with Disabilities

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### Case Study #1: Ethiopia

UNICEF estimates that 98 percent of children with disabilities in Ethiopia have no access to school or vocational training. UNICEF Ethiopia and the Mobility Without Barriers Foundation have set up a joint project for children and youth with impaired mobility that takes a unique approach to the issue of access. The ability to travel is essential if young people with limited mobility—due to accidents, amputations from landmines, or polio, for example—are to have a better quality of life. Typical wheelchairs are difficult to use on the rough roads and uneven terrain found in much of Ethiopia. A new type of mobility cycle has been developed that can handle these conditions. Young people with disabilities, and their parents, are involved in manufacturing and repairing the mobility cycles. This much-needed income relieves financial pressures on the families of children with disabilities, for whom poverty is another barrier to getting education and training. And as young people with disabilities are more able to participate in the life of their communities, negative attitudes about disabilities will eventually begin to change.

UNICEF is also involved in a number of activities to prevent disabilities. It works to vaccinate children against measles, which can cause brain damage and blindness, and polio, which can cause physical disabilities. Programs to provide vitamin A help to reduce the risk of blindness. Adding iodine to salt is helping to reduce preventable forms of mental retardation. Mine Risk Education programs aim to enable children to avoid contact with landmines, which can kill and disable children.

For more information on UNICEF's work with children with disabilities in Ethiopia, visit [www.unicef.org/ethiopia/ET\\_Disability\\_fact\\_sheet\\_Nov\\_06.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/ET_Disability_fact_sheet_Nov_06.pdf).

For information on a UNICEF-supported school for children with autism in Ethiopia, visit [www.unicef.org/ethiopia/ET\\_Feature\\_Joy\\_Nov\\_06.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/ET_Feature_Joy_Nov_06.pdf).

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### Case Study #2: Georgia

In the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, there were few alternatives to institutionalization for children with disabilities until recently. Children with disabilities were segregated from the rest of society, with few opportunities to develop their full potential.

A UNICEF-supported project called “Inclusive Education” is changing this. The project integrates children with disabilities into preschools and elementary schools in Georgia, where they can learn alongside their non-disabled peers.

In the morning, children with disabilities meet in small groups with special education teachers. An expert group has prepared a manual for teachers working with children from the first to third grades, focusing on methods to teach mathematics and language to children with disabilities. Specialists in occupational therapy, physical therapy, language therapy and psychology work with children on a one-to-one basis. Children are also helped to develop basic life skills such as dressing themselves.

In the afternoons, they join non-disabled children in classrooms where they are able to learn and socialize. Non-disabled children are helped to overcome their stereotypes about children with disabilities by working and playing together.

The schools also provide workshops and educational materials for parents of children with disabilities, to help them understand and care for their children.

In a sign that attitudes toward children with disabilities are changing in Georgia, educational law in Georgia was implemented in 2005 to state that children with disabilities are entitled to an education that is compulsory and free, and that schools cannot discriminate on the basis of disability. UNICEF is supporting the government of Georgia with technical assistance as it changes educational policy to respect the rights of children with disabilities.

Read more about the work of UNICEF Georgia on behalf of children with disabilities at [www.unicef.org/ceecis/reallives\\_3238.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/reallives_3238.html) and [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/georgia\\_1817.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/georgia_1817.html).

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### Case Study #3: Sri Lanka

One afternoon, 14-year-old Varatharaj Thinesh was idly digging in the dirt with a bottle when his hand scraped the rubber corner of an anti-personnel land mine. Thinesh could have been killed, or lost his arm. Instead, realizing that he had accidentally found a landmine, he stayed calm and called on adults to alert the police and have it safely removed.

Today, Thinesh is a child educator in a Mine Risk Education program funded by UNICEF. The program, which operates in the Jaffna and Vanni districts, uses a range of imaginative methods to reach young people with messages about how to keep themselves safe from landmines.

For example, a board game has been developed to teach about the dangers of landmines. An animated game involves children playing the role of a landmine, and other children have to demonstrate how to avoid it. Children are taught songs that carry safety messages, and posters are placed in school hallways that illustrate the dangers of landmines. Billboards, lectures and house-to-house visits help to educate parents about the risks as well.

An evaluation of the program shows that awareness of mine risks, knowledge of warning signs for landmines, and understanding of how to avoid danger was increased by the program. The evaluation also found that local communities had sympathetic and positive attitudes toward people who experienced disabling injuries caused by landmines. This is in part due to the fact that the program recruits landmine survivors as educators, who can talk personally about their experiences.

UNICEF is continuing support for this program, which is contributing to a reduction in deaths and disabling injuries from landmines.

Read more about UNICEF Sri Lanka's work on Mine Risk Education at [www.unicef.org/srilanka/reallives\\_1712.htm](http://www.unicef.org/srilanka/reallives_1712.htm) and [www.unicef.org/srilanka/media\\_1719.htm](http://www.unicef.org/srilanka/media_1719.htm).

An evaluation of the Mine Risk Education program can be found at [www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_29565.html](http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_29565.html).

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### Case Study #4: Macedonia

Every child has the right to grow up in a nurturing family. Yet many children with disabilities in Macedonia are placed in institutions that are often understaffed and lacking in resources. Without adequate care that promotes their fullest possible development, many of these children live out their lives in diapers, bottle fed, and physically confined to their beds. They have no contact with their families and communities or opportunities to socialize with other children.

UNICEF Macedonia is supporting a project to eliminate the need for children's institutions by finding them alternative care options. Wherever possible, children are returned to their biological families, and given special assistance to help them cope with the child's special needs. Where no biological family members can care for the child, foster families are being found that can care for children in a home environment. The foster families receive special training and support to be able to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

One foster mother describes her child's progress: "When he first came to the family, he wasn't able to walk, he wasn't able to eat, and he wasn't able to go to the bathroom by himself. Little by little, I taught him how to eat. He can now go to the bathroom by himself at night and he's just greatly improved overall."

UNICEF is also identifying and renovating buildings that can be used as day care centers. It is training staff to make individual education plans for each child, and to locate resources—such as physical therapy and psychological services—that the children need. The centers provide both specialized education and support for foster families that take on the challenges of raising a child with disabilities.

Read more about UNICEF's work on children and disabilities in Macedonia at [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/TFYRMacedonia\\_28532.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/TFYRMacedonia_28532.html) and [www.unicef.org/ceecis/reallives\\_3047.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/reallives_3047.html).