

## Nodira's Story

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Nodira lives in Uzbekistan. She was born with spina bifida—this means that her spinal column did not close completely before she was born. As a result, she is paralyzed from the waist down and uses a wheelchair. Nodira dreams of going to university, riding in her father's car, and being able to walk like other children. But, for now, she is limited to her house and the area immediately outside.

Nodira, which means “unique” in Uzbek, is one of five children in a poor family. Every morning, after saying her prayers, she feeds the hens and goats from her wheelchair. The rest of her day is spent knitting for other people and helping her mother with the household chores.

Nodira has never been to school because it is too far from her home and cannot be reached by wheelchair. A local teacher used to tutor her at home, and she was able to finish third grade. After that, her parents moved to another town, and the tutor came less often, then stopped coming all together.

Despite many difficulties and frustrations, Nodira is fortunate to be living with her family. Many Uzbek families place children with disabilities in institutions. There are many reasons for this, such as negative attitudes toward children with disabilities and lack of wheelchair access in schools. Many families face poverty and cannot care for children with disabilities at home. Children in institutions often receive less attention and affection than they would in a family. Many children in institutions do not receive the health care and education they need.

These days, Nodira does schoolwork exercises at home and reads as much as she can. Still, it is unlikely that she will be able to finish her elementary school education, much less attend university. While missing out on an education is a great disappointment to Nodira, her greatest wish—finding a true friend—can still come true.

“What I want more than anything is a friend who also has a disability,” she says. “Somebody to talk to that will not feel sorry for me or make fun of me, somebody who will understand what my life is like.”

1. What could people in Nodira's family do to make her life better?

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2. What could people in the community do?

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3. What could other people in her country, or in the government, do?

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Source: 2006 *State of the World's Children* report, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/profiles/child7.php>.