CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY & POVERTY

WHAT CAUSES DISABILITY IN CHILDREN?

Children can be born with many kinds of disabilities (called ‘congenital anomalies’), including cleft lip, club foot, cerebral palsy or cataracts. Children can also develop disabilities after birth, through illness, injury or poor nutrition. Children living in poverty are at higher risk of acquiring disability.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY AND POVERTY

Children with disabilities are often likely to be among the poorest members of communities. They are less likely to attend school, access medical services or have their voices heard in society.

Prejudice and discrimination mean children with disability are at higher risk of abuse, and of being excluded from receiving proper nutrition, medical care and humanitarian assistance. Through our work with our partners in the world’s poorest places, we have seen children with disabilities caught in a vicious cycle of poverty.

THE CYCLE OF POVERTY & DISABILITY

Children with disability are at higher risk of living in poverty. Children with disabilities are often discriminated against and not provided with opportunities to go to school and participate in childhood activities for play, learning and social development. The household may also miss out on income if a family member needs to stay home from work to care for the child. In many places prejudice and stigma around disabilities may also mean these children and their families are even further marginalised.

Families living in poverty often struggle to access safe and healthy living conditions, nutrition and health care. This means that the poorest children are at higher risk of experiencing a disability.

cbm

 together we can do more
EARLY MEDICAL INTERVENTIONS

Many children born with disabilities will need medical intervention in their early months so that they can feed and grow healthily. For example, without intervention babies born with cerebral palsy or cleft lip can have trouble feeding, leading to starvation or developmental delays.

Early detection and intervention is also crucial to ensuring good outcomes: the earlier that conditions such as cataracts or club foot are treated in children, the more likely that the procedures will be straightforward and successful.

INCIDENT MORTALITY: Newborn babies are at their highest risk of dying during the first 28 days of life. Every year, around 270,000 newborns die during their first four weeks due to congenital anomalies (or ‘birth defects’). It is crucial to ensure feeding and care during this period to improve the child’s chances of survival and put them in good stead for a healthy life.

Inclusion is also important from day one. Being surrounded and involved in daily family and community life ensures that children are cared for and is how they learn about the world. Sadly, stigma around disability means that in many countries children with disabilities are marginalised in their early childhood, causing devastating psychological and developmental effects. Educating and supporting communities to include children with disabilities in all aspects of family and social life on an equal basis builds strong foundations for everyone’s future.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

We believe everyone has a role to play in fighting poverty and building a world that includes all children with disabilities.

- **Talk to your friends and family** about the opportunities we have to support children living with disability in some of the world’s poorest countries.
- **Pray for our work** with people with disabilities in the world’s poorest places at cbm.org.au/prayer
- **Donate** to life-saving surgery and care to save fragile lives.
- **Email for more information** on our work and how you can help at cbm@cbm.org.au

Whichever way you choose to get involved, we are so grateful for the part you play in our work. Everything we do is possible because of you, our supporters.

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**Approximately 150 million** children under 18 years live with disability

**Around 50%** of congenital anomalies—or ‘birth defects’—can be treated with surgery

In Nepal, almost **6%** of school-age children are out of school. Of those, an estimated **85%** are children with disabilities

**EARLY CHILDHOOD: A CRUCIAL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY**

Early childhood is a time of crucial importance. Children’s experiences during these early years cast a strong influence over their life-long personality, behaviour and capacity to learn. For many young children who experience disabilities, early childhood presents a window of opportunity in which to access the medical interventions and inclusion in community that will provide a strong foundation for them to reach their full potential.

**Opportunity FOR EARLY MEDICAL INTERVENTIONS**

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**Opportunity FOR BEING INCLUDED AS EQUAL**

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A SNAPSHOT OF CBM AUSTRALIA’S CHILD HEALTH WORK...

Globally, the CBM international family works with children with disabilities in 65 countries. Some of the projects that CBM Australia supports through your generous donations include:

Africa
1. **Ethiopia**: club foot services and training for health staff on club foot
2. **Togo**: medical and rehabilitation services for children
3. **Niger**: early identification and treatment of impairments in children
4. **Democratic Republic of the Congo**: home-based rehabilitation for children with disabilities

**Across Africa**: widespread disability prevention measures, including training health professionals and mass drug distribution for prevention of blindness

Asia
5. **Bangladesh**: early intervention, support skills for daily living, physiotherapy, cataract operations, and communication support for children with disabilities
6. **Philippines**: support skills for daily living, including orientation and mobility skills and independence skills
7. **India**:
   - early identification and intervention for children with disabilities
   - provision of assistive devices, braille, speech therapy and mobility training for children with disabilities
8. **Vietnam**: awareness raising and outreach to children with disabilities regarding eye care

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OUR RESPONSE
With your support, CBM is working to break the cycle of poverty for children with disabilities. These children each have unique experiences and needs and face various barriers in accessing the resources they need to flourish.

It takes a village

COMMUNITY-BASED REHABILITATION
Children with disabilities and their families need a range of assistance besides medical procedures. This can include rehabilitation, equipping children with daily life skills, and providing assistive devices such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, glasses or crutches. These services are also provided as follow-up care, as needed, for children who have undergone medical procedures. CBR programs also undertake important inclusion, awareness raising and capacity building work in their communities.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS
Our local partners work with communities to raise their awareness about issues affecting children with disabilities, such as how to prevent disabilities and how to receive assistance. This also involves educating the communities that children with disabilities have so much potential and should be included rather than stigmatised.

OUTREACH
Where possible we focus on outreach to remote and poor communities that may otherwise not be able to access services.
**EARLY IDENTIFICATION**

We train local village health staff and field workers to find children with disabilities and refer them for the treatment and support they need.

**MEDICAL TREATMENT**

We partner with local hospitals and health clinics to give life-changing treatment to children who need it. This ranges from surgery for children born with cataracts or cleft lip, straightening the feet of children born with club foot and rehabilitation for children who have acquired disability through injuries.

*Where surgery is not possible:* Many children live with disabilities that cannot be cured through medical treatment. We believe that it is just as important to ensure these children are able to reach their full potential. Therefore, our focus here is to provide these children and their families with rehabilitation and life skills, and work with their communities to reduce stigma and ensure they are included in community life.

**MATERNAL HEALTH**

CBM International and our partners work with mums-to-be to ensure their babies stay healthy through nutrition advice and pre-natal check-ups, helping to prevent disability and identify any complications early on.

**INCLUSION**

Children with disabilities are often unfairly excluded from education. We work to help families, schools and communities to realise the importance of including children with disabilities, and support them to do so.

**CAPACITY BUILDING**

In order to achieve long-term, sustainable change we know it’s imperative continue to build the capacity of our local field partners. This includes training local professionals in the health, education and disability sectors to continue carrying out work with children with disabilities, and providing equipment and infrastructure to ensure children grow and reach their potential.
Fred’s early years were heartbreaking: born with a cleft lip and palate, he could not feed properly and almost starved. Even though he survived, he faced a life of exclusion—kept away from school and the community who found his slurred speech difficult to understand. But thanks to CBM supporters, Fred has received the surgery, rehabilitation and support he has needed and is now full of smiles!

Cu and Hong Le Thi, a couple from Hue City in Vietnam, have endured times of great hardship and also unexpected joy in their lives. When their first daughter died of liver disease at 23 years of age, they were devastated and thought they would never have a girl again.

But two years later, they were told that a baby girl had been abandoned in a nearby rubbish bin. They rushed to the bin and found the baby being circled by three dogs. Any further delay and the baby would have likely been killed.

They took the baby home and cared for her for the night while deciding what to do. They reported the child to the local authorities and police, but when the mother did not come forward they decided to keep the child and raise her as their own—an unexpected blessing of a second daughter, whom they called Nguyen.

Cu and Hong were delighted with their new baby girl, and their three adult sons were quick to welcome a little sister.

But when Nguyen was two and still having problems walking, her parents began to suspect something was wrong.

After visiting a couple of doctors, they received the diagnosis that Nguyen had hemiplegia, a paralysis condition that weakened the left side of her body.

“I was upset when I heard her legs were weak because I realised life was going to be harder for Nguyen,” said Cu. In Vietnam there is still much discrimination against people with disabilities, and Nguyen’s parents worried that this unfair prejudice would mean Nguyen would not be given the same opportunities as other girls to go to school and work and to marry.

But then the family found out about the community-based rehabilitation (CBR) work of a CBM local partner. They met with a CBR worker called Tram, who started coming to their house five days a week to work with Nguyen.

Again, after grieving Nguyen’s disability, her parents have found unexpected joy—this time through the support of CBM. Tram has told them that the current program to strengthen Nguyen’s leg muscles and help her walk will take at least three months.

Cu is committed to providing his daughter every chance at a better life. “I would like her to go to school in a couple of years just like the other children her age.”

Thanks to CBM and our generous supporters like you, that is possible for Nguyen and many other children like her.