

FINDING
THE
WAY
HOME



FINDING THE WAY HOME

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INTRODUCTION BY **GEORGETTE MULHEIR**
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Protecting Children. Providing Solutions.

HBO[®]

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Lumos is the spell I created in *Harry Potter* that brings light to dark places.

Lumos is the spell I created in *Harry Potter* that brings light to dark places. A single word that can change things, with long lasting effect.

As we all know, in the real world, it is not that simple. Sustainable change requires hard work—and rarely happens in an instant. Today, nearly two decades after learning about the plight of institutionalized children, I’m struck by how far we have come . . . and at how much work there is still left to do.

The reason I set up Lumos is well documented. In 2004, I came across a photo in a newspaper that was so startling I nearly couldn’t bear to read the accompanying story. On the point of turning the page, I told myself, “*You must read this. And if it’s as bad as you think it will be, you must do something about it.*”

The story *was* worse than I had imagined: It featured a child who spent twenty-three hours of each day essentially locked in a cage. And as I read on, I discovered there were thousands more children like him—and millions more in similar situations. In fact, there are an estimated eight million children residing in orphanages throughout the world today.¹ Shockingly, 80 percent of them have parents or family members who want to raise them² but are prevented from doing so for reasons that are mostly rooted in poverty and lack of resources.

Seeing that single photo made me a witness to the atrocities happening to marginalized and poor children across the globe. And once I became a witness, I had to act.

Lumos was launched in 2010 from what started as the Children’s High Level Group, and unlike the spell Harry and his friends use, this Lumos is much more than just a simple word. We are a global, ambitious organization committed to ending the systematic institutionalization of children by 2050. Lumos coordinates with other similar-minded nonprofits and governments to solve this entirely preventable—and reversible—problem. Our vision is a world in which all children have the opportunity to grow up in a safe, caring family or, where there is no alternative, in special, caring environments that meet their needs and consider their rights.

We do this carefully, and with great respect to the cultures, traditions, and beliefs of the regions in which we operate.

Lumos understands that most people supporting the world’s orphanages, whether financially by individual donations or by large-scale contributions, government funds, or through other means, do so with the best of intentions. But eighty years of research has proven that orphanages are harmful to children’s development, and that it is less expensive and more successful to close orphanages and instead redirect their funds toward community-based solutions that support children in their homes, where they belong.

Through my involvement with Lumos, I’ve met some incredible young people just like the ones you’ll read about here, whose childhoods were tragically formed by forces beyond their control, but who now are able to thrive in supportive, loving environments. All these stories demonstrate the firm beliefs at the very heart of Lumos: that families belong together, that children do best when raised in a family

environment, and that the problem of institutionalization is solvable and reversible. The families featured here prove that there is hope, and that together, we can ensure all children are given the futures they deserve.

This book pays tribute to the hundreds of people around the world who can make this happen, from the people who work tirelessly to help the youngest and most vulnerable members of society, to those who themselves have been directly affected by the structures and machinations that enable institutions to continue to exist.

Imagine a world where every child is raised in a loving family environment, with the resources they need to thrive.

My sincere thanks go to Georgette Mulheir and the entire Lumos team; and to our partners and supporters, who are tirelessly working to make this wonderful goal a reality.

THANK YOU.



When you invest in families, it is like investing in the blacksmith who forges the suit of armor a child needs: *That is love.*

I walked into my first orphanage in 1993, soon after the Romanian revolution that overthrew the Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. In the immediate aftermath, television screens across the world were filled with images of emaciated babies lying in squalor and skeletal children with shaven heads and sunken eyes, some tied to beds, others rocking back and forth. But nothing prepared me for the reality.

Despite housing five hundred fifty babies and infants, the building was silent. The smell hit me before I ever heard or saw the children, a distinctive odor I have since encountered in hundreds of residential institutions all over the world—a combination of boiled cabbage, stale urine, disinfectant, and fear. I was shown into room after room of newborn babies, each lying in a cot in silence, staring into space with desperation in their eyes. Many had soiled diapers and must have been distressed, yet made no sound. I saw twelve-month-olds the size of babies half their age, rocking back and forth, flapping their hands. Toddlers with shaved heads and hollow eyes, running and clinging to strangers, calling us “Mama, Mama,” desperate for cuddles, but gaining no comfort from the physical contact. I later found out the mortality rate was high. We were losing babies every week.

I had to stop myself from asking “What’s wrong with all these children?” Because it was clear—and would later be proven scientifically—that there was nothing wrong with the children. This mass of misery was the product of the way the system operated. The babies rarely had contact with other human beings, apart from a few hurried moments of feeding and changing. This lack of stimulation, of human interaction, of love, which occurs so naturally in the family environment we do not even notice it, was delaying and distorting the development of their brains, their bodies, their personalities. I had witnessed how the act of separating children from their families and raising them in an institution results in the rapid and complete destruction of what it means to be human.

I watched the efforts of many organizations that had flooded into Romania to help. Their focus always seemed to be on improving the orphanages. It was an understandable immediate response: clean the building, provide diapers, clothes, better milk formula, clean needles, vitamins, medicines. But no one seemed to be asking the most important questions.





More than 95 percent of the children were not orphans, so where were these babies' families? And how much did this massive system cost? Surely it was cheaper to support families.

I had been hired to set up Romania's first service to keep mothers and babies together, housed within the orphanage building. Within months, we were taking in our first families and with hardly any resources, we soon had a nearly 100 percent success rate of keeping mothers and babies together. And the children who were raised with their mothers looked strikingly different from their peers across the hall. They were healthy, happy, and of normal development, despite receiving the same nutrition. I watched a living social experiment unfold before my eyes.

After Romania, I worked across Eastern Europe and in North Africa, helping governments and communities to dismantle institutions and replace them with family-based care. But everywhere I went, I was struck by how few people understood the harm of orphanages. Fewer still believed it was possible to end this travesty and replace it with a system of care in families and communities.

Then J.K. Rowling founded Lumos, making it possible for us to demonstrate how systems of care can be transformed to move children back to families, even in the most challenging social contexts. Together with many partners—NGOs, donors, self-advocacy groups, religious organizations—we are building a global movement to end the institutionalization of children.

But given the eighty years of evidence proving the harm caused by orphanages, that most children in orphanages have living parents who love them and want them, and that orphanages are more expensive than family-based care, why do they still persist? Why has this problem not solved itself?

Partly, the answer lies in vested interests in the status quo. The people working there are afraid of losing their jobs. Donors who have invested in orphanages want to believe they are a social good. More recently, traffickers have spotted an opportunity in orphanages, graphically laid bare in *Finding the Way Home*. Partly, the problem is awareness. Too few people around the world even know the problem exists, let alone feel compelled to engage in the solution.

HBO's decision to make the powerful documentary *Finding the Way Home* is a pivotal moment in helping the world understand how orphanage care destroys children and how only



the unconditional love of a family can rebuild them. Together with partner organizations across the world, we gathered more than fifty stories of children who had found their way home from orphanages to families. The film focuses on six of these families, showing us the many reasons children end up in orphanages and the variety of family solutions that exist across the world to rescue children and give them a second chance in life.

Thanks to the kind generosity of Scholastic, this book to accompany the film gives voice to many more of the children. Morgan Baden's beautiful treatment of each of the children's stories is matched by Brendan Bannon's stunning images. Together, they take us to the heart of what family means. They teach us we can survive with insufficient food and shelter, but we are lost without the protection of a mother's love. They give us hope that these happy endings will one day be the lived experience of millions of children currently languishing in institutions across the world.

At Lumos, we hope *Finding the Way Home* will help raise awareness among the many generous people who support orphanages to redirect their funds, energy, and commitment to support families and communities. There is an almost innate desire to give to orphanages. Donors can see a physical building, with the children all in one place. It feels like you know where your money is going. You can perhaps even name the building in memory of a loved one. You have a place you might one day go and visit. You imagine the walls and roof, the heating system and sanitation are providing safety and shelter for the children. But as Martina, who had the good fortune to be taken from an institution to live with a foster family, said: "We should stop investing in buildings and start investing in families. Because when you invest in families, it is like investing in the blacksmith who forges the suit of armor a child needs: That is love."



HAITI

Haiti was thrust into the global spotlight in 2010, when a record-breaking earthquake hit its capital, Port-au-Prince, nearly leveling the city. The earthquake killed or injured half a million people and displaced three times that, leading, ultimately, to a humanitarian crisis the small, poor country had never before seen. Struggling even before the 2010 earthquake, Haiti has never fully recovered from it, due in part to a string of additional natural disasters that befell the island in the years since.

With a high level of poverty and very limited social services, Haiti already struggled to respond to the most vulnerable children. The poorest among them have long been at risk of family separation. Before the 2010 earthquake, about one hundred orphanages operated in Haiti; afterward, that number shot up to seven hundred.³ On the surface, this seems to make sense:

With so many casualties, it's likely many thousands of children lost their parents, but most orphaned children across the world are taken in by their grandparents, aunts, and uncles, and this is what happened in Haiti. A deeper look at the orphanages reveals the hidden truth: Out of the thirty thousand children institutionalized in Haiti, an estimated 80 percent have at least one living parent.⁴ Most of them would care for their child given the right support. This is true globally, too: More than 80 percent of the eight million children institutionalized throughout the world have families who love them and want them.⁵

A MANUFACTURED CRISIS

A natural disaster brings out both the best and worst in humanity. After the earthquake, thousands of people flew to the region to offer their assistance, and donations poured in from



A natural disaster brings out both the best and worst in *humanity*.

around the world. Billions of dollars were pledged by governments, and many kindhearted individuals donated, too.

However, with such limited infrastructure in the country, connecting the youngest survivors of the earthquake with their families was a huge challenge. Hundreds of new orphanages were established in the months following the event, as well-meaning volunteers thought this would address the problem. Then, with the best of intentions, much of the post-earthquake efforts focused on filling these newly founded institutions with Haitian children rather than on sustainable solutions to strengthen families and communities.

Rather quickly, a well-meaning but ultimately damaging idea began spreading through Haiti: *Foreigners like to volunteer in orphanages, and want to donate their money to fund them.* As this idea spread, those people managing institutions began to believe that, in order to attract sufficient foreign donations, they needed more and more children to come through their doors. They needed supply to meet the demand.

As a result, vulnerable children became a means to an end.

Today in Haiti, children are often recruited to orphanages through a variety of circumstances: Some are outright purchased, coerced, or deceived, and then, once institutionalized, they are often neglected, abused, or exploited, purely for profit. They are, simply put, trafficked.

Orphanage trafficking is increasingly recognized by the United Nations and the US government, and it is a lucrative business. Lumos found that annually, at least one hundred million dollars is donated to Haiti's orphanages. Children are forcibly separated from their families every day to feed this business. Today, the perceived "orphan crisis" in Haiti is now, instead, an "orphanage crisis."

The exponential increase of orphanages in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake has tragically become the model for other countries facing similar disasters. Establishing new orphanages is now the go-to international response following a disaster, and is undermining efforts to create broader child protection and social care systems. This manufactured crisis will take years to dismantle.





A TRAGIC TURN OF EVENTS: ILOVE'S STORY

Ilove's story, like so many others, begins with poverty. Her parents lived on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince and decided to send six-year-old Ilove and her thirteen-year-old brother, Willy, to live in the capital with an aunt. There they could attend school and, hopefully, have a better future than they were sure to have in their home village.

When the earthquake struck, their aunt was presumed dead, and Ilove and Willy were left alone and scared. As unaccompanied children with no way to find their family, they, like many other Haitian children in the aftermath of the earthquake, were referred to an orphanage. They would remain there for six long years, growing increasingly malnourished and falling further and further behind academically. When Lumos first met them, Willy said, "I have been separated from my family since 2009. My mother and father have had no word of our existence for six years. They have had no news of us and we do not know where to find them. We miss them very much."

Meanwhile, their parents missed them, too, and searched desperately for their children. But with the capital in a state of utter destruction and without any government resources or infrastructure, finding Ilove and Willy was near impossible. Their family did the best they could to find their children. When they learned Ilove's aunt had passed, and could find no trace of their children in the devastation of Port-au-Prince, they assumed the worst.

In 2015, the government's child protection department, Institut du Bien-Être Social et de Recherches (IBESR), had been alerted to concerns of abuse in institutions and asked Lumos to join them on an exploratory visit. During this visit, members of the Lumos team met Ilove and Willy and decided to make every effort to find their family. Through their connections and expertise, Lumos was able to trace their roots to Artibonite, in the west of the country, where the community was stunned to learn Ilove and Willy were alive.

With help from community elders, the teams at Lumos and IBESR were able to then find Ilove and Willy's family, who had actually relocated to Port-au-Prince years earlier in an effort to find their children. Finally, after six long years, during which each believed the others were dead, the family was reunited.

Today, both Ilove and Willy are in school, working hard to catch up to their peers. Lumos and IBESR have helped their parents by offering training centered on parenting skills and financial independence, even with the aftermath of disaster and the systemic poverty that wreaked such havoc on their lives. Thanks to this training, supplemented by a grant, Ilove and Willy's parents now sell products such as rice and beans in their community so they can provide for their family. Ilove has become a leader of a group of young people in Haiti who are speaking out against orphanage trafficking. Through her work, she educates the government and various community officials on how to protect all Haitian children and ensure they grow up in loving, nurturing families.

In June 2018, Ilove joined J.K. Rowling and other young people from around the world to take her message to the highest level of the European Union at the No Child Left Behind conference in Brussels. She told the European Commissioner responsible for funding Haiti, "I am very happy to meet you today and to share a very important message with you. I come from Haiti and I know how much you love my country because you give a lot of help to Haiti. What I would like to ask you is to stop giving money to orphanages in Haiti. And also, to help the Haitian government to help each child to live in their family."

Now back in school and continuing their education, Ilove and Willy have big plans for their futures: Ilove wants to be an accountant and Willy would like to be a mechanic.







THE PROMISE OF EDUCATION: DIEGO'S STORY

Like Ilove and Willy, Diego has a happy ending to his story. But the circumstances surrounding his childhood were far from positive.

Diego was just a baby during the 2010 earthquake. He, along with his mother, Gertrude, and the rest of their family lived in a rural suburb of western Haiti called Colladere. "Colladere is a very difficult place," says Gertrude. "There's no money, the harvest isn't good. The food from the garden is the only way to make a little money to pay school fees. When the garden doesn't bear fruit, the kids get sent home from school because parents can't pay."

Throughout the entire country, families like Diego's struggle: The poverty rate hovers around 58 percent; the extreme poverty rate around 25 percent.⁶ Soon after Diego's birth, his father abandoned the family, leaving Gertrude to raise her two children alone. "After Diego was born, my mother took care of me, because I wasn't selling anything, I wasn't working," Gertrude says. "After my mother died, I had no one to help me. I couldn't even keep up with the kids' school fees. Life became difficult."

It was a full, if hard, life. "I used to go to school," Diego explains. But he adds, "Sometimes I'd spend the day without eating, and went to bed hungry." Life became even fuller when Gertrude had two additional children, and soon, Gertrude was raising her children alone, with no income, no support, and no social services. And Gertrude's—and Diego's—circumstances quickly became dire.

It's this kind of desperation that some orphanages count on. In many regions throughout the world, institutions often pressure families into placing their children in orphanages simply to access basic services they can't provide themselves. Gertrude was about to learn firsthand how easily a vulnerable family could be manipulated into giving up a child through false promises of a brighter future.



The orphanage industry can be a *surprisingly* lucrative one.

THE BUSINESS OF CHILDREN

While most volunteers and donors following the 2010 earthquake were operating with the best of intentions, some were not. The orphanage industry can be a surprisingly lucrative one. In Haiti, as well as many other countries, orphanages actively seek out children to recruit, because the more children there are, the more government funding they receive . . . and the more donations from foreigners who believe they are helping “save” less fortunate children. Gertrude was a perfect candidate for this kind of exploitation: single, too many mouths to feed, and no support.

When a man named Gary approached her and offered help, Gertrude listened. “They said it was a nice place, the kids will have everything they need,” Gertrude explains.

Gary represented himself as an educator from a Port-au-Prince-based school seeking students. The school could take one of her children, he said, and provide him with the education he so desperately needed, and would definitely not get otherwise, in order to make a better life for himself and, ultimately, for Gertrude.

“I made that decision, because I realized I couldn’t afford to send him to school,” Gertrude notes. “The day I sent him off was a Wednesday. I sent him away . . . I sent him away, but not with a happy heart.”

Sending a child away would be emotionally hard, Gertrude knew, but she also knew that education was Diego’s path out of poverty. Diego would receive food and schooling, opening up all kinds of opportunities for his future. Wouldn’t any good parent want this for

her child? Her desperation and hope for her child’s future mingled with Gary’s convincing and bullying ways. “I had no choice but to agree,” Gertrude tells us.

So Diego packed his meager possessions, said good-bye to Gertrude and his siblings, and accompanied Gary back to Port-au-Prince to begin his new life. He was just six years old.

As it would turn out, he was also the victim of a scheme.

In the orphanage industry, Gary is what’s known as a “child-finder.” While this term may sound innocuous, child-finders and the institution directors who pay for their services are, in fact, child traffickers. Once Gertrude gave Diego to Gary, the promises of care, education, and opportunity evaporated. Gary did what he was paid to do: He delivered Diego to an orphanage. It was his job to boost the orphanage’s numbers, using whatever means and telling whatever lies necessary, because the more children an institution has, the more funds it can solicit. Diego was trapped.

The orphanage was a bleak and scary place. The day Lumos first entered, there was no adult caregiver on site; instead, the older children were charged with looking after the little ones. There were too few beds, so some children slept on a concrete floor. The roof leaked. With no potable water, the children had all kinds of intestinal infections. Food was scarce. Starving and neglected, Diego spent his nights shivering from cold.

“I didn’t eat well,” Diego recounts. “They only gave us plain soup to eat . . . I wasn’t in school . . . I was scared.” Now, when asked how he was treated by Gary, Diego says, “He used to beat us. Beat us badly. He used to hit us hard.”



FINDING DIEGO

In March 2016, Lumos staff learned about the terrible conditions at this institution and made immediate plans to investigate. When they found Diego, he was underweight and anemic, riddled with parasites. He vomited up the little food he was given. He had grown closed and shy in his year at the orphanage, had fallen behind both academically and developmentally. Diego became a priority case for family reintegration.

The mission of Lumos is to end childhood institutionalization by 2050, replacing orphanages with family- and community-based care, so that all children can grow up in loving, nurturing, protective families. With family reintegration as a top priority, Lumos partners with allies and advocates to create lasting change.

In Haiti, because of the sheer volume of illegally operated institutions and the lack of infrastructure and connectivity, it can be near impossible to keep tabs on children's whereabouts. The problems that existed before the 2010 earthquake became magnified exponentially. Once trafficked into the orphanages,

children simply disappear. If they are taken when they are young, often they cannot remember their parents' names or any other identifying details, so tracing families is a real struggle.

In Diego's case, Lumos, working with IBESR, made a visit to Diego's hometown of Colladere in May 2016 to try to find his family. There was no information about his parents in his file, so the team met with local community leaders to get information about where Diego might belong. Through the efforts of dedicated social workers and strong community networks, they were able to make contact with his mother that very same day.

When Gertrude learned about Diego's condition and about how he had been treated, she was shocked. Within days, Lumos and IBESR were able to bring Gertrude to the orphanage to pick up her son. She explains what happened on that day in early June when she was reunited with her son:

"When I called Mr. Vernet [the orphanage director], he said all the kids were fine, they're doing really well where they're at. That they were in school, when in fact they weren't. When

we went to pick them up, we didn't even get to meet him, he didn't even return the birth certificates. The parents waited for Mr. Vernet, but no one met him. All the kids left without him being there.

"When I arrived, I found Diego wearing a huge old shirt. It was filthy. He was dirty and barefoot. Where he was living was completely, completely awful. When we left the orphanage, we came to my sister's house before coming home. When we got there, he kneeled scrunched in a corner. All the other kids were fine, but him, he was bent over in a little corner.

"If it was not for Lumos's intervention, my child might have died."

The process of family reunification takes time, patience, and lots of support, including training and regular visits, and an understanding that having the most basic of needs unmet can upend any progress made. When children have been separated and institutionalized for some time, particularly younger children, they are traumatized and do not always remember

their parents well. It takes gradual assistance to rebuild relationships and make sure children are coping. With the aid of Lumos in providing school fees, uniforms, and supplies, as well as parenting and business skills training, Gertrude now has the foundation with which to keep her family together.

Today, Diego is making good progress at school and is working to overcome the trauma he has experienced. Gertrude is really proud that he has learned to read and write. He loves to play with other children in his village, and Lumos continues to provide support to monitor his progress and safety. Diego says that when he grows up, "I would like to be a great citizen and help my community and my country." There are still echoes of the trauma he suffered, but every day at home within his family and community, he grows more and more secure in the knowledge that his mother's love will protect him.

"I love my mom," Diego says. "I'm good. It feels good to be home."



THE LASTING EFFECTS OF CHILD TRAFFICKING

In many ways, Diego is lucky. He's back with his family, getting the help he needs. He's surviving and, with his family's protection, he now truly has the opportunity to learn and grow and break out of poverty. But there are countless stories of trafficked children around the world who have been lost—to the streets, to morgues, to prison systems. In Haiti, generations of children who were trafficked to orphanages despite having families who want to care for them have nowhere to go once they age out of the orphanage.

Lumos has worked with many of them, including Rodney, now twenty years old, whose childhood in an orphanage rivaled that of a war zone. He recounts extreme physical abuse—punches to the face, lashes with a belt—on top of emotional abuse and abandonment. One day while Rodney and some of the other older children were out, the orphanage moved locations without notifying them. “When they left us behind, I lost all hope,” he said.

Hugens and Vladimir, brothers who are now twenty-four and twenty-seven years old, were institutionalized as young children after their family realized they couldn't care for them, and their uncle married the woman who founded the orphanage. There were promises of education and enticing future prospects. But instead, it was a corrupt place where exploiting children and volunteers alike was a deeply embedded practice. Today, they say whatever vision Americans have of orphanages is wrong. “The kids don't get taken care of well because all their ideas are to make money,” says Vladimir.

Financial corruption in particular was rampant at the institution they attended. Vladimir recounts many of the ways he began to notice how the orphanage was exploiting them, such as how donated items were sold off rather than reaching the children for whom they were intended. Vladimir believes he and the other children were fed only enough to survive, despite the ample food donations that arrived regularly. “When you send money to an orphanage, if it really did make it directly to the kids, that'd be different,” Hugens explains. “But that is not how it is. So, if someone would like to help a kid in Haiti, I wouldn't give them the advice to do it through an orphanage.”



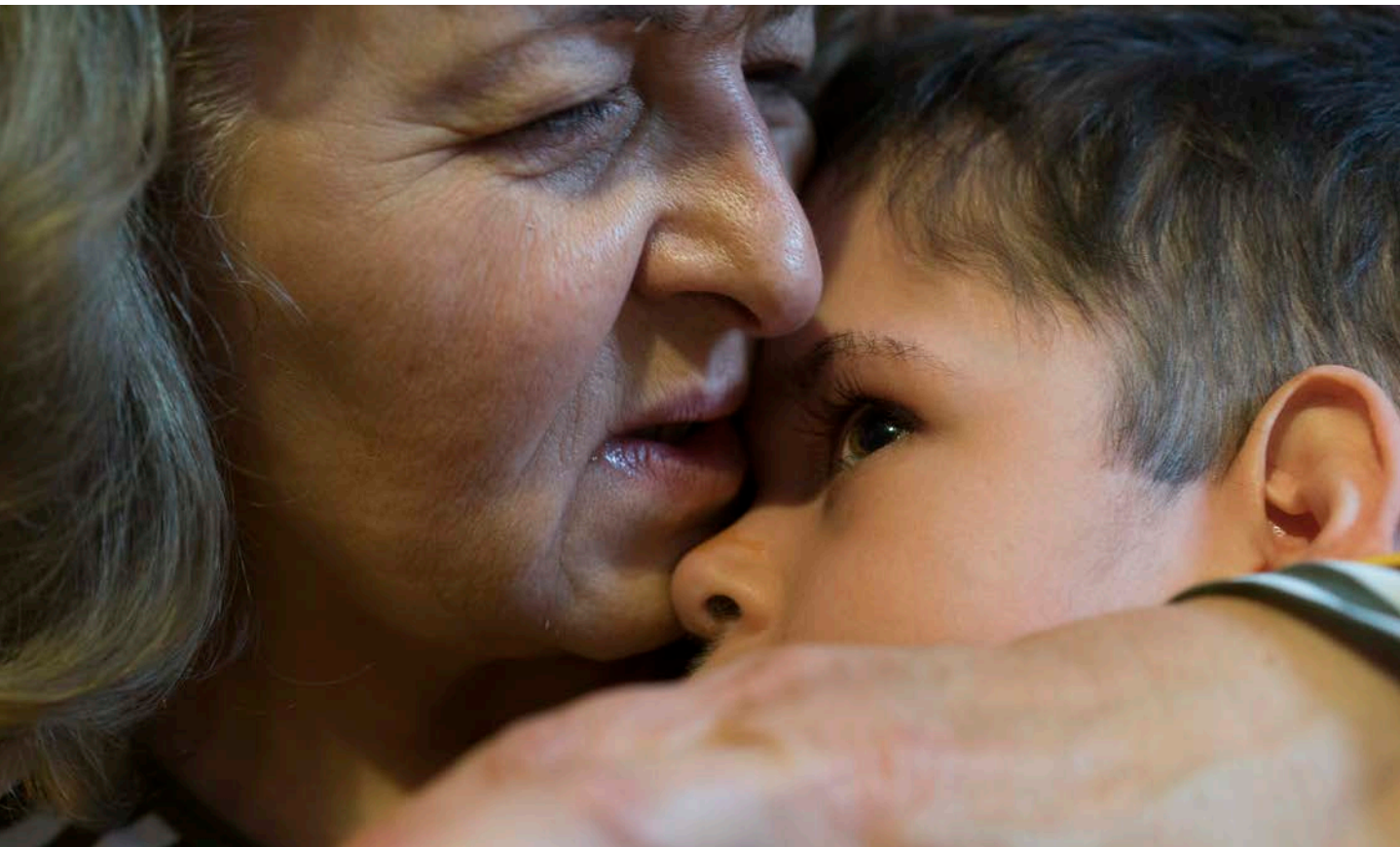


SUSTAINABLE EFFORTS TO ENACT CHANGE

Orphanages are expensive (often much less cost-effective than family-based care) and have poor outcomes. In Haiti, Lumos's research has shown that six or even up to ten children can be financially supported in loving, healthy families for the same cost of keeping a single child in an orphanage. But the persistent myths surrounding orphanages, including myths about their effectiveness and costs, are compelling enough to continue to inspire donations. The money is, quite simply, too good to pass up.

One of the country's biggest challenges—and Lumos's—is dismantling this for-profit orphanage industry and outlawing orphanage trafficking, particularly in a country with insufficient government capacity to intervene. Through painstaking work by allies and advocates, though, the Haitian government has now demonstrated the will to transition away from orphanages and instead support family-based care. The government recently banned the establishment of new orphanages in Haiti and asked all donors wishing to help the children of Haiti to instead give to organizations that help children stay in their families and communities.

While there's a long way to go, Lumos is committed to supporting Haitian society and government through the change. It's promising news for the thirty thousand children still institutionalized in Haiti.⁷



DIMA WITH ISUS, AGE 16

BULGARIA

After twenty years in an advertising career that took her around the world, Dima was ready for a change. She began taking courses in her native Bulgaria in subjects that had always interested her. One of those courses would change her life . . . and the life of young Isus.

It was through her class on families dealing with children at risk of severe harm that Dima was connected with Lumos. The organization, she learned, was seeking people to work with them in Krushari, at the time Bulgaria's most notorious state institution for children with severe and complex disabilities. In 2010, Krushari housed ninety-three children and young adults.⁸ According to the director, the average life expectancy was eleven years. "When I went there, for myself, it was a nightmare. It was almost unbearable," Dima says.

"We visited the first building," she recounts. "I saw gloomy

rooms, looking like prison cells with metal beds, with bars on the beds. Everything was bare and empty. The children were looking miserable and I was horrified."

In 2009, the Bulgarian government, supported by the European Union, embarked on an ambitious program of ending institutionalization by 2025. They decided to start with the institutions for children with disabilities, as they knew the children living there were the most vulnerable. After the United Nations and local human rights organizations exposed the high mortality rate at Krushari, the government learned that many children there were dying from malnutrition and reached out to Lumos for help. Lumos committed to finding ways to stabilize the health of Krushari's children and prepare to move them to alternative care, eventually closing down Krushari for good, as the government led Bulgaria into a family- and community-based care system.



“Deep inside, I’ll be honest,” says Nadia Shabani, who, as head of the State Agency for Child Protection, led the government’s efforts to end institutionalization, “I was so worried, not really believing that it was possible. I thought: If it is possible to close this one, then everything is possible, and maybe Lumos is right—if we can do it, the world can do it.”

Dima was having conversations like those with herself, too. “I told myself that this place is not just a place, an accidental place, and I’m not there by chance. I asked myself, ‘Dima, are you ready for this challenge?’ And the answer was yes.”

MEETING ISUS

The children in Krushari had varying levels of disability, but all were separated from their own families due to the same cultural belief that children with disabilities required permanent institutionalization. This concept prevailed under the country’s previous Communist regime, when people were judged by their utilitarian value to the state. Within this highly enforced, decades-long belief system throughout the Soviet Union and former Eastern bloc, children with disabilities did not fit in with the societal vision of the ideal human being. Over the decades, as authoritarian rule became a deeply ingrained way of life, the advice of state officials was taken as direction. Doctors told parents of babies born with disabilities to leave them in an institution; to go home and make a “healthy” baby instead. Many parents complied, and institutions filled up with hundreds of thousands of children with disabilities—warehoused, hidden away, and forgotten by the world.

Lumos responded to the emergency in Krushari and found that more than half the children were so malnourished they were in danger of dying of starvation. The reason behind so much malnourishment became clear upon further inspection: The institution operated on a strict regime, where each member of staff had only thirty minutes to feed twenty children. Due to these time constraints, each child had just one minute, twenty seconds to eat their meal. This led to fast force-feeding, as the staff had to move on to the next child, and outright rejection from children who needed more time and care in order to eat. Children were dying not because of a lack of available food, but because no time was assigned to help them eat their food.

When Dima first arrived at Krushari, she was immediately drawn to thirteen-year-old Isus. Staff from the Krushari institution said they could see a change in Isus from the moment he met Dima; that despite his complex disabilities, he responded positively to her presence.

“When I moved closer, I saw his big, beautiful eyes,” Dima explains. “And, as they say, the eyes are the window to your soul. His eyes spoke of a very tender soul.” But while Dima and





Isus forged an immediate connection and Dima's protective instincts kicked in, she struggled to see how she alone could effect change within an institution like Krushari. "The building was fifty children, two women on a shift. And these two women had to take care of all the children. No one could spend the time to care about them."

Isus, along with the rest of Krushari's children, was often left alone, strapped to his bed, staring at the ceiling. The staff were on such a tight schedule, and there were so few of them, that their only interaction with the children was to force-feed them quickly, so they could move on to the next hungry child, often as they remained lying down, because they did not have time to move them to a seated position. Of the general attitude toward Krushari's children, Dima notes, "The sad thing is that they have treated him like an animal . . . the way they bathed him, the way they gave him food, it's animal-like."

Dima's first interaction with Isus was seared into her memory. "His eyes were trembling all the time. He was not able to focus on any object or people. He was not able to focus his gaze at me. And he had seizures during the feeding schedule. But I didn't give up. I held him in my arms. I hugged him because I wanted him to feel my warmth and me."

AN UNBREAKABLE BOND

Dima's visits to Krushari, in partnership with Lumos, continued. Soon, the light that Dima saw in Isus became visible to others, too. "He started smiling. He started vocalizing," she recalls. "He even started laughing out loud and everyone was really surprised."

The prevailing narrative in both Krushari and Bulgaria at large was that children with disabilities were limited beyond just their physical capacity. But as their relationship grew, Dima knew she had to show the staff that Isus could do more than they imagined; that, indeed, his life depended on it.

Soon, Lumos helped establish an outside play area for the children. Dima began to take Isus for walks. "We walked around with Isus in a stroller and, for the first time there, he sensed the wind and I saw him, for the first time, start to laugh out loud when the wind was blowing in his face. He started looking around; he started noticing the outside world. He noticed the branches of the trees, how they moved from the wind. And the trembling disappeared."

Taking Isus for walks was controversial. Krushari staff didn't believe him capable of being outside, fearing the change would instigate more seizures. But Dima pushed back, and pushed on, and eventually was able to travel short distances outside the institution with Isus. They even visited a nearby beach house that a friend had offered up for use. "Well, we traveled out to that house.

On the way, I sang him songs, although I am not a very good singer," she laughs. "So, the whole trip was enjoyable. And, from that moment onward, no one was able to say anything to stop us."

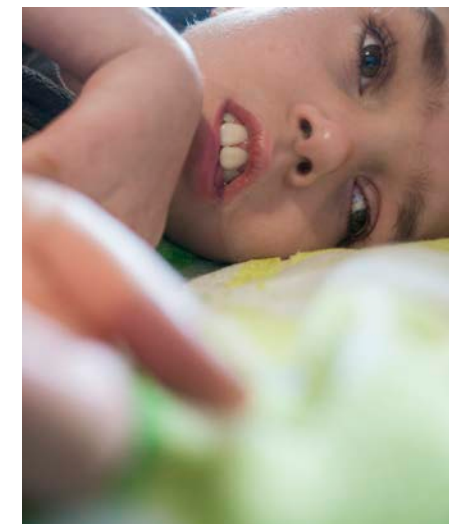
TURNING FOSTER CARE INTO A VIABLE OPTION

The foster family system for Bulgarian children with disabilities was nonexistent when Lumos began working in Krushari. Even Dima herself initially scoffed at the idea, calling it "mad." But meeting Isus changed things. And as Dima began to care for him more often, continuing her visits, she began to wonder what would happen to him . . . and to the other children in his ward at Krushari. What, she considered, would happen to Isus without her there to protect him?

The answer was obvious, and chilling. When Lumos first began assessing the institution for closure, they asked the director why she thought the mortality rate was so high. Her response was unforgettable: "You must understand, these children are sent here to die. The average life expectancy of one of these children is eleven years old. If a child lives longer, we feel we have done an exceptionally good job."

But Bulgaria is far from alone in its lack of considering foster families as a viable option. In many places around the world, fostering children, particularly those with disabilities, is an alien concept.

In countries where foster care has developed, however, it has been one of the keys to making it possible to bring children out of institutions. In the Czech Republic, sixteen-year-old Lubos is one of the country's success stories. After his father's death, his mother became too unwell to care for her children, and all three of them were institutionalized. Lubos was just three years old.







Multiple promises from relatives to take the children went unfulfilled, and five long years passed. While Lubos was waiting, the government was introducing the paid foster care program, and when he was eight years old, he and his sisters were finally placed into a foster family. His new foster parents already had two other children in their care, and Lubos entered into a loving home environment, filled with children who would become his friends . . . and ultimately his family.

Story after story shows us how foster families can fill in the gaps that institutions leave behind. Barbora, also from the Czech Republic, was born with spina bifida and is vocal about how her foster family helped her learn how to live an independent life. She spent the first six years of her life in an institution before moving to a foster family with the help of Lumos. Because of their support, Barbora was able to attend college. Today, she works for people with hearing impairments, living independently and traveling as much as she can. Fostering changed Barbora's life, and now she changes the lives of others.

A NEW PATH FORWARD

Back in Bulgaria, while Dima was wondering about Isus's future, she received news that he'd become gravely ill. He was transferred to the emergency unit at a nearby hospital, with a condition so severe that Dima was not allowed to visit him. She prayed—"For one month, I was praying for him"—and even showed up at the hospital, knowing she couldn't see Isus but hoping to get more information about his condition. She was there so often that the doctors began to question her. "No one is interested in this child," the doctors told Dima. And they asked, who was she? What was her connection, her relationship, to this child?

"I told them that I'm his future foster parent," Dima recounts. It was the first time she realized, even to herself, that she wanted to take care of Isus full-time, in a more formalized way. That becoming his foster parent would be the only path ahead for her.

The hospital staff were shocked. They believed Dima didn't know what she was saying, that she couldn't understand what she was asking. "They couldn't accept this thought that a person could want, might want, to become a foster parent of a child with disabilities. They couldn't accept that thought," Dima notes sadly.

When Isus's condition worsened, the hospital staff kept Dima informed, telling her to "be ready for the worst." When Dima recalls these conversations, she's thoughtful, serene. "I know, they mean death . . . For me, death is not the worst thing."

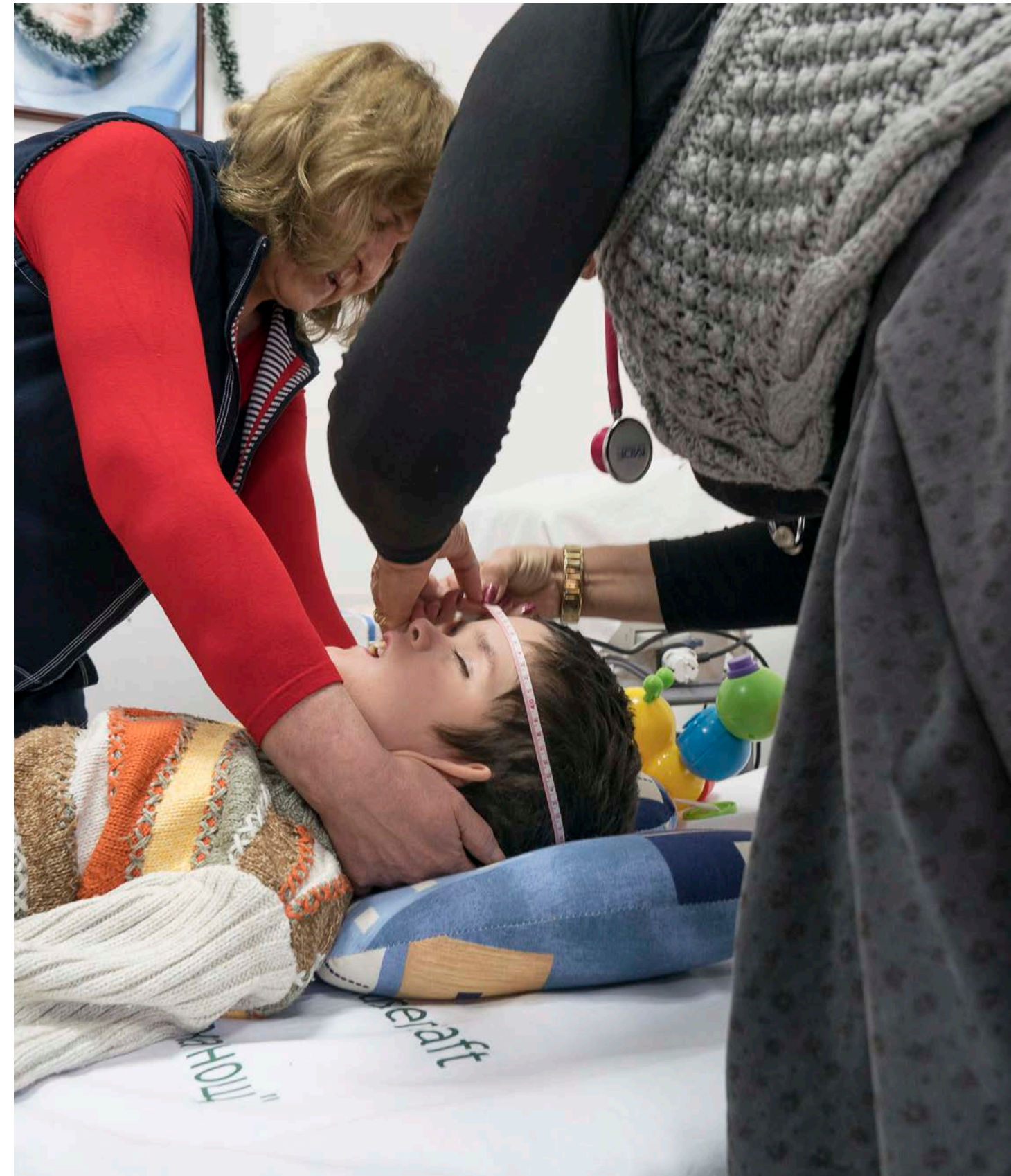
Finally, Dima was permitted to see Isus. "He looked like a skeleton," she recounts. "I held him in my arms and felt he might fall apart. He looked at me with a tear in his eye and everything inside me turned."

When Dima returned home, she wrote an official letter, requesting to foster Isus.

Soon, Isus began to improve, and the hospital staff regained hope about his prognosis. Dima began making plans, confident that Isus would become well enough to leave the hospital and, hopefully, live with Dima.

But when she told her parents about her plans, their reaction was not what she expected.

Dima lived with her parents, common in Bulgaria for an unmarried woman, and her mother in particular rejected her plans to foster Isus. Dima had to choose between staying in her home with her parents—and without Isus—or fostering Isus in a new place, alone.





For the first time, Isus has a mother, *a home.*



SHUTTERING KRUSHARI FOR GOOD

In December 2015, the last child left the Krushari institution. The building was closed—for good. “The input of Lumos in the closure of Krushari not only changed the lives of the children,” says Eva Jecheva, head of the Bulgarian State Agency for Child Protection from 2013–16. “They have provided us with a new environment, a new and better way of working. Lumos has become a magic word for us, spreading light in the darkness.”

For Dima and Isus, the memory of Krushari remains very real. And fostering a child with severe disabilities in a place with no infrastructure designed to support people with disabilities is a challenge. So, too, is doing this in a region where the narrative about children with disabilities remains negative. Dima still struggles to understand the disconnect so many people have about disabilities. “Because these children, they have abilities, which can be developed,” she emphasizes. “We must work in such a way that these children have families and love. And they not only deserve it, but we should do our duty. We are obliged to do that.”

Isus has been living with Dima for a year and a half now; he’s put on weight and has developed emotionally. He and Dima have discovered ways to communicate. When discussing his progress, Dima, says, “This is more than obvious, that these children need families. It is more than obvious.”

Despite her struggles in fostering Isus, Dima remains optimistic.

“I really count on the future generations because in Bulgaria, work with children with disabilities and thinking about these children, we have only non-governmental organizations. And I notice that mostly young people work for these organizations. So, I hope that their way of thinking leads to something, to development, because the older generation . . . They don’t have the desire to fight. They don’t believe that anything can be changed.”

But of course, Lumos—and Dima, and Isus—know that things *can* change; in fact, they can be transformed.

SHE CHOSE ISUS.

When he improved enough to leave the hospital, Dima found a new place to live, and today, she and Isus live together in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Dobrich, Bulgaria. “There is no good transport. It’s very dirty,” Dima explains. “The streets have no pavement. There is no way to go outside for walks. But my financial situation was such that this was what I could afford. I realize that this is not the best I can give Isus, but, right now, that’s the only [thing] I can do.”

Dima is on her own, but she’s not alone. “I have worked with the Lumos Foundation, which was really important,” Dima adds, “because they stood by my side. I know that I have people I can trust.”

For the first time, Isus has a mother, a home.



NEPAL

It is a three-day walk to Anga's village in Humla, Nepal, a remote mountain region with no accessible roads. When Anga was fourteen, she and her father made the long trek to the nearest village, seeking a man who, they'd heard, could bring Anga to a school in Kathmandu.

Anga's father was grateful that his daughter had this opportunity for education. There isn't much hope for most of the families in Humla; the region has a literacy rate of less than 50 percent,⁹ and almost half of children never go to school at all. He paid the man two hundred and sixty dollars, an exorbitant sum for the family. When he left, neither he nor Anga could anticipate the fear and trauma they were about to encounter.

Nepal is facing a crisis. In Kathmandu alone there are more than one thousand orphanages . . . but only three million residents. It is estimated that up to 85 percent of chil-

dren in Nepal's orphanages have at least one living parent.¹⁰ How, one may wonder, are all these children ending up in these institutions?

Tourism is the largest industry in Nepal. Much like the manufactured orphanage crisis in Haiti, Nepal is suffering from the casualties of "voluntourism," where well-meaning but often naïve travelers visit Nepal and volunteer in orphanages while on vacation.

Voluntourism has become incredibly lucrative for orphanages; now the demand creates the supply. Today in Nepal, children are deliberately separated from their families and institutionalized, where they are often isolated, abused, and underfed, all so they can be used to attract fee-paying volunteers and donors, ultimately enabling those running the institutions to turn a profit.









THE REAL-LIFE BY-PRODUCTS OF VOLUNTOURISM

It is shocking how easily a child can end up trafficked to an institution, even with well-meaning parents, simply due to a lack of underlying civil structure in a community (such as paperwork when babies are born, law requiring that children attend school, etc.). After Anga's father paid to have her sent to school, Anga became one of the many lost children of Nepal. A few months after her departure, it became clear no one knew where Anga was: not her family, and not the man her father had paid to escort her to school. That man, Anga's father would soon discover, was a child-finder: someone paid to seek out vulnerable children and traffic them to one of Nepal's many orphanages. They pocket the money and often receive a fee from the orphanages for providing them with the children. These orphanages then use the children to gain donations from tourists and foreign donors alike, effectively making them a commodity.

Anga's father scoured newspapers for mention of her, a nearly impossible task in his remote village, and learned where she and other missing children might be. He began working to find the funds needed to make the trip to Kathmandu to find his daughter. Years passed with no word from Anga, and no success in finding her. Anga's father continued pressing the child-finder; he even reached out to distant acquaintances he knew in Kathmandu. He feared the worst.

He was right to do so. It would take seven years for Anga to be reunited with her family.







FROM ORPHANAGE TRAFFICKING TO FORCED LABOR

A few years prior to Anga's experience, close to her home village in a place called Raya, lived five-year-old Bishnu Buddha. When two men appeared in his village, offering families the chance for their children to receive top-notch educations in a boarding school that was seeking students, Bishnu's parents were torn. They didn't want to send him away, but they knew Bishnu had very little opportunity in Raya. After much consideration, they decided to invest in his future. Bishnu's father accompanied him to Simikot, the closest small city and a common stopping point on the journey from Humla to Kathmandu, and handed his son over to the two men from the school Bishnu would be attending. He said good-bye, confident about his son's prospects.

One day in 2006, a volunteer named Connor (now the co-founder of Next Generation Nepal, a local nonprofit partnering with Lumos and many others to end the orphanage crisis) was working in an orphanage in Kathmandu. He came across a small group of boys living in a nearby institution and was horrified by their destitute conditions. The boys told Connor they had been beaten and starved.

"In that orphanage, they would not give us enough food," Bishnu, one of the boys, told Connor, breaking down in tears. "We would be beaten up regularly, and didn't get to study."

Connor made immediate plans to help the boys, contacting local NGOs to arrange for an emergency rescue and delivering a week's worth of food for the seven children in the interim. But word of the boys' impending rescue got out, and before they could be saved, one of the child-finders who had initially visited Bishnu's family took them all to an unknown location. Bishnu and the other boys were once again lost in the orphanage business of Nepal.

It would be another eight months before Bishnu would be located. By then, he had moved through a string of orphanages, hostels, and hotels; he recounts that, at one point, he was taken to a hotel where he was forced to wash dishes. Eventually, he was sold to a bank manager as domestic labor. Local NGOs had to pressure a local government official to force the bank manager to return Bishnu. Eventually, he complied. Finally, Bishnu was rescued from his years of trauma. He was still just seven years old.





Bishnu says,
 “I didn’t even remember
 where I used to live.”

FINDING FAMILIES

Once Bishnu was found, the search shifted to locating his family. He was transferred to a temporary care center for what many hoped would be a brief stint. Tragically, because Bishnu was so young and had faced so much chaos and hardship, he could recall very little about his village and his home. Bishnu says, “I didn’t even remember where I used to live.” Exhaustive efforts to find his family led nowhere for four long years.

In 2010, two workers from Next Generation Nepal arrived in Raya. They had finally found Bishnu’s family, and delivered the news that Bishnu had been rescued and was safe. But his parents were confused; they’d been getting regular updates about Bishnu’s progress and whereabouts from the child-finder who’d trafficked Bishnu all those years earlier. They believed him to be safe and well at his boarding school, and had even been given a photograph of a child in a uniform that they were told was their son. While they agreed the boy didn’t look quite like Bishnu, they’d had no reason not to trust the kind men who’d come to provide their child with an education, and figured Bishnu’s looks had changed in the years he’d been gone. Their confusion is testament to the lengths child-finders will go to in order to keep their deception and fraud from being revealed.

Next Generation Nepal also intervened when Anga was a teenager. In 2010, they were able to locate her family in Humla. Soon, they arranged for her transfer back home, where she was reunited with her family after seven years apart. The long journey to Humla showed the extent of Anga’s struggles: She was barely able to keep up after being underfed and abused for so long.



CHILD-FINDERS ACROSS THE GLOBE

Child-finding on behalf of an orphanage can be a lucrative enterprise, not only in Haiti and Nepal, but all across the world. As Bishnu and Anga were being reunited with their families, a young girl named Susan in Kenya was falling prey to the deceptive promises of a local child-finder.

When Susan was ten, a child-finder approached her grandparents, making irresistible offers of education. They wanted the best for their granddaughter, and so they agreed.

Susan, though, saw her life upturned. She was placed in an institution where, for five years, she was forbidden to see her family. She faced physical and emotional abuse, and was often deprived of food. The institution had a chronically high turnover of foreign volunteers, and when Susan would speak to them, she would be punished. It is a situation Lumos and other organizations fighting orphanage trafficking have found time and again:

The presence of volunteers—in spite of their good intentions—often makes things more challenging for the institutionalized children they work with.

Meanwhile, Sospeter, affectionately known as Sossy and an orphan from Makuyu, Kenya, understood Susan's plight. He was eight years old when his mother died, and at age ten, a child-finder approached his aunt, promising a better life for Sossy: education, food security, opportunity. His aunt agreed, and Sossy was sent to an orphanage. But those promises were not kept. In addition to being separated from the only family he had left, Sossy was exploited as a source of labor for the orphanage's farm. In one gruesome incident, he was left to suffer without medical attention for days after an accident with some equipment; that scar is a visible reminder of the pain he underwent during his time in the institution.

In 2014, the Stahili Foundation, a nonprofit that combats child exploitation in rural Kenya, began supporting Susan, leading to her return to her grandparents' home. "I feel children should not be separated from their families," Susan says. "The best option is sponsoring kids from their homes." Responsible and practical, Susan is on track to graduate from high school in 2020. She plans to study accounting and has recently joined a mathematics club. She has seen firsthand how vital family reunification can be.

And in 2015, when Sossy was fifteen, Stahili began searching for his family. The organization was able to locate Sossy's family and eventually reunite them. It was a life-changing moment for Sossy. "My bond with my siblings and my family is very important to me," he says. Today, Sossy is a student in high school. He wants to be an engineer. He has family.

Haiti, Nepal, Kenya, India, Uganda, Thailand, and Cambodia are among many countries struggling to deal with orphanage traffickers. Hundreds of thousands of children—perhaps as many as millions—are regularly separated from their families to feed the orphanage industry and to draw in the billions of dollars donated by volunteers and churches. But because of the tireless work of a group of NGOs like Stahili and Next Generation Nepal, a movement is growing to end this form of trafficking. In late 2018, Australia became the first country to legislate against voluntourism-driven orphanage trafficking. Many of the travel companies that organize orphanage volunteering are changing their practices. And former orphanage volunteers are warning young people who want to help children to choose another path.





ADJUSTING TO LIFE BACK HOME

When Bishnu finally arrived home, things were different. He didn't recognize his siblings. "At home there were my mom and dad and brother. I didn't even know I had a brother," Bishnu explains. "I have two, and I have one sister. But I didn't remember them. I was very happy to meet them."

Today, Bishnu is completing his schooling, living with relatives in a nearby town until his final year is finished. While he feels secure and safe with his family, the memories of his time in institutions haunt him. Many Nepali people have a cultural propensity toward being reserved, but Bishnu gets visibly emotional when speaking about his past. "Whatever happened to me as a kid, it happened," he says. "I'd like to forget about it. Now, I have a new life. I'd like to do something with it."

Anga, too, is forever changed. After two years back home, she's since returned to Kathmandu for her studies, with the support of her family and Next Generation Nepal, which facilitated her transition into school. She wants to be a computer engineer. When she's not studying, Anga volunteers with Next Generation Nepal to raise awareness about voluntourism.

While her future is bright, Anga continues to deal with the emotions and memories that affect her day-to-day life. She's discussed the lingering resentment she carries against her parents for sending her off, and speaks often about how difficult the transition back home has been. Using her platform with Next Generation Nepal, she is vocal about how devastating this kind of voluntourism-based trafficking is for families.

Bishnu's mother, Putali, has also changed. Today, Bishnu is healthy and growing. "He's studying. It's OK. Now we need to make his future," she says. But her thinking on whether young children should be sent away from their families at all, even if it's for educational purposes, has shifted.

"Staying away from parents, how can it be good?" she questions. "In truth, they should be raised with their parents."



CRISTINA WITH KARINA, AGE 11; KETTELYN, AGE 7; AND KAROLINE, AGE 12

BRAZIL

Cristina has the family she never dreamed possible. Now forty-four and living in a suburb outside of São Paulo, Brazil, she wakes each morning to a house filled with love and laughter, thanks to her husband, her two granddaughters—Karoline, twelve, and Karina, eleven—and her grandniece, Kettelyn, age seven. She and her husband are employed, the children are in school, and Cristina can finally say she and her family are thriving and hopeful.

“We’re a happy family because we’re very united,” Karoline says. “We play games, go to the park. We talk to each other a lot, we’re communicative.”

It’s nothing short of remarkable that Cristina is stable, happy, and sober, when you consider the traumas of her past.

Cristina grew up in a poverty-stricken community in São Paulo, born to an alcoholic mother and a father she says “didn’t

like” her. “When I remember my infancy and my youth, I don’t have many good things to remember,” she says. By the time she was a teenager, she had fled to the streets. Eventually, she was found by authorities and put in an institution.

AN UNENDING EPIDEMIC

When she was released from the orphanage, Cristina returned to the streets. All around her, people were falling victim to the crack epidemic that was just beginning to rage in São Paulo. At age sixteen, Cristina became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter she named Patricia. But shortly after her daughter’s birth, Cristina finally succumbed to the pull of the drug, and quickly became addicted herself. “I got to know crack when I was around seventeen, eighteen years old,” she explains. “And I used crack for ten to twelve years of my life.”







With each passing day, her daughter slipped further and *further away.*



The crack epidemic has devastated São Paulo and led to a new phenomenon in the region of children growing up with addicted parents, known as “crack orphans.” “The impact of crack on my life and, in general, people’s lives across town was huge,” Cristina says. “I think there are probably three or four people left from my time that are still alive and they have some really heavy collateral effects.”

Soon, Cristina found herself living in Cracolândia, or “Crackland,” an area of the city where thousands of addicts openly congregate and drug use is brazenly visible. Crackland is “a cemetery of living people,” she says. “It wasn’t hard to get into crack. I lived for crack, I woke up for crack, slept for crack.”

Raising a baby in Crackland was, of course, out of the question. (The area is regularly raided by police, only to be “rebuilt” by its residents a few days later.) But the pull of Cristina’s addiction was too strong. She lost custody of Patricia, who was delivered to an orphanage . . . just like Cristina herself had been. The cycle of institutionalization in Cristina’s family would continue.

While her daughter was institutionalized, Cristina was

struggling to get clean. She tried rehab a few times, but it never worked. One day, Cristina opted for a more drastic solution. “Only when I put alcohol on my body and set fire to myself, I managed to free myself from crack. I was realizing I needed to kill myself in order to escape the situation.”

That moment was a turning point in Cristina’s life. She kicked drugs for good. Eventually, she was able to bring Patricia home.

But “home” wasn’t enough to make up for the holes in Patricia’s life. Many children raised in orphanages develop challenging behaviors that arise from attachment disorders, and they are angry with their parents for abandoning them. The longer the child is in an orphanage, the harder reunification can become. This was the case for Patricia. “She was in an orphanage for five years,” Cristina recalls, “and when she left the orphanage, I didn’t have any authority over her.”

When Patricia was thirteen, she ran away. For two years, Cristina searched for her on the streets. With each passing day, her daughter slipped further and further away.



TWO DAUGHTERS; TWO DIVERGING PATHS

Patricia, tragically, would never recover from her traumatic start to life: born on the streets of a drug-ravaged community, then institutionalized. Children model what they see, and what Patricia saw everywhere was devoid of hope, of light. After lots of searching, Cristina learned that Patricia, too, was a teenage addict, living on the streets—just like Cristina had been.

Meanwhile, Cristina had another daughter, Luciana. Because she was sober, Cristina was able to keep Luciana in her care, raising her in a home, with her family. Today, Luciana is twenty-four years old, lives close to Cristina, and is happy and healthy.

Cristina didn't see Patricia for two full years. When she finally found her, she was deep in the throes of her addiction. She was also pregnant. "That's when my world fell down again," Cristina says. She herself had battled addiction, and both her siblings, too, were addicts. "And now, it was my daughter."

The similarities between Cristina's own path and that of her daughter continued to make themselves known. Like Cristina, Patricia would herself give birth to two daughters, Karoline and Karina. And also like her mother, her addiction cost her dearly. She lost custody of her daughters, and because their father was imprisoned, they, like their own mother had been, were institutionalized. And then, at the age of just twenty-four, Patricia was killed on the streets of São Paulo.





Cristina now stands tall among those who can call themselves *survivors*.



BREAKING THE CYCLE

In her grief, Cristina found a way forward.

With one daughter lost, Cristina knew she couldn't make the same mistakes with her granddaughters. She gained custody of both Karoline and Karina and, haunted by the memories of her own daughters' drastically different upbringings, vowed to keep them together.

"When they arrived in my life, I picked myself up even more," Cristina explains. "I knew I had to be well so that the same thing that happened to me didn't happen to them."

"We've been through a lot of difficult moments and I am really hoping that we also have some really good times," Karoline says.

Cristina's heart continued to grow even bigger when she discovered her niece, too, was struggling with addiction. She took in her niece's daughter, Kettelyn; now Cristina and her husband have a house filled with three vibrant, beloved girls. "I feel I have an absolute obligation to fight for their health, for their education, for their lives," she says.

The seemingly unending cycle of drug abuse, violence, and neglect has finally ended. Cristina credits ACER, a local organization that reunites children without parents with members of their extended families, for helping her stop the cycle. She and her family were some of the first to participate in ACER's pioneering formal kinship care program, Family Guardian, which offers social and financial support and has been successfully helping families like hers throughout Brazil. "For me it's very important to have all this help [from] these people who are making an effort to be by my side and help me." After many years of work with ACER, Cristina successfully graduated from the program in 2016.

From an abused, addicted childhood, Cristina now stands tall among those who can call themselves survivors, breaking the generational cycle of violence, addiction, and institutionalization. Cristina notes, "No more orphans, no more orphanages, no more crack in my family."



INDIA

India contains one-sixth of the world's population, with millions of children living in poverty, on the streets, or in orphanages. Every year, an estimated six hundred thousand children are abandoned in the country. Most of them are girls.¹¹

As it is in Bulgaria, foster care in India is a relatively new concept, one being pioneered by groups like Foster Care India. And the first official foster mother in Goa, India, is Maria, age sixty-three.

Maria first met Livya, now fourteen, a few years ago while volunteering in a small orphanage. Despite her troubled beginning, Livya has a smile that "will change the world," says Maria. She was born to a poor family in Goa and given to a neighbor when her parents realized they couldn't provide adequate care for her. That solution, though, was a temporary fix, and Livya was dropped off at an orphanage when she was just one year old.

As Livya grew, first her mother and then her father succumbed to illnesses, leaving her without any immediate family.

She remained in the institution for ten years. Despite her institutionalization and family background, though, Livya was a cheerful child; while a bit on the quiet side, she had a reputation in the orphanage for being friendly, obedient, and thoughtful. But the undercurrent of Livya's demeanor was one of yearning: for a family, for belonging, for acceptance.

"I was feeling lonely in this world 'cause I was left alone," Livya explains. "There was nobody to, like, say, 'You're mine.' So, I needed family . . . I needed a mother."

She's frank about the years spent wishing for a family. "When I was in the orphanage, I prayed for family. Family is where you learn values, and how to talk to people in society: how to dress, how to eat, how to behave with other people, how to [say] hello." Livya was so desperate for a family, she says she made a bargain with God: She cut off her hair, vowing to sacrifice it all in exchange for a mother.



LIVYA, AGE 14

A LONG JOURNEY TO PARENTHOOD

While Livya was wishing and praying, nearby, Maria was doing the same. For twenty-five years, she and her husband tried to have a family, visiting countless medical professionals and eventually exploring adoption services. Adoption, though, was often a complicated and mysterious process, and when Maria was told she was “too old,” she quickly ruled out the possibility, afraid the rejection would be too much to bear.

When her husband died, Maria wondered what was next for her. Even without her partner, she knew she still wanted to make a difference in a child’s life. She began volunteering at a nearby orphanage. This particular institution seemed to be well-managed by caring people, but still, “there was no freedom for the children,” Maria remembers. “I feel in the orphanage, of course, the material things they give. But that love? What we people, like the parents, give for the individual child of their own? I think they don’t get that at the orphanage.”

Maria recounts the constant longing she would see in the children’s eyes; it was there in Livya’s face, too. Maria says, “The day I saw her, she was miserable, with that small hair-cut, you know, and with a big paunch tummy coming out like this. I still remember . . . she looked like, you know, a slum girl.”

Maria and Livya formed an immediate bond. When she was first introduced to her, Livya was serious, blank-faced. Maria says, “So, when I looked at her, I said, ‘I wonder if this girl is going to come with me?’ And her face was very dull, no smile, nothing, you know? So, I said, ‘Baby, are you coming with me?’ That one smile that she gave transformed the whole face!”

Through Maria’s volunteer work, she was able to spend more and more time with Livya. Despite being once told she was too old to adopt a child, she couldn’t help but wish things could be different. Especially with Livya. “A home is a better place for a child,” Maria says. “So, in the orphanage, I don’t think they can give the proper love. No.”

Maria remembers how Livya used to wait for her visits. According to her, Livya said, “Mama, I used to wait when your call would come. I used to tell the Sisters, ‘Please call her, please call her, please tell her to come and take me!’”





BREAKING NORMS, MAKING HISTORY

One day, someone from the orphanage told Maria there was a fledgling program she should consider. She met a man named Suchit from a local nonprofit organization called Catalysts for Social Action, which was trying to set up foster care for the first time and offered foster parent training. With foster care being a brand-new concept in India, Suchit's work meant Maria could maybe take care of a child in her home.

This kind of exploration of unique options for care is showing great promise for many vulnerable children. Shivani, another young woman in India, has experienced firsthand how new approaches to childcare are changing norms. As a young child, Shivani and her siblings witnessed an unspeakable crime: Their father murdered their mother and then hid the body under their bed. Shivani was too young to explain what had happened, but was old enough to know it was horrific. When she called her grandparents for help, her father fled.

Research proves that economic factors are one of the main reasons children are sent to institutions, even though they have extended family members willing to care for them; in Shivani's case, their grandparents and uncle wanted to look after them but had no means to do so. The siblings were institutionalized for more than two years before being transferred to a small group home run by Udayan Care, a model that's fast becoming a viable alternative to overcrowded and abusive institutions. The concept was chartered in 1996 with the goal of providing orphans with a loving home, a group of Parent Mentors, and home coordinators who provide care and a sense of belonging. Most crucially, the group home allowed Shivani to remain with her siblings so they could grow together and support one another during the most trying of times.







“She can win the *world* with that smile.”

FINDING FAMILY

Inspired by Suchit, Maria was ready to experiment, too. She became the first person in Goa to apply to be a foster mother. “I thought, it’s a very good scheme that the government has started, so we people who intend [to] take a child, maybe at a later stage or as a widow . . . it’s a great scheme where we can take a child.”

The journey to getting approved, though, was an uphill one. Her status as a widow and her age both worked against her. “But I knew, heart of hearts, I can do it,” Maria says. Over time, she was able to officially adopt Livya. Today, she’s no longer her foster mother; she’s her mother, and they are a family.

“She can win the world with that smile,” Maria promises. “That’s what I feel.”





MAKING THE MOST OF THE ADJUSTMENT PROCESS

All children have the right to a family, and Maria holds that belief intensely, deeply. The love between Maria and Livya is contagious, and their bond and banter have inspired others in Maria's life to consider fostering and adoption.

Recently, she's helped her cousin and her neighbor go through the process. "I'm all ready to help them. I don't want them to give up easily. I'm always there for them," Maria stresses. "I told them, 'Anything, I'll go out of the way to help you people. If you need the advice: how to get along, the relationship, I am there for you. If you want to do the school admission, I am there for you.'"

There are, naturally, struggles. The adjustment process is ongoing, and can be tough to navigate. Research shows that for every three months in an institution, children lose a month of development, and that when children are old enough to leave the institution, they're often ill-prepared to live independently, which puts them at greater risk for exploitation, homelessness, and more. Maria still thinks of the children she didn't adopt, the ones Livya grew up with in the orphanage, and imagines what it must be like to move through the world knowing that people are treating you differently because of where you came from. "I can imagine what these girls or these boys must be going through, when they are grown up as teenagers going to school or going to

college. There must be an inferiority complex always in their life. And this will totally harm their later lives also, I feel."

Maria and Livya themselves understand firsthand how complicated an adjustment a fostering (and ultimately, adoption) process can be. They've learned how to deal with prejudices. "I told my daughter, I said, 'See, if anybody questions you, let it not affect you. Don't bother to tell them you're from this institute, or from that orphanage, or this.'"

And if someone questions Livya about her birth parents, Maria has a strategy for that, too. "I told her, 'Please tell them, ask my mama. Any queries, ask my mama. She will answer you.'"

Now things are better. Maria credits Livya's thousand-watt smile and strong character for that, noting that everybody in the village has accepted her. "There is so much in her," Maria gushes. "Let her make the best use of it."

IN LIVYA'S OWN WORDS

Livya is vocal about the love she has for Maria, and has blossomed in Maria's care. "I have no words for my mama. She's very generous, she's very kind, she's very understanding, she's very loving. She has everything . . . Nothing is less in her," Livya says. "To me, she's like a diamond. 'Cause I cannot lose her."





MAMA MARIA AND LITTLE MARIA, AGE 11

MOLDOVA

Little Maria and Mama Maria are quite the pair. The two live happily in Floresti, Moldova, surrounded by dogs, sheep, rabbits—all the furry creatures and beautiful wildlife that cause little Maria, age eleven, to shriek with joy.

But perhaps the greatest source of happiness in little Maria's life is Mama Maria herself. Mama Maria is Maria's foster mother, and when describing her, Maria says, "She's the best mother in the world. And, thanks to her, I have the best family."

A NEW KIND OF FAMILY

Maria's joy comes easily these days, but it was buried for a long time. Maria was born with cerebral palsy, and in Moldova, the poorest country in Europe, which had one of the highest rates of institutionalization, the stigma of disability is one that can linger forever. In Maria's case, her disability caused her parents,

from an impoverished region with no resources to help a child with disabilities, to leave her in an orphanage.

Orphanages used to be the default way of looking after vulnerable children in Moldova. Lumos has been working with the government there since 2006, and the country has enacted significant changes to address its institutionalization problem, which is one primarily of poverty and resources. Only about 2 percent of children in orphanages in the country are actually orphans.¹² Most were placed there because of poverty and disability or because their parents had moved abroad to find work. In Maria's case, she was first sent to an institution, and then from there, to a residential school for children with disabilities.

That's where Mama Maria met her, when she was eight years old. At fifty years old and with two adult daughters, Mama Maria had a lot of love still to give. "There was no longer noise in



Mama Maria turns emotional when discussing how *beautifully* Maria has fit into her life.

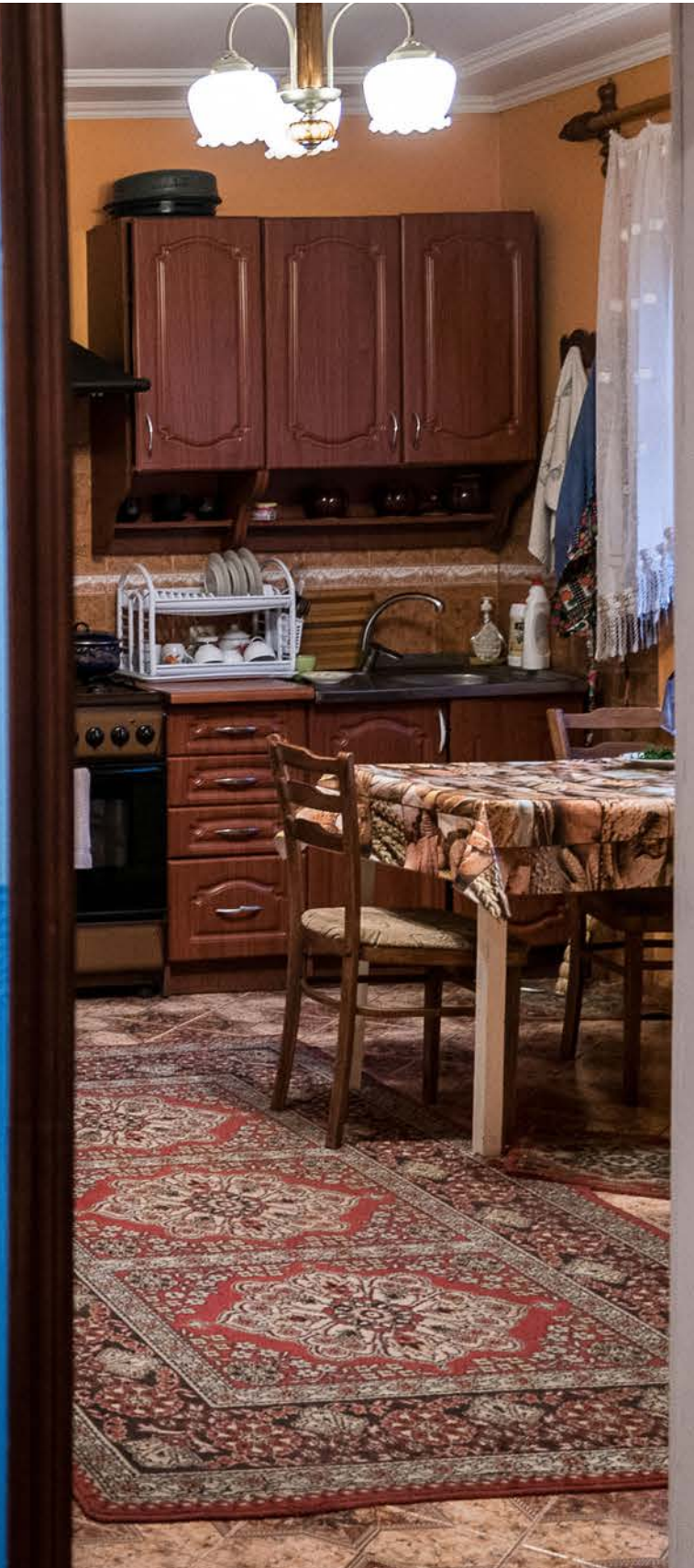


the house, no talk, and smiles, and children’s laughter,” Maria says. “So, in this way, I just decided to apply to become a foster mother, not to have the smile of a child disappear.”

Mama Maria thought this was the perfect next step in her life. “When I decided to take Maria they told me that she had some disabilities. We were not scared about her illness. We saw that she could walk; she could eat by herself. Just with my support and my help.”

Mama Maria turns emotional when discussing how beautifully Maria has fit into her life; how much it feels like fate. She also knows that, with her cerebral palsy, Maria didn’t have as many options as some of the other institutionalized children. “If there weren’t any services like there are now, I think that these children would have never benefited of any joy, of having a chance to have a mother, having mother’s love,” Maria says. “I’m really happy to have this kind of service of foster care in every country so that children can get the love that they cannot, could not receive from their birth parents.”

Since Lumos began working in Moldova, the number of children in institutions has been reduced by 88 percent, from 11,544 in 2007 to 1,429 in 2017. The country is committed to ending institutionalization by 2020—a goal that Lumos knows is eminently achievable. More important, Moldovan government and society believe it is possible, too.







AN UNSPEAKABLE HISTORY

The spark that radiates from Maria is palpable, authentic. But it disappears quickly when she discusses her experiences at both the orphanage and the residential school.

“When I was at the institution, there was a small bed, not very comfortable,” she remembers. “I wasn’t allowed to watch TV then. It was a dangerous thing for me. I was feeling a bit lonely. But, please, let’s not talk anymore about that . . . I don’t like to speak about the institution too often because I feel sad then. I just don’t want to talk about it.”

Mama Maria agrees. “The children in orphanages, even though they had food and clothes, they were definitely lacking the warmth of having parents. You can give everything to a child, but if they do not have the love of a parent, of a mother and a father, this is what is completely missing for them.” She acknowledges that Maria’s most basic needs were met, but there was much missing. “When she came to us, she couldn’t even read. She didn’t know the alphabet.”

Maria has told her foster mother some things about her time in the orphanage that are so painful, they often strain credulity: about punishments the children used to receive; about how, even with her medical condition, Maria was often forced to stand in corners with her arms raised for lengths of time.

“I was very angry with them, but I couldn’t show this anger in front of them because they were very bad,” Maria says. “I couldn’t do anything. I had just to . . . endure.”

But everything is different now. “In this family, they’re nice, great,” Maria says, with that trademark joy lighting up her face again. “They actually don’t punish me. I feel good here. And they take care of me.”

By working with the Moldovan government, Lumos has been able to help redirect funds from institutions into family-based services across the whole country, so that children like little Maria can find homes like Mama Maria’s.

Help, understanding, and love from those around you are the most *important things*.

FOR DUMITRITA, A TRIUMPHANT RETURN HOME

Dumitruta, now sixteen, is a vocal advocate for family-based care. Having grown up both in her family as well as in an institution, she speaks from experience.

Born with a physical disability requiring special care, Dumitruta was raised in her home, with a loving family. But as she approached school age, her family realized their local school would not accept a child with disabilities and didn't have the resources to support her. No parent should have to worry about whether the bad roads in their community would hinder their child's journey to school, or whether her teachers would offer enough time in class to do schoolwork. But for decades, thousands of parents were forced to make that kind of choice: send their child away to a terrifying institution, or keep them at home but deny them an education.

That school was far from alone. Many schools in Moldova did not have the necessary buildings or equipment for children with disabilities, from simple accommodations like wheelchair ramps to more comprehensive requirements like special education teachers. Because every child has the right to learn, Lumos has worked with the Ministry of Education, which has led to changes in schools across the whole country to provide solutions. In the past seven years, the number of children with special educational needs in inclusive community schools has increased by 685 percent.

Dumitruta spent five long years in a residential institution for children with disabilities. To her, those five years were "an eternity." She says, "I felt like [I was] in a dark labyrinth where I couldn't find the light. Only the hope that the day when I go back home would come gave me strength!"

In 2013, the local authority worked to get all the children out of the residential institution, and with the support of Lumos, Dumitruta was able to return home. The school in her town became inclusive, again thanks to support from Lumos, which enabled her to attend. And, most important, she's back with her family, where she belongs.

Although initially fearful that her peers might not accept her, Dumitruta soon found that members of her school community were all there to support her, especially in the form of the special education teacher within the Inclusive Education Resource Center that Lumos established in her school. Lumos also created a student group to support children with disabilities. And Dumitruta's colleagues help her get around the school, carrying her backpack.

Dumitruta has blossomed since returning home. "Now I know what a child needs to be happy," she says. "I have learned that help, understanding, and love from those around you are the most important things. If we want a better world, we should transmit these values to others."





All children, including those with disabilities, deserve to have a happy childhood alongside their parents.

BECOMING AN ADVOCATE TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Both Dumitrita and Maria serve as inspirations for the communities around them, particularly by using their voices to advocate for change. Dumitrita in particular is making a name for herself on the speaking circuit; she's participated in impressive global events such as the International Conference on Inclusive Education and the Global Conference to End the Institutionalization of Children. She has also featured in several short films that promote the right of every child to a family, to education, protection, and well-being.

Dumitrita considers inclusion a strong value for all societies, and she promotes the idea that all children, including those with disabilities, deserve to have a happy childhood alongside their parents, and deserve to learn together with their peers. Her biggest dream is to become a journalist. She says: "I do hope that my life experience will inspire other children who have the same difficulties to overcome all barriers they face."



“I can’t imagine *life without her*. I can’t imagine.”

**FACING AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE . . .
WITH CERTAIN OPTIMISM**

When it comes to barriers, Mama Maria is well aware of the challenges that may lie ahead for little Maria—and what she escaped. “I can’t imagine what her life would have been, how she would have been helped, supported,” Mama Maria wonders. “It seems to me that someone could hurt her. It’s really painful for me to think what is in store for her, because we want to ensure for her all the warmth and the love.”

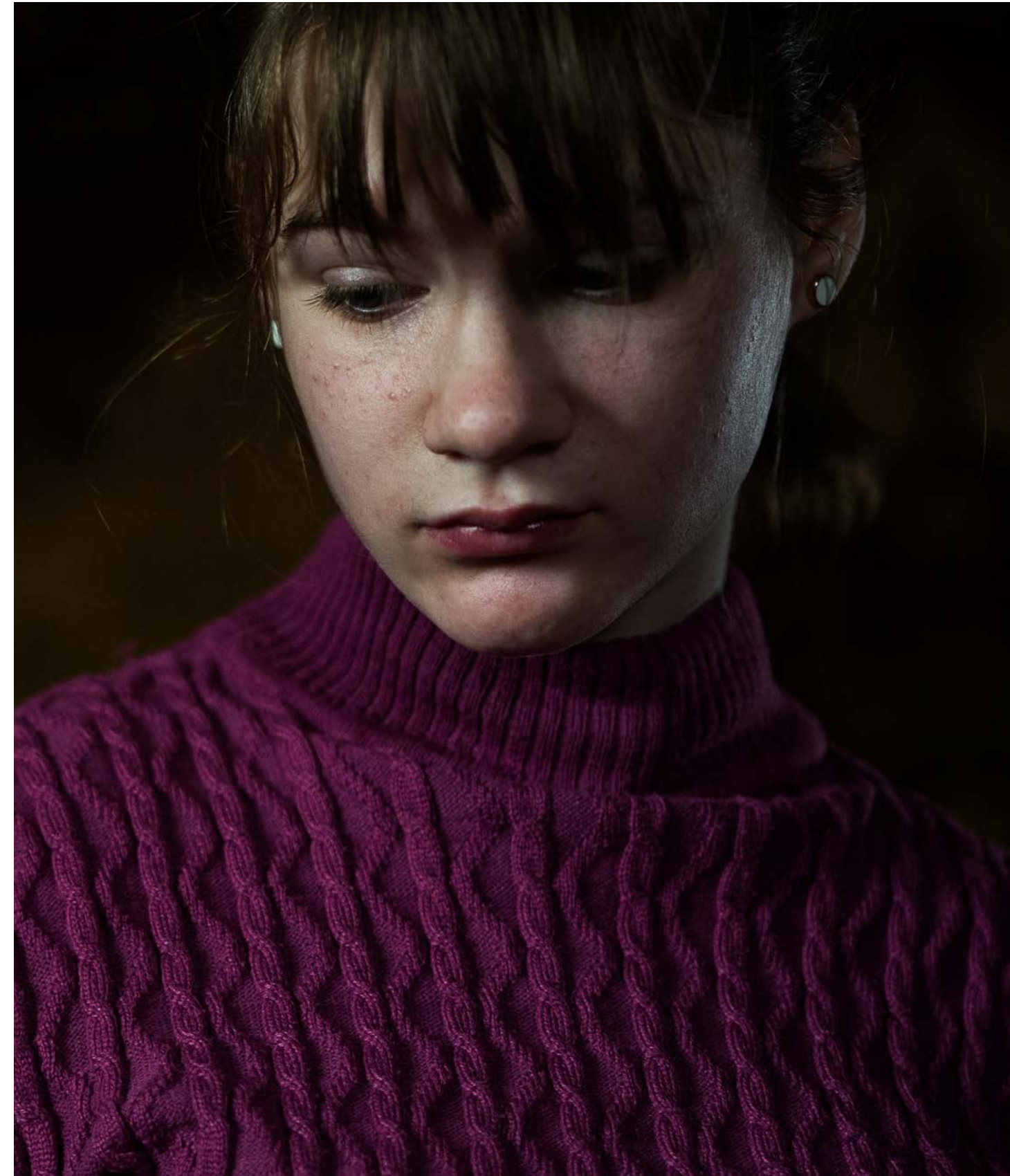
Educating Maria so that she can someday live independently is at the top of Mama Maria’s concerns. “I educate and raise her and try to offer all the life skills that she needs in order to move independently and be responsible,” Maria explains. “I hope I manage to do that.” And it’s working. When Maria first came to Mama Maria’s home, it used to take her thirty-five minutes to walk to school. Now she does it in twenty.

The connection between the two Marias is remarkable. “I try to give her all the love that she was deprived of before coming to us,” Mama Maria says. “She’s my all . . . I can’t imagine life without her. I can’t imagine.”

She also has a message for other families and adults just like her: that foster care is exhilarating, joyful, and life-changing. “We have to offer [these children] the chance of being healthy. I would like to see good people as there are, here in Moldova, to take in their care such children.”

LITTLE MARIA HAS A MESSAGE, TOO.

“If I had magical power, I would like to find families and to be confident that the children would not . . . stay in orphanages,” Maria says. “And I will take these children from the orphanages and put them in families. That would make me very happy.”



Together, help us to *shift* the world, *shape* the future, and *restore* the childhood every young person deserves.

The six stories featured in *Finding the Way Home* represent hundreds of thousands more: stories of real children whose trauma has been transformed into resilience, courage, and hope. Each of them is a testament to the core mission of Lumos: Children belong in families, and, with proper support, the global orphanage crisis can be solved.

Indeed, we are quickly approaching the global tipping point when it comes to institutionalization: the time in which the process of transforming systems of care all around the world will become irreversible and all countries will strive to find families for the children who need them. The momentum is building, and your support is critical to keep us moving in the direction of progress, of justice for all the children of the world.

As we reach this tipping point, Lumos is readying itself for what comes next. We're developing trainings and tools to ensure that a coalition of organizations, individuals, and governments will be adequately prepared to prevent the further separation of children from their families, to reunify families wherever possible, and to find loving families for those children who cannot go home. The stories in this book, and the millions like them, are key to helping others understand that a child-centered approach, as Lumos recommends, is achievable; that a second chance truly exists for all institutionalized children—and for their families.

As more of the world begins to share in the knowledge that there is a better way, Lumos is using its significant experience to carefully advise on best practices in ways that are culturally appropriate and deeply respectful. Through partnerships with local organizations and governments, Lumos understands that local narratives about children, as well as women, marriage, and family, must be addressed in order to overcome the belief that orphanages should be a standard form of care.

Ultimately, inspiring a family to raise their child even in the hardest of circumstances means recognizing the challenges, whether financial, familial, societal, religious, or other, that first prohibit them from staying together, and working backward from there. Data and facts are powerful tools to effect the kind of change that's now underway throughout much of the world, and so are stories, anecdotes, like those of the families featured here. Countries where institutionalization was deeply ingrained, from Sudan and Romania to Bulgaria

and India, are now witnessing radical shifts in belief systems about institutionalization, thanks to informed data and coalition building. But it is the shared stories of the healing power of unconditional love that only families can provide that ultimately convince the decision-makers to change the system.

Of the millions of children in orphanages around the world, we know at least 80 percent have living families who want them, but who were separated due to poverty, discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity or disability, war, and disaster. And we also know that it's actually more cost-effective to find nurturing, protective families for children than it is to sustain orphanages. Through their careful work, Lumos anticipates that most of the children comprising that 80 percent can be brought home to their families with the help of partner organizations in affected countries. This reunification process will literally change the landscape of childhood and family structure around the world.

But it's not enough. Every child—every single one—deserves a family.

The remaining 20 percent of institutionalized children are those who have suffered the most and are judged by the world as simply too complex a problem to solve: children fleeing mass conflict, children with multiple and complex disabilities, children who have been trafficked through the orphanage system, and children in the juvenile justice system. And right now, the world is failing them.

The mythology of orphanages is pervasive. But the only way to rebuild the narrative is to shine a light on a truth.

Since 2005, Lumos has been working to solve the global orphanage crisis, and the rumblings of change can no longer be ignored. Lumos and our many partners have raised awareness among governments, communities, donors, and the world at large of the harm caused by institutions, and that better alternatives exist. Evidence has been presented, and financial analyses have convinced governments that transitioning to family-based care is not just better for children, but also more affordable.

Lumos is committed to finding families for all the world's children, even—especially—those who are often considered impossible to place. Because the global orphanage problem is *not* impossible to solve. Indeed, Lumos has witnessed how

the impossible becomes possible when communities are consulted and respected, when partners and community leaders work together and, most importantly, when we truly listen to children and young people. Right now, Lumos and its partners are finding families for unaccompanied refugee children in Ethiopia to keep them out of terrifying detention centers; for HIV-positive children in Colombia, so they can be healthy, happy, and fully included in their communities; for babies born outside marriage in Sudan; for trafficked children in Haiti and Kenya.

Never before in the history of the world have children had as powerful a voice as they do now. And Lumos is listening. As Pavel, a young person from the Czech Republic, told us, "Without love, there is no childhood." This movement, our movement, is growing. Together, help us shift the world, shape the future, and restore the childhood every young person deserves.





ABOUT LUMOS

Children belong in *families*, not orphanages.

Lumos has a bold yet achievable mission: to have children worldwide out of institutions and into loving, nurturing family care by 2050.

Lumos demonstrates the dramatic harm to children caused by institutionalization and the proven benefits of the alternatives: community and family care. Lumos tackles the root causes of family separation—poverty, trafficking, and discrimination—and reunites families.

Lumos speaks up on behalf of the eight million children trapped in orphanages and other institutions worldwide to transform their care, so every child can thrive in families and communities. Eighty percent of these hidden children are not orphans and could stay with their families, with the right support.

Named after the light-giving spell in Harry Potter, Lumos is an international organization that was founded by J.K. Rowling in 2005.

Find out more at wearelumos.org.



Protecting Children. Providing Solutions.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



DEBRA HURFORD BROWN © J.K. ROWLING 2018

J.K. ROWLING

Compelled by an article in the *Sunday Times* newspaper back in 2004 about children being kept in caged beds in an institution, writer J.K. Rowling had the original idea for a charity that would seek to end the institutionalization of children. And so Lumos, named after the light-giving spell in Harry Potter, was founded to shine a light on some of the world's most disadvantaged children.

After eight years as chair of the Board of Trustees, J.K. Rowling became Founder and Life President of Lumos in 2014.

J.K. Rowling is the author of the record-breaking, multi-award-winning Harry Potter novels. Loved by fans around the world, the series has sold more than five hundred million copies, been translated into over eighty different languages, and made into eight blockbuster films.

J.K. Rowling has written three companion volumes in aid of charity: *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (in aid of Comic Relief and Lumos), and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (in aid of Lumos). In 2007, J.K. Rowling auctioned a copy of one of seven special editions of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, which raised £1.95 million for Lumos. In December 2008, the book was widely published in aid of the charity and became the fastest-selling book of that year.

Her 2008 Harvard commencement speech was published in 2015 as an illustrated book, *Very Good Lives: The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination*, and sold in aid of Lumos and university-wide financial aid at Harvard.

In 2016, J.K. Rowling collaborated with writer Jack Thorne and director John Tiffany on the stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, which is now playing in London, New York, and Melbourne.

Also in 2016, J.K. Rowling made her screenwriting debut with the film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

A prequel to the Harry Potter series, this new adventure of Magizoologist Newt Scamander marked the start of a five-film series to be written by the author. The second film, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*, was released in November 2018.

Through her charitable trust, Volant, J.K. Rowling supports a number of other causes to do with social deprivation, particularly concerned with women, children, and young people at risk. She continues to fund research and treatment of multiple sclerosis and other neurological conditions through the Anne Rowling Clinic at Edinburgh University.

As well as receiving an OBE and Companion of Honour for services to children's literature and philanthropy, J.K. Rowling has received many other awards and honors, including France's Légion d'honneur and Denmark's Hans Christian Andersen Award.



PIPPA WILSON

GEORGETTE MULHEIR

Georgette Mulheir joined international children's rights organization Lumos in 2007. For twenty-eight years, Georgette has worked in thirty-three countries around the world. Her work has transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged children and saved the lives of more than fifteen thousand. She pioneered a model of transforming care now followed by many governments, preventing the separation of children from families, returning children from institutions and so-called "orphanages" to families, and redirecting finances from institutions to community services that enable children to flourish in families. She has trained and advised policy makers and senior government practitioners from fifty-one countries in transforming children's services. She has spearheaded groundbreaking work to ensure full inclusion in society of children with disabilities, through the development of inclusive education and award-winning projects to support children and young people with intellectual disabilities to become powerful self-advocates, influencing policy at the highest level.

Georgette led action research that exposed the phenomenon of orphanage trafficking. This research has contributed to global efforts to eradicate this widespread form of modern slavery. She is now leading a new approach to ensuring unaccompanied and separated child refugees are not kept in detention, but rather in family care. In 2014, she was named as "one of the world's thirty most influential social workers" by *socialworkdegreeguide.com*. In 2015, she was honored in the prestigious sixth Tribeca Disruptive Innovation Awards for her work.

Georgette has also written extensively, including authoring four books on children's rights, gender, disability, and transforming care services for children. Most recently, she has contributed to *The Routledge Handbook of Global Child Welfare*.



GINA ASPROCOLAS

MORGAN BADEN

Morgan Baden is an author, bestselling ghostwriter, and freelance writer. She's also an award-winning social media expert and communications executive, and previously taught social media marketing courses at New York University. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and two children. Find her at morganbaden.com.



© RHEA ANNA

BRENDAN BANNON

Photographer Brendan Bannon has worked on projects for the *New York Times*, Doctors Without Borders, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and HBO. He is the founder and director of The Most Important Picture, through which he has run educational collaborations with Syrian refugees, Ugandan AIDS orphans, Rwandan genocide survivors, and Serbian photojournalists. He is currently working on The Odyssey Project, giving combat veterans the tools to explore the challenges of coming home through photography and writing. His personal photography and his Syrian students' pictures were featured at the Museum of Modern Art as part of the *Insecurities* exhibition. His websites are brendanbannon.com and mostimportantpicture.org.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped this book, and the documentary film that inspired it, *come to life*.

FROM LUMOS

J.K. Rowling, *Founder*, Neil Blair, *Chairman*, Georgette Mulheir, Kris Moran, Kate Timbrell, Robbie Wilson, Rani Selvarajah

And . . .

Eddie Redmayne, for his unwavering support and his exquisite narration in the film.

FROM SCHOLASTIC INC.

Richard Robinson, *Chairman & CEO*, Ellie Berger, Billy DiMichele, Emily Clement, David Saylor, Meryl Wolfe, JoAnne Mojica, Joe Romano, Melissa Schirmer, Steve Pozzo

FROM PENTAGRAM

Paula Scher, Rusty Van Riper, Emily Atwood

FROM DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY TELEVISION CENTER (DCTV)

Jon Alpert, Matthew O’Neill, Larissa Bills, Gladys Murphy, Moses Naranjo, Jessica Galente

FROM HBO

Jacqueline Glover

SPECIAL THANKS

To Richard Plepler, who charted the course for the documentary film *Finding the Way Home*.

And to the extraordinary Sheila Nevins, *Executive Producer*, without whom *Finding the Way Home* would never have happened.

Thank you, Sheila, for your vision, your wisdom, and your impeccable eye.

ABOUT LUMOS’S PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Finding the Way Home would not have been possible without the extraordinary support of the following partner organizations:



Associação de Apoio à Criança em Risco (ACER) is an NGO that offers an alternative way of life to vulnerable children and young people living on the streets of São Paulo, Brazil. ACER provides this through core programs of education and culture, social assistance, community development, and youth leadership. www.acerbrasil.org.br



Amalthea z.s. is an NGO in the Czech Republic. Its aim is to increase children’s satisfaction in their own foster and adoptive families and to prevent the placement of children in institutional care. Amalthea provides social, educational, and therapeutic services to families with children and ensures the social and legal protection for children. It provides family support services to prevent children being separated from their families, as well as support for foster families. amalthea.cz



Lila Mujer is an association of women living with HIV/AIDS that aims to promote their growth and development in order to improve their well-being and quality of life, together with their families and community. Lila Mujer achieves this through counseling and support groups, youth groups and education on HIV and sexual health, legal assistance, and HIV awareness and training. lilamujer.org



Catalysts for Social Action is an Indian NGO with a mission to create a brighter future for children under institutional care. It achieves this through providing support to adoptive families and children, supporting young people transitioning into independent living, and through education and a vocational training program. csa.org.in



Amalthea z.s. is an NGO in the Czech Republic. Its aim is to increase children’s satisfaction in their own foster and adoptive families and to prevent the placement of children in institutional care. Amalthea provides social, educational, and therapeutic services to families with children and ensures the social and legal protection for children. It provides family support services to prevent children being separated from their families, as well as support for foster families. amalthea.cz



Child in Need Institute (CINI) is an Indian NGO that aims to enable impoverished women and children to take control of their lives and have a share in sustainable development. For over forty years, CINI has partnered with central and state governments, national and international donors, NGOs, and local communities to strengthen the capacity of deprived children and women to improve their health, nutrition, education, and protection conditions. cini-india.org



Foster Care Society is an Indian NGO that promotes family preservation, kinship care, foster care, adoption, and aftercare as best practices for children in need of care and protection. Its work focuses on advocacy, direct practice, capacity building, and research.

fostercaresociety.org



Fundación Dar Amor (FUNDAMOR) is a Colombian nonprofit organization that specializes in social intervention programs that promote the inclusion, education, and protection of vulnerable communities, especially children and young people affected by HIV. In 2016, FUNDAMOR, with support from Lumos, became the first institution in Colombia to begin the process of deinstitutionalization.

fundamor.org



The Nasio Trust is a UK- and Kenya-based charity that aims to provide a holistic solution to ending the cycle of poverty through programs focused on education and childcare, health-care provision, and sustainable income-generating projects. Based on the belief that children should not grow up in institutions like orphanages, the Nasio Trust model encourages entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency to create communities that can look after themselves.

thenasiotrust.org



Next Generation Nepal

Next Generation Nepal is an NGO that reconnects trafficked Nepali children with their families. Next Generation Nepal rescues children that are being kept in illegal, abusive children's homes/orphanages and safely reintegrates them with their families. It also runs awareness-raising campaigns in Nepali communities to educate parents and prevent children from being trafficked into orphanages.

nextgenerationnepal.org



OrphanCare is a nonprofit organization that endeavors to give institutionalized children and at-risk newborn babies in Malaysia the joy of growing up in a family. It works closely with the Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development and the Department of Social Welfare, as well as Lumos, to implement the transition from institutional care to family-based care.

orphancare.org.my



La Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento Familiar (RELAF) is the Latin American Foster Care Network for the right to community- and family-based care for children and adolescents. It has promoted and supported the work of NGOs and governments to make the right of every child to live in a family and a community a reality since 2003. It aims to create and strengthen a network of regional stakeholders to contribute to deinstitutionalization, to promote alternatives such as foster care, and to prevent family separation.

relaf.org



Stahili is an NGO that works in child protection, development, education, and human rights in Kenya. "Stahili" means "to deserve" in Swahili, and Stahili believes that every child deserves to fulfill their potential and to be protected. Its vision is to ensure that no child lives in an orphanage. It empowers families to bring children home from orphanages and provides reintegration support.

stahili.org



Středisko náhradní rodinné péče (Center for Alternative Family Care) is a Czech organization that aims to ensure that family care prevails over institutional care. It also works to develop and change the system of foster family care in the Czech Republic, as well as providing services for those interested in adopting or fostering a child.

nahradnirodina.cz



"Udayan" is a Sanskrit word meaning "eternal sunshine," and Udayan Care aims to bring sunshine into the lives of underserved sections of society that require intervention. It is a charity that works to empower vulnerable children, women, and youth in twenty-three cities across thirteen states of India. Udayan Care runs small group homes where children are brought up in safe family environments. It also has a fellowship program to send girls to college or vocational training, and an IT program to teach young people digital literacy.

udayancare.org



Vanitashray is a nonprofit organization that provides crucial support to underprivileged and vulnerable children, women, and families in Pune, India. Vanitashray believes that advocacy, capacity building, policy reform, and direct practice all must be done simultaneously in order to deliver their work with children, women, and families. Having recently deinstitutionalized, Vanitashray's key purpose is family strengthening and preservation. To meet this purpose, they provide services such as day-care centers, community education, and feeding and medical assistance programs, as well as microcredit loans and income-generation training programs to avoid family separation.

facebook.com/Vanitashray

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vteřina poté

Vteřina poté (Seconds After) is an NGO in the Czech Republic. Its mission is to amplify the voices of children and young people who have gone through an institution, and to support a dialogue between young people and those working in institutions so they can work together to prepare young people for leaving institutions.

vterinapote.cz

ENDNOTES

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