



Until we are all equal



Mitzy, 15, encourages girls to play football alongside boys in Peru.

# Gifts of Hope: Real Stories, Real Change

Last year, 13,952 people across Canada gave **Gifts of Hope** that reached children and families facing some of the toughest challenges around the world. In this report we share seven inspiring stories of the young people those gifts helped support.

# From Crisis to Classroom

► **IMPACT:** The **Humanitarian Aid** gift raised \$20,185 to support projects in Uganda, Peru, and Ecuador that reached **163,122 people** facing emergencies.

**W**hen Anifa was 17, her mother left their home. Suddenly, Anifa was the one caring for her siblings – so school had to wait.

“I had to cook food and do all that my mother used to do,” says Anifa.

The RISING project in Uganda, which is supported by the Humanitarian Aid Gift of Hope, is designed for girls like Anifa – girls who face crises that lead them to drop out of school or prevent them from attending in the first place. Today, Anifa is back in school, and she dreams of becoming a doctor so she can help others.

“Some girls felt shy about returning

to school because they’re older than their classmates,” explains Isaac Oluma, a primary school teacher in the northern district of Alebtong. Letting girls know they’re welcome no matter their age is one of the many ways the RISING project bridges the gap to bring Anifa and other girls like her back to the classroom.

This is especially important when children are pulled out of school because of changes at home, or due to war or a disaster like an earthquake. The longer they’re away, the harder it is to catch up. Last year, RISING helped 110,086 out-of-school children get back to class in Uganda.

## DID YOU KNOW?

This Gift of Hope also helped support projects that trained 272 “Baba Clubs” for 8,000 fathers and community leaders in Uganda, which helped boost school enrolment by 26.4% – with girls making up 64% of new students.



Anifa completes a math equation in class. She has returned to school with support from Gifts of Hope.

## Turning the Tide

› **IMPACT: The Nature-Based Solutions for Economic Empowerment** gift raised \$15,000 to support projects that trained **1,595 girls and women** in environmentally friendly businesses.

Meet another environmentalist supported by Gifts of Hope.



Mima (left) and members of her women's group support one another and farm seaweed together.



For more than four decades, Mima has relied on seaweed farming to support her family and pay for her children to go to school. She farms on Funzi Island in Kenya's Kwale County, but things have changed.

Rising sea levels and increasingly harsh weather conditions threaten her crops. Drought brings disease, and heavy rains wash away the seaweed farms. "Thirty years ago, the ocean was far from where it is today," Mima says, pointing to the tide – now just 30 metres from her home.

This Gift of Hope helped Mima rebuild her business. She received new equipment such as drying shades, storage space, seedlings, ties, ropes, and pegs, and she joined 600 other women in learning new ways to farm and sell seaweed in a changing climate.

## Pooling Resources

› **IMPACT: The Clean Water for Families** gift raised \$143,543 to support projects that helped **41 communities in seven countries** access clean water close to home.

The students at Raida's school know that water has the same volume as mass. They know that 38 litres of water, for example, weighs 38 kilograms. That's how much water they carried to their school each day from a river 1.5 kilometres away.

Even still, Raida and her girlfriends used to stay home from school during their periods because there wasn't enough water – or privacy – to wash themselves.

"When I had my period, I would rush home and remain there for three or four days," says Raida, 13. "Even my mother thought it was safer to stay home than risk disease and shame."

With help from the Clean Water for Families Gift of Hope, water taps were added to two schools in Raida's community so she and her friends wouldn't miss any more classes. These taps are enabling 1,500 students to have access to clean water every day.



Raida, 13, and her friend Hilda wash their hands at school.

“I can't express how happy I am to have clean water at our school now.”

—Raida, whose school received support from the Clean Water for Families gift

## Knowledge Is Power

► **IMPACT:** The **Girl Power** gift raised \$479,329 to support projects that reached **124,045 girls in 12 countries** with programs that promote equal rights for girls.

**S**ushmita was in Grade 6 when boys from her school began sexually harassing her. "I didn't dare share it with my family," she says. "They might have stopped me from going to school."

Sushmita kept quiet, but it wore her down. "I felt sorry for myself back then," she says.

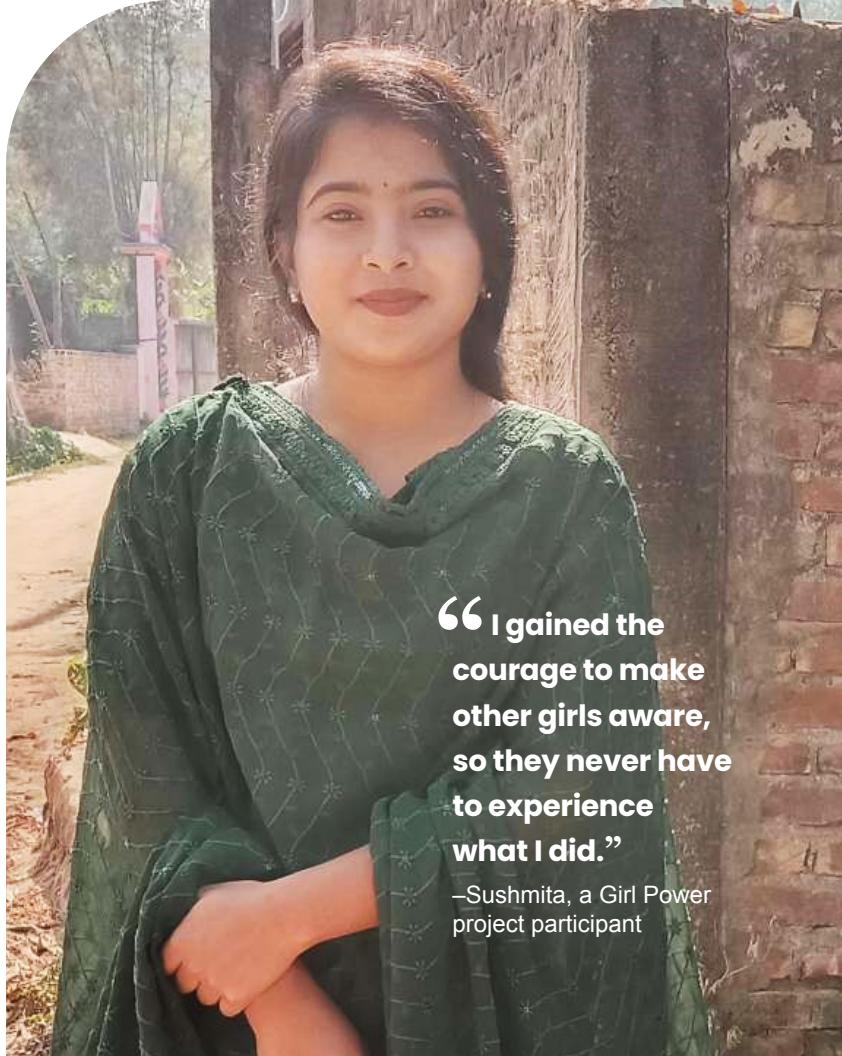
Years later, Sushmita joined a Champions of Change club funded by Gifts of Hope, and everything

shifted. She learned that what she had experienced wasn't only unfair – it was violence. And she didn't have to accept it. "Other girls were harassed like me, but none of us ever spoke up [before]," she says.

Now Sushmita speaks out. She teaches other teens on how to stand up to harassment and protect themselves. And she's not alone: The Girl Power gift has helped 10,080 girls in Bangladesh do the same,

### DID YOU KNOW?

In Girl Power-supported communities in Bangladesh, the number of adolescent girls and young women who know how to prevent and protect themselves from violence has more than doubled, from 38% to nearly 80%. That's a 42-point increase in awareness, showing how education and empowerment can transform lives.



Sushmita, 18, is a participant in a project fueled by the Girl Power Gift of Hope.

## More Than a Meal

► **IMPACT:** The **Help End Global Hunger** gift raised \$113,350 to support projects that helped **179,614 people** receive food assistance in five countries, distributing **1,733 metric tons of food**. (That would fill 779 Olympic-sized pools.)

**“I don’t have to worry about running out of fresh vegetables.”**

—Janine, who took part in training to learn how to grow vegetables at home

**J**anine needed more food.

She and her husband had fled violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo and were raising their three children in a refugee camp in Rwanda. Life was hard, and without enough nutritious food, one of her children became very sick.

Janine didn’t want to wait for help; she wanted to do something. At an information session for a Plan project supported by the Help End Global Hunger gift, she got the seeds of an idea: What if she grew her own vegetables?

She started with two gardens – one to feed her family and another for vegetables to sell at the nearby market. It worked. Her family had enough to eat, and with the money she earned, she could buy salt and fish to go with the vegetables. Most importantly, her child recovered, and her family had created a way to stay healthy.

This gift also reached 2,157 pregnant women and 6,808 breastfeeding mothers in Rwanda with the tools and support they need to grow their own food and keep their children strong.



Janine (above) tends to her vegetable garden. Gifts of Hope have supported her family and others in Rwanda in growing their own food.



## Free to Be Informed

► **IMPACT:** The **Help Refugee Children** gift raised \$98,432 to support projects that reached **108,965 people** who have been displaced from their homes.

**O**ver the last decade, 7.9 million people have left Venezuela to escape political and economic crisis there. But arriving in a new country doesn't mean their struggles are over. For example, in some areas, getting health care can be a challenge for Venezuelan migrants, because they need legal documents such as proof of residency and to be able to afford to pay for care. They also can face discrimination from health care providers; the large influx of migrants has stirred tension and hostility in some host communities.

For young people, being barred from accessing health services can derail their entire future, particularly when it comes to their sexual and reproductive health. Without access to care, they're

more vulnerable to disease, unplanned pregnancy, and misinformation.

With support from the Help Refugee Children gift, Plan International holds training sessions that help young people learn where they can go to get welcoming health care that meets their needs. "They told me that it didn't matter that I was a minor and that [the health centres they suggested] could inform us on different topics," says Luis, 16, in Peru.

The trainings also make it easier for youth to talk about things like sex and menstruation. "They didn't just come to the neighbourhood to hand out contraceptives," says Jhoriman, 19, in Colombia. "They also gave us guidance on things I had never heard about, and they spoke to us openly without shame or hiding anything."

### DID YOU KNOW?

Before the trainings, 24% of participants in Peru aged 14–19 knew where to go for sexual health services. Afterward, that number soared to 76%.

A young woman attends a Plan training session in Colombia.



## Stop the Stigma

► **IMPACT:** The **Fight Health Stigma** gift raised \$7,500 to support projects that reached **47,439 people** and provided five health facilities with medical supplies.

**F**or some marginalized communities in El Salvador, shame can be deadly. The groups with the highest risk of contracting HIV – including transgender women, sex workers, and men who have sex with men – are also the least likely to get tested or seek treatment. Why? Because they face stigma and are discriminated against when they seek health care.

Enter: Match Con Tu Salud (“Match With Your Health”). With support from the Fight Health Stigma gift, this app connects people with safe, respectful health services and virtual counseling so they can get tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections without

fear or shame.

Kevin is one of 4,000 people who got tested for HIV after receiving a referral through the app. He wants to take care of himself and the people he’s intimate with. “I had the opportunity to speak with the health care worker [the app referred me to],” he says, “and it was comforting to feel supported and educated without judgment.”

Match Con Tu Salud is much more than an app. It creates a space where stigma doesn’t decide who gets care – a space where people like Kevin can take control of their health.

A medical professional provides HIV testing from a mobile health clinic.





Click or scan the QR code to learn how you can support girls until we are all equal.

## WHAT'S NEW AT PLAN

### Girls' Equal Futures

We're at a turning point for millions of girls and young women around the world. What we choose to do – or not do – right now will shape generations to come.

Cuts to global aid, humanitarian crises, conflict, and economic and political instability are undoing decades of progress. Every day, it's getting harder for girls to go to school, access health care, and be seen as equals to the boys and young men around them.

At Plan, we refuse to stand by, because we know a better future is possible.

It takes **determination**.

It takes **optimism**.

It takes **vision**.

Last year, we reached more than 23 million girls worldwide – helping them stay in school, protecting them from child marriage and violence, and ensuring access to health care.

Like us, you believe that an equal world is possible. That belief is at the heart of our campaign, Until We Are All Equal. Your support for Plan's work enables us to focus on the greatest needs facing girls today.

There are 1 billion girls alive today – each filled with promise, potential, and dreams for the future. How do you transform the future? Start by investing in them.



### About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada is a member of a global organization dedicated to advancing children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International has been building powerful partnerships with and for children for over 85 years and is now active in more than 80 countries. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind, or not equally valued. We're determined optimists, and we will continue to persevere until we are all equal.

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**HUMANITARIAN COALITION**