

Releasing Children from Poverty through Play

The benefits of play have long been acknowledged here in the UK. The Government's recent Child Poverty Strategy states that 'a key influence on the early development of children is...the 'home learning environment' and play is specifically listed as an activity 'associated with higher intellectual and social/behavioural scores.'

However, many families in developing countries can't afford the luxury of play. As soon as children are able to walk they must join in with the daily chores and the hard graft of survival. In other cultures, playtime is just not deemed as important.

As part of its work releasing some of the world's poorest children from poverty, Compassion UK believes play is vital, understanding that poverty is not just the result of economic factors. Through the Child Survival Programme, vulnerable mothers and babies are taught many skills to help their children thrive – and playtime is high on the list of priorities!

In the village of Inigodawela in Sri Lanka, Compassion is encouraging families to build playhouses for their little ones. Some are made out of wood, some out of bamboo shoots, others are covered palmyra leaves. Each one looks different, but the purpose is the same: to play.

Nirosha Sarojini is a 25-year-old mother who is raising two little boys on her own, Dilshan and Sasidu. Their father is on the run from the army and won't come home for fear the villagers will hand him over. But even by herself, Nirosha was determined to make a playhouse for her boys by collecting wood from a nearby wasteland.

Then there's Dharshni and her daughter Prabodya who have been a part of the Child Survival Programme project for eight months. Dharshni's husband Piyatissa was an alcoholic, and Dharshni herself has suffered from severe depression. She even tried to abort little Prabodya by drinking kerosene during the early stages of her pregnancy.

But since attending the programme, the couple's lives have changed. Their marriage is stronger than it's ever been; they exchange proud glances as they gesture towards a beautiful playhouse. "Today is the first day that I put Prabodya in her playhouse. She was there the entire morning and didn't want to come out," says Dharshni. "It's so good to have a place for her to play, a place specially made for her. It's a brilliant idea. I am so grateful."

Compassion is a leading child development charity serving more than a million children in 26 of the world's poorest countries. To find out more, visit www.compassionuk.org.

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