

blessings

OPERATION BLESSING INTERNATIONAL

MAY 2017

Creating
beauty
in a safe place



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Beauty in the Brokenness: Helping survivors put the pieces of their lives back together



1 HONDURAS: A volunteer pauses for a photo while working on Operation Blessing's anti-mosquito pilot project in Monte Verde.

2 HAITI: Three girls enjoy each other, and some time outside of class, at Operation Blessing's ENLA School.

3 GUATEMALA: Edinson shows off the new school supplies and brand new shoes he received from OBI. This year he received a special leadership award at school!

4 UGANDA: After leaving her abusive husband, Jane reached out to Operation Blessing partner, Abide Family Center, for help. Today, she runs her own business!

5 PERU: Mery, a mother of two, weighs one of the baby broiler chicks she received from Operation Blessing to help her begin her poultry breeding business.

6 EL SALVADOR: Eight-year-old Kenya (2nd from left) is thankful for a new chance at life. A special partnership between OBI and Health City hospital in the Cayman Islands provided Kenya with the heart surgery she desperately needed!

OPERATION BLESSING
HAPPENINGS





obi
TRENDING

THIS MONTH ON FACEBOOK



Monica
Livelihood Program Manager

Did you miss the chance to go behind the scenes with Operation Blessing's livelihood program manager, Monica Eriksen? In remote areas of Nepal, vulnerable women are living in shacks and struggling to care for their children. To help these families, Operation Blessing is not offering a short-lived handout, but a hand up—teaching them valuable skills, like sewing, that they can use to support the ones they love. Visit ob.org/sewing to watch this video!

Don't miss another update about how Operation Blessing is using innovative programs and projects TO EMPOWER WOMEN WORLDWIDE!



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HONDURAS



RWANDA

Motherhood AROUND THE WORLD



UGANDA



IRAQ



GUATEMALA



PERU

The gift of SPEECH

A young boy's life is transformed through speech and cognitive therapy

by Dr. Sandra Arbaiza, OB Peru director

Meet Adam, our dear young friend and an Operation Blessing success story. We first had the pleasure of making little Adam's acquaintance in 2013, when at 3 years old, he became a part of our OBI program at *Mi Chocita* preschool in the Belén area of Iquitos, Peru.

Adam lit the room with his smiles. He was kind and always participated, but his teachers noticed that he barely spoke. Articulating words and expressing himself proved difficult for Adam. When the teachers called on him, the other students would say, "Don't bother him. He can't talk.", but we did not give up on him.

Due to their holistic approach, for the next two years, *Mi Chocita* tended to Adam's educational, physical and social needs. Like they did with every child in his classroom, *Mi Chocita* monitored his height, weight and hemoglobin levels and provided him with additional protein and supplements through their nutritional program. Because of rampant problems with parasites in his area, each year he and the

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other children were provided medicine to protect their health and well-being. In addition, he benefited from OBI's Developing Values program, aimed at improving the children's social skills, manners and character and allowing them to learn about important issues such as equality, democracy and social justice from a young age.

However, despite the program's best efforts, two years later, Adam's speaking skills still had not improved. In 2015, we discussed the issue with his parents and discovered that his family, like many others in Belén, survive by fishing and taxiing passengers across the nearby river by boat. They could not afford the extra expense of treating Adam's speech issues.

We also learned that his mother had fallen when she was seven months pregnant with him, and his family had always suspected that to be the origin of Adam's condition. "I had some friends and even relatives telling me my son was mute," his mother Carmen said. "I started believing it. He only pointed at things, and as he continued growing up, I got worried, but I didn't know what to do."

So OBI took Adam to a speech specialist, where we covered the cost of the necessary tests, and Adam was diagnosed. We proceeded to provide all of the speech and psychological treatment that Adam would need in order to thrive in elementary school. First, he was taken to a speech therapy clinic twice a week, and he very quickly became more verbal. In addition, an OBI psychologist worked with him on cognitive issues, reinforcing areas such as writing, identifying colors, vocabulary, pronunciation and building puzzles. Throughout his therapy, Adam remained enthusiastic and cooperative.

By the end of that year, Adam was like a whole new child. He confided to our workers that his mother made him the best cake ever for his birthday. The kids at his school declared, "Adam speaks!" and his teacher reported that he now greeted people and raised his hand to ask and answer questions in class. Perhaps most importantly, his mother said, "I have seen a big change, and it fills me with joy."

We continued to actively work with Adam until he graduated from our preschool program, equipped with the skills to enter elementary school. Recently,

"I have seen a big change," Adam's mother said,
"and it fills me with

joy."



we caught up with Adam and his family in Belén. As expected, Adam is right on track and doing well. When he opened the door, he immediately recognized his former instructor, Vania, and expressed his excitement over seeing her loud and clear. OBI will continue to follow Adam's educational progress and support his family as they raise him and his little sister. By providing supplies and new uniforms, we facilitated

their enrollment in elementary school for another year. Adam's life is just one of many changed forever by our faithful Operation Blessing staff, volunteers and generous donors like you.

We are excited about the progress he's made, and we look forward to watching Adam grow into his full potential for many years to come. ♦

Creating beauty in a safe place



Mother & daughter learn a new skill to create a new life



In a region of El Salvador rife with violence and gangs, self-protection becomes a way of life. Many citizens flee their hometowns for safety, especially if a rival gang shows up.

In 2016 — when the murder rate climbed to 22 times that of the United States — 21-year-old Maria fled her hometown, leaving behind her education and her mother because her life had been threatened by a local gang simply for crossing territories between her school and home.

“I was hiding for a few months,” she said. “At night I was crying thinking about how my mother was.” She hid with an aunt until her mother could join her, and the two were

thankfully reunited. They eventually found a safe place to live, but they were unsure of how they would make a new life.

Traumatized by her scrape with gang violence, Maria learned of a support group through her local health clinic, where she met other women who also benefited from the emotional support. Operation Blessing International hosted a paper flower-making workshop at the health clinic. Maria said, “I used to do this kind of thing before, but not very well. With the workshop they have brought, I have been able to improve and develop my skills to make flowers.” After completing the workshop, she realized she could produce more flowers to

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generate income for herself and her mom. She also taught the skill to her mother so that they could make flowers together.

Maria began selling her creations, and received many orders for special occasions and holidays in Latin America. Since that time her orders and production have only increased. Together, she and her mother are building a successful business.

“Thanks to Operation Blessing for this beautiful workshop,” Maria said. With a new skill under her belt, Maria and her mom can look forward to creating a secure life. ♦



Mom,
for all you do - thank you

You are the gatekeepers, the tear-wipers, the cheerleaders and the voice we hear most when we're looking for inspiration. You're the mothers, grandmothers and female figures who have helped shape us and teach us. We are who we are because of your love!

You taught us we can overcome anything, but we know there are moms struggling just to make ends meet.

Won't you join us in supporting other moms around the world?

operationblessing.org/mom

Fostering a *happy* home

Amarilis has a big heart and a happy home but empty cupboards. For the past 15 years, she has worked as a community health worker with mentally ill and special needs patients, but a few months ago she lost her job.

Amarilis has adopted three children into her home, siblings Raymond, 19, Ivan, 17, and Lynette, 13. She began fostering them in 2006 and adopted all three four years later.

“They are very outgoing, good kids,” Amarilis said.

Without an income, Amarilis fell behind on her rent payments. Social services said they could not help, and she struggled to make ends meet.

Operation Blessing’s partner in the area, House of Blessing, brought Amarilis the relief she needed. Not only did she get help with her rent, but she also comes twice a month to pick up food to help feed her family.

“It’s always needed,” she said. “We love the bread and the eggs and the milk.”

Amarilis is looking for work, and is hoping to find a job that is not as physically strenuous as her last. She wants to be sure she is strong and able to be there for her children.

As she looks for the right position, Amarilis is thankful for the support that she has found from Operation Blessing and their local food pantry.

“You are a blessing for a lot of people that are really in need,” she said. “Thank you.” ♦



Single mother
struggles to feed
adopted children
after job loss

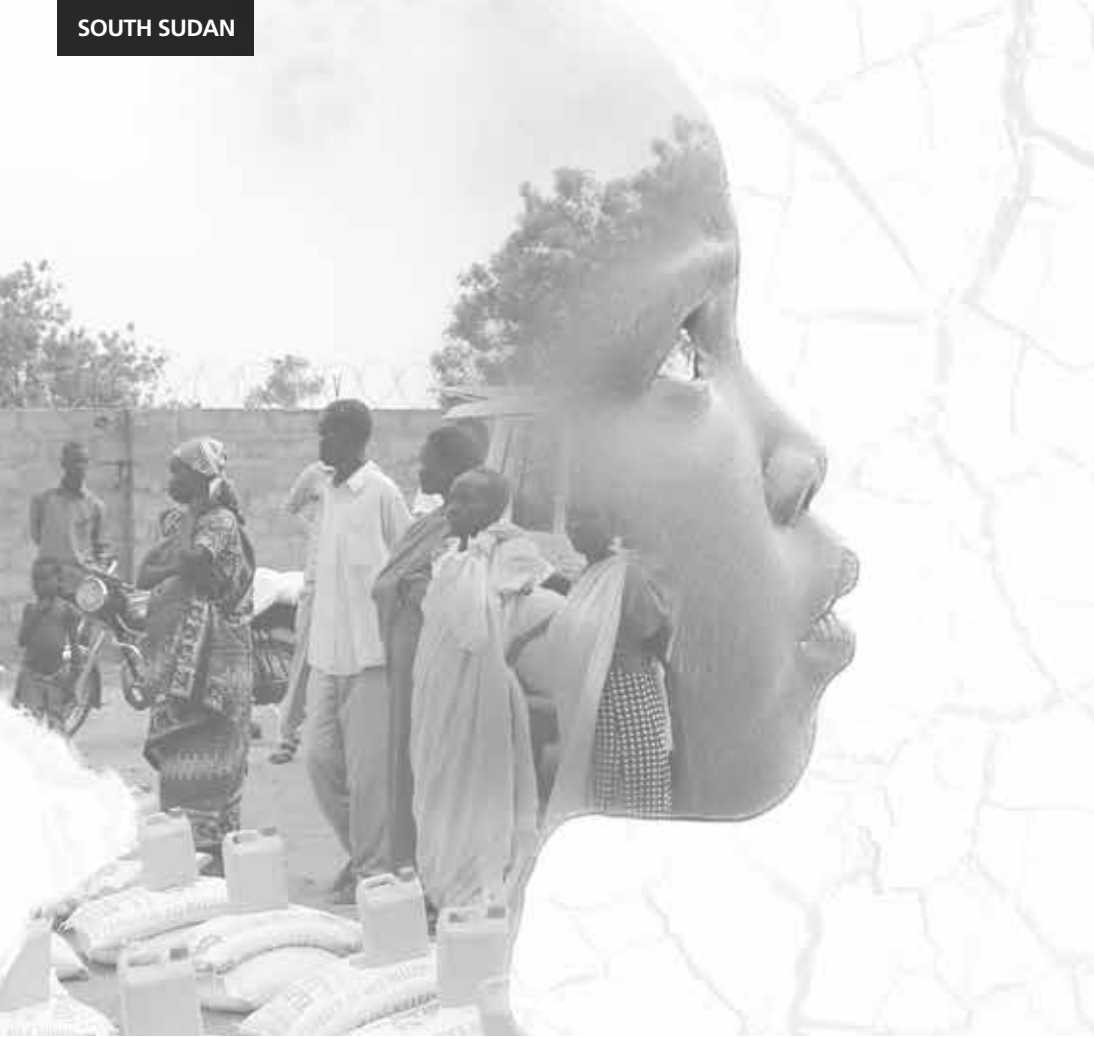


FAMINE

IN SOUTH SUDAN

The land in South Sudan is parched, causing a widespread famine that has left already-struggling families devastated. Famished families and starving children needed help. Thanks to compassionate partners like you, Operation Blessing teams delivered emergency food and supplies to families and orphans in one of the most desperate areas.

Thank you for being a blessing to the hurting! ♦



BEAUTY IN THE BROKENNESS



Bill's Blog

by **Bill Horan**, President
Operation Blessing International

Read more from Bill's Blog
at ob.org/bill

I'm on a 13 hour flight headed home from Tokyo after spending the past few days in Japan attending the annual OB Japan board meeting. OBI had never worked in Japan until March of 2011 when the historic triple disaster of a magnitude-9.0 earthquake, resulting tsunami and eventual Fukushima nuclear meltdown ravaged the northern coastal region.

We responded immediately, first with emergency food and water, then shifting focus to assist coastal fishing communities whose livelihood depended on aquaculture and the farming of oysters and seaweed, along with conventional fishing. Among other

things, we supplied over 100 fishing boats and motors as well as a massive amount of fishing gear that enabled hundreds of families to get back to work in record time.

The physical loss of that disaster has passed for most survivors, but for more than 80,000 people who lived near or downwind from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, the nightmare continues. Many of these communities were unscathed by the tsunami but poisoned by invisible radiation that persists to this day. OB Japan's disaster recovery focus has now shifted from emphasis on physical relief to efforts in helping displaced survivors cope with the wrenching trauma of living in decent but depressing temporary housing for an indeterminate period of time.

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Their lives are "on hold." Their homes, businesses and earthly possessions are so near — yet so very far away. Nobody can be certain, but it's doubtful that those who cannot yet go home will live long enough to wait out the radiation and return. Experts say it might take 50 years or more for the radiation to dissipate to safe levels. Can you even imagine the stress of being stuck in that dilemma?

Our disaster recovery outreach now focuses on "Post-Traumatic Growth" and teaching that brokenness can result in a better life than before. The metaphor that OB Japan uses to explain that concept to displaced survivors compares their suffering and brokenness to the ancient Japanese art of Kintsugi.

Kintsugi is the art of repairing and restoring broken pottery using lacquer mixed with powdered gold or other precious metal dust. The pieces are meticulously put back together and cracks filled with the gold lacquer. The emphasis of this process focuses on the beauty of the repaired cracks; the scars of what happened are highlighted, rather than disguised or hidden. The end result exudes a beauty that surpasses the unbroken original.

As a philosophy, Kintsugi uses the repaired cracks as the focal point of the object rather than something to keep hidden. Japanese culture values the artfully repaired object as better, stronger, more beautiful and containing far greater character than before it was broken. This principle, when applied



Tokyo

to a person rather than an object, can have a dramatic and positive effect on someone who feels broken.

When the OB Japan counselors explain the Kintsugi metaphor, disaster survivors can easily grasp the message, which sets the stage for meaningful teaching and discussions. The concept that a person's brokenness can ultimately result in greater strength, a new level of appreciation of life, better relationships, new possibilities and, at times, a spiritual change, becomes exciting. There is even strong scientific data to back up the fact that individuals who accept the damage they have endured as a key part of their history come out the

other end of the experience stronger and wiser than before the trauma. In Japan, Operation Blessing is not only fixing boats and replacing broken belongings, we are also helping survivors put the pieces of their broken lives back together.

As Christians, we have a huge advantage compared to non-believers when it comes to recovering from trauma. Instead of using gold dust to beautify the glue that holds us together, we can call on Jesus, and ask Him to heal the wounds of a life upended by disaster or disappointment. Thanks to you, dear reader, Operation Blessing continues to shine the light of God's love into many dark places. ♦



HELP KEEP family together

Poverty orphans are the direct result of the breakdown of families...families like little Aksam's in desperate situations who are abandoning their children because they lack the means necessary to continue caring for them. Thanks to friends like you, Operation Blessing and our partner, Abide Family Center, ensured little Aksam would be able to stay with his mom.

Will you help rush urgently-needed care and resources to these families today? Visit **operationblessing.org** to learn how you can help.



operationblessing.org



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