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## Chapter 12

# Education

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All children—deaf and hearing—have a right to education. Children who get an education have more opportunities to learn about the world, develop skills, and find jobs. Education is especially important for deaf children because it allows them to develop their thinking, to communicate with other deaf and hearing people, and to make friends. And with the skills they gain, children who cannot hear well will be able to live productive, independent lives and take part in the life of the community.

Though this book is mostly for children from birth to age 5, this chapter includes some important issues about educating older deaf children, to help parents plan for their child's education.

### Learning begins at home

Learning begins at home, in a child's infancy, and continues throughout her life. The family plays a very important role in helping children learn. Parents and family members are the earliest and most important teachers. At home, a child will learn to communicate, start thinking, and begin relating to other people.

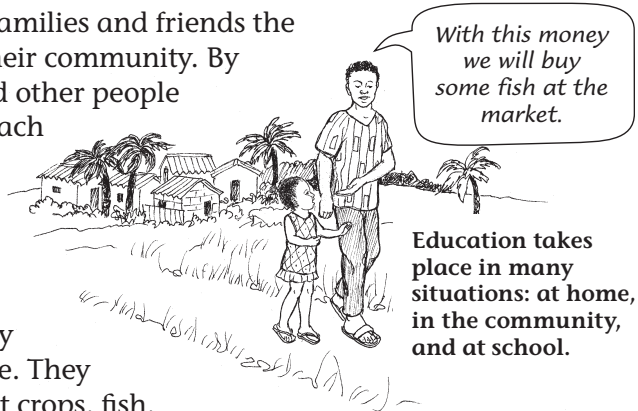
Some communities have teachers and deaf adults who come to peoples' homes to help parents learn how to communicate with their deaf child.

They show family members activities they can do together to learn language. (For ideas and activities to help families teach their children a language, see Chapters 7, 8, and 9.)



## Learning continues in the community

Children learn from their families and friends the skills they need to live in their community. By watching how children and other people talk, play, and work with each other, children learn how to get along with others. They learn to get places they need to go—walking, riding, or driving. They learn to buy and sell, to pay bills, and to get things done. They learn to gather wood, plant crops, fish, weave or sew, make handcrafts, and many other skills.



When children participate in the community, they also learn about their emotions and build self-esteem. Games they play with each other are informal ways of learning to be part of communities. (Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 describe ways to include children in the community and to build strong social skills.)

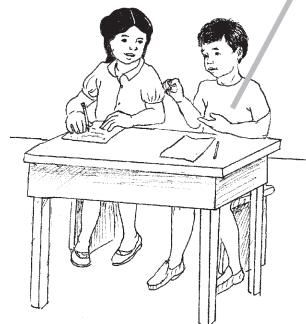
As children grow older they become ready to go to school. Education in school will build on the skills children learn at home and in the community. What they learn at school also gives children skills that prepare them for life as adults.

## Going to school is important for deaf children

Education in school will improve the ability of children who are deaf or cannot hear well to communicate, and can give them skills to lead productive lives and to support their families.

At school, deaf children can learn to read and write—often the only ways that deaf people can communicate with people who do not know sign language or cannot understand their speech. Reading helps people who cannot hear well understand the ideas, emotions, and experiences of other people. Writing helps them communicate and share their thoughts and emotions.

*I'm going to write a letter to my brother who went away to work in the city.*

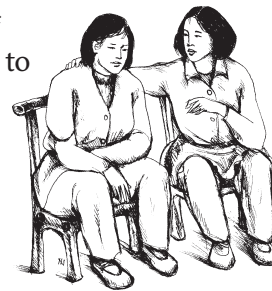


**Deaf girls especially need education!**

It is often even more difficult for a deaf girl to get an education. A girl who cannot hear well is often kept at home doing housework—even after her sisters and brothers leave to go to school or get married.

*You don't have to worry about Chung-Yi. You did the right thing by sending her to school. One day she will be able to look after you!*

Why does a deaf girl need to know about the world? She needs skills to keep herself safe and take part in her community. She needs to know her rights, and get the skills to have a job and live an independent life.



Without communication and education, a deaf girl cannot learn about social rules or understand changes in her body. Too many deaf girls become pregnant without knowing how or why. All girls and women need information they can understand about sexuality, family planning, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

**Different kinds of schools for deaf children**

Children who are deaf or cannot hear well can go to school and learn a lot, including skills they will need to earn a living. They can learn in regular classes together with hearing children, or separately with other deaf children.



Even though you may not have many choices about the kind of school to send your child to, knowing about schools is important because:

- it can help you think about what would be best for your child.
- it can help you work with your school to make the school better for deaf children.
- it can help you work with the community to get the kind of school that families with deaf children need.

### Schools and language

Schools that teach deaf children usually focus either on the **spoken language** of the community or on **sign language**. Some schools teach deaf children to speak and use sign language at the same time, or to speak and use finger spelling. They use sign language, gestures, pictures, lip reading, speech, and reading and writing.

Often the teachers who use spoken language and teachers who use sign language do not agree with each other's methods. This can make it very difficult for parents to get information about what is good in each method.

*Our school believes that deaf children have a right to learn sign language, as it is the "natural language" for deaf people.*



*We also teach about the history and importance of deaf people and the deaf community.*

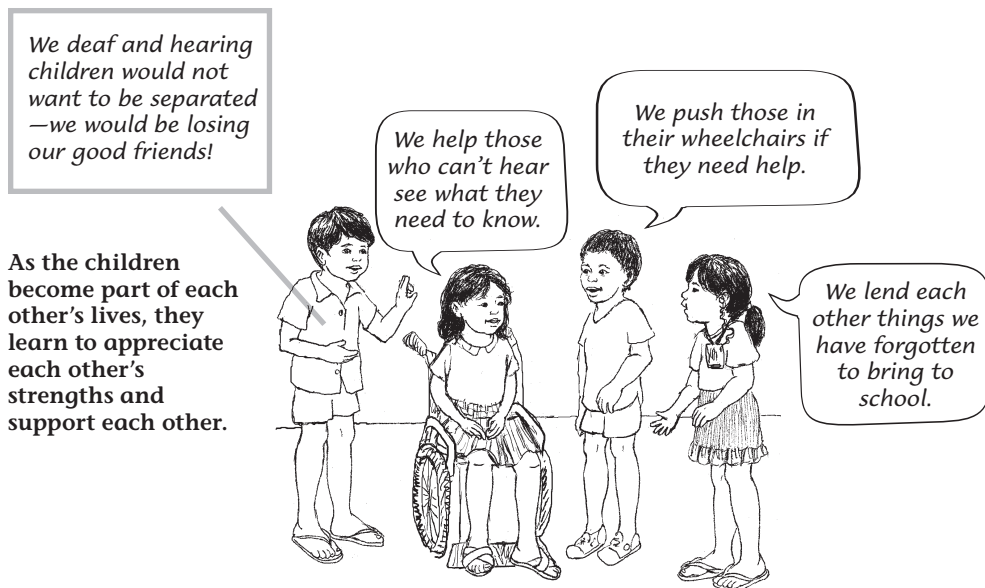
*Our school believes that only deaf children who can understand and respond to spoken language can succeed in the world.*



See Chapters 7, 8, and 9 for information about spoken and sign languages and how to start using them. It is important to remember that each child has his or her own needs and abilities.

## DEAF CHILDREN CAN LEARN IN THE SAME CLASSES AS HEARING CHILDREN

Teaching deaf children and hearing children in the same class is often the only way a community is able to educate deaf children. Children who hear may tease or ignore deaf children because of the way they speak or because they may not understand what people say. But if people make an effort to stop that kind of hurtful behavior, deaf children can have the opportunity to make friends with hearing children and to become part of the local community.



Some local schools teach everyone sign language so deaf children are not left out. Or they spend extra time to teach children who cannot hear well to speak.

### Benefits of learning with hearing children

- Deaf children can continue living at home with their families.
- It is often less expensive.

### Difficulties of learning with hearing children

- Children who can hear may tease or ignore deaf children.
- Teachers may not be able to learn much about deafness or how to teach children with different hearing abilities.
- There may not be enough people fluent in sign language to learn a complete language. The child's mental development may suffer.

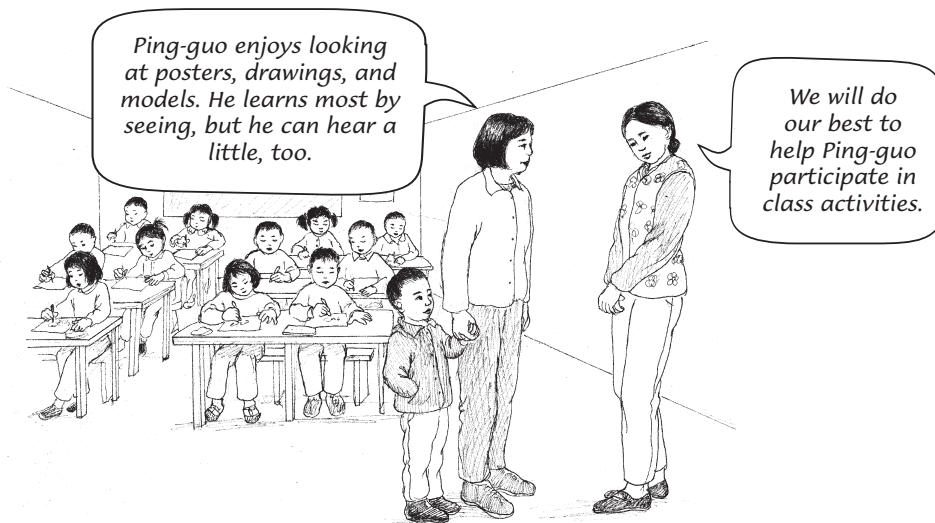
### ► **Ways to support deaf children in hearing classrooms**

It is not enough just to open the school doors to deaf children. A deaf child who learns in a regular classroom needs a teacher and classmates who can communicate with her. Lessons must be taught in a way deaf children can understand. If a deaf child cannot understand, she will not learn.

When schools do not provide enough support for deaf children, they will not learn as well as hearing children. If schools expect deaf children to learn less, then all children will learn the same thing—deaf children are less capable. This idea is not true and harms everyone.

#### **Offer extra training to teachers so they can learn how to communicate with deaf children**

A teacher who has not worked with children who are deaf or who can hear only a little may be unsure about how to teach a child who does not hear well. Talk to the teacher about the child's needs and abilities, and see if there are simple ways to make learning easier for the child.



If a child can hear a little or read lips, the teacher should face the child when she speaks and check often to make sure the child can see her mouth.

Let the child sit close to the teacher. She will be better able to see the teacher's lips move. She will also be less distracted by the movements of other children.

### Help schools meet a deaf child's needs:

- Teachers can prepare the rest of the school—the other teachers and children—to welcome deaf children. They can teach everyone in the school about deafness and about how deaf children learn best by seeing.
- Deaf adults can help the teacher or the students learn sign language. They can help the teacher in the classroom by giving extra attention to the deaf students.
- Because children who are deaf or cannot hear well learn by seeing, schools can help them have their eyes checked and get glasses, if needed.



Parents can meet with a child's teachers to get information about what and how she is learning. This will help parents strengthen and build on what their child is learning at school. They can also tell the teacher about what the child does at home. That way the teacher can include things from the child's experience in her lessons.

### DEAF CHILDREN CAN LEARN IN THEIR OWN GROUP

Children who are deaf or cannot hear well can learn in separate classrooms for deaf children in a local school, or in separate day schools or residential schools.

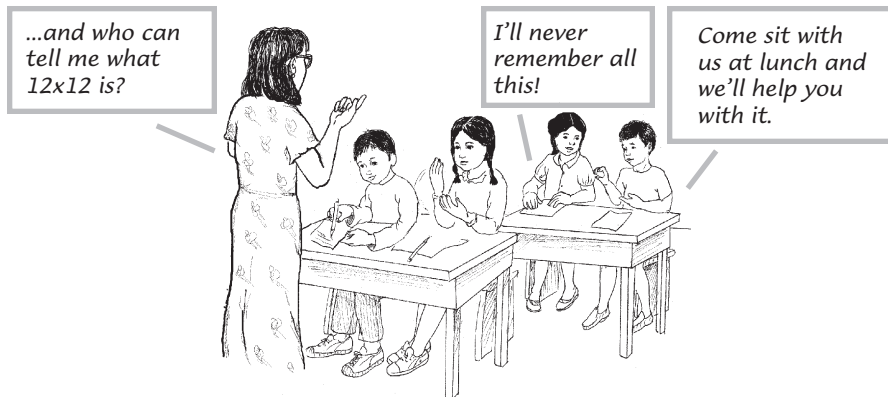
Many local or national associations, or government, religious, community, or aid organizations have started separate schools or classrooms to educate children who are deaf or cannot hear well. These organizations may even offer scholarships for deaf children to study in such schools or classrooms. Bringing deaf children together in their own schools or classrooms creates a community of children who otherwise might have been isolated from each other.

When children attend schools like these, they often learn sign language. Family members will be able to communicate better with their children if they learn sign language too.



### Residential schools

Deaf children live at these schools and return home only for weekends or holidays. Children at residential schools often learn skills for work, like computers, mechanics, art, and farming, as well as reading, writing, and math.



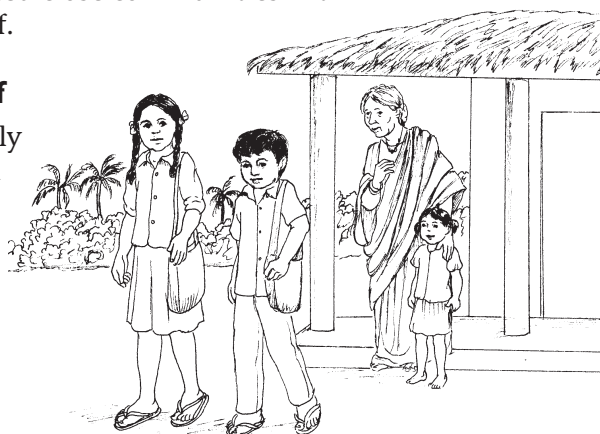
Families sometimes worry about their children when they are far from home. Communicating with families of other students, visiting their children at school, and meeting the children's friends and teachers can help parents feel more comfortable when their children are away at residential schools.

Like anywhere else where children live, there are chances for abuse at a residential school (see Chapter 13 for information on abuse). Parents must encourage their children in residential schools to communicate their problems to teachers, house parents, and others.

Most deaf people who have studied in residential schools found the experience good. Even though they missed their families, the school gave them more opportunities to communicate with a larger group of people, and the deaf students created close communities with other students and the staff.

### Day schools for the deaf

These day schools teach only deaf students. The children live at home with their families and continue to interact with hearing children and adults in their community.



### Separate deaf classes in local schools

In some schools, deaf children spend the entire day in a separate classroom and see hearing children only during breaks. The ages and abilities of children in the special class may vary. In other schools, deaf children spend part of the day in classrooms with hearing children, learning art, mathematics, or doing exercise.



### Benefits of learning only with other deaf children

- Most deaf schools and classrooms have teachers with training to teach deaf children. These teachers can usually meet the deaf children's needs and attend to each child.
- Deaf children feel less isolated when they can communicate with all the people around them.
- Deaf children have opportunities to play, learn, develop social skills, and create friendships.
- Children can meet and interact with deaf adults who work at the school.
- Some deaf schools or classrooms also help deaf children get hearing tests and hearing aids.



### Difficulties of learning only with other deaf children

- Deaf children who study in separate schools may not learn how to live and interact comfortably with people in the "hearing world."
- The schools may be far away and costly.
- Classes may include children of different ages. It may be difficult for teachers to meet their different needs.



## Good schools meet deaf children's needs

All communities can have good schools for deaf and hearing children. It is not money, new buildings, or “expert” teachers that make a good school. A good school pays attention to all the needs of its students and has committed teachers who help children of different hearing abilities learn and use language.



Schools that respond to the many different needs of deaf children can make a great difference in their lives.

Schools can cooperate with health care services and hospitals to provide hearing and eye tests, and hearing aids and eyeglasses. Schools can be made available for vaccination campaigns to make it easy for parents to get the children vaccinated. And schools can include nutrition and sanitation in the subjects they teach.

Schools can make time for deaf children to learn and play with hearing children, and not allow children to tease each other. When schools teach about the history and importance of deaf people and the deaf community they can help deaf children feel important and build self-esteem.

When schools first include children who are deaf, they often make mistakes, despite their good intentions. Schools have to learn about deafness, just as deaf children and their families have to learn about schools. Here is a story of one family that persisted in getting their daughter an education and about the change that made in her life.

### Oyuna's story

When Oyuna was 7 years old she started going to her neighborhood school, in a small town in Mongolia, with other children her age. Her parents had to work hard to convince the school to allow their deaf daughter to attend. The traditional belief in Mongolia is that deaf children are “abnormal” and should not be with “normal” children. Her parents felt very lucky that the director of the school agreed to admit her.

But even though Oyuna was going to school, she still had no means of communication except some gestures, pointing, and a few sounds. Her teacher at the neighborhood school could not communicate with her. It was soon obvious that Oyuna was not learning. Oyuna's parents began to lose hope because the only school for deaf children was in the capital city, very far from Oyuna's home.

*How can Oyuna be expected to learn so far away from the support and love of her family? Especially when we have no way to explain the situation to her, or to be in contact with her.*



Then a neighbor told them about a new program at another nearby school. A teacher at that school, whose own son was deaf, was helping to train the other teachers in basic sign language. The deaf children and the hearing children were all being taught in sign and in spoken words, in the same classroom.

Oyuna now goes to her new school happily every morning. The children in her class won a prize in a math competition among all schools in the town. And Oyuna got a prize for her good handwriting. Oyuna has changed from the sad, unsmiling girl who started school into a happy, playful child who often helps other children in her class.



## GOOD SCHOOLS HAVE TEACHERS COMMITTED TO LEARNING

The most important qualities in a teacher are that she expects deaf children can do well in school and life, and that she takes the time to learn about each child's needs and abilities.

### Experience makes the best teacher

A day school for the deaf in Tanzania had a teacher who was deaf herself. Even though she had no formal training as a teacher, her patience and creativity helped to bring out the abilities of each child. Because the teacher could not hear their voices, she rested her hand on their shoulders to feel the vibration of the sound as they learned to speak. She also used sign language with them, helped them with their handwriting, and taught the children math by counting bottle caps.



The class was small, so the teacher was able to spend time with each child. She learned to identify and make use of their strongest abilities to help them learn.

Many people think that a teacher with special training is the best teacher for deaf children. This is not always true. Training about deafness does not automatically make a better teacher. Many teachers of the deaf do not have the opportunity to train in their own country, so they go away to learn in places that are very different from their own communities. The ideas they learn in another country may be difficult to use or may not work at all in the schools and communities back home.

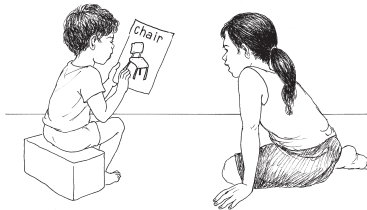
A teacher who is trained to teach deaf children can be a resource for other teachers. Teachers of the deaf and teachers with experience teaching hearing children can learn from each other and build on what they know. This sharing of experience benefits all children.

*I have arranged for the local hospital's eye clinic to do eye tests for all our children.*



## DEAF ADULTS HELP DEAF CHILDREN LEARN

Deaf adults are probably the best teachers for deaf children. Good schools involve deaf adults in the classroom as teachers, translators, and assistants. Deaf adults understand the challenges deaf children face. Deaf adults can become role models for deaf children, and help create positive attitudes about deafness and deaf people.



Older children can help younger children learn to read and write.

## CHILDREN CAN HELP EACH OTHER LEARN

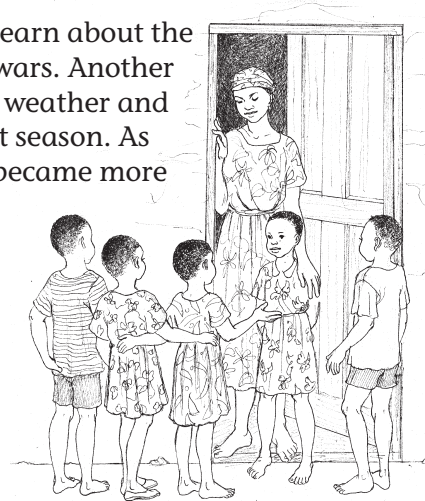
Many children need help to learn difficult ideas. Deaf children often need extra help and attention to learn skills like reading and writing. Children—deaf and hearing, older and younger—can help each other learn skills and feel comfortable at school (pages 26, 137, and 138 include examples of how children can help each other).

### Children can take part in their own education

A teacher in a school in Zambia encouraged the children to express themselves freely about what they wanted to learn. The teacher introduced ideas like voting in the classroom.

One week the children chose to learn about the reason why people fight and have wars. Another week they chose to learn about the weather and the reasons it rained during the wet season. As the weeks went by, many children became more interested in what they learned. They behaved better and attended school more regularly.

By the end of the school year, the children even went around the village to find other children who weren't attending school and encouraged them to come.



When children are involved in their education and work together to solve problems, they get an education better fitted to their needs. They feel confident about themselves, about what they learn, and about their ability to make a difference in the world!

## FAMILY SUPPORT AT SCHOOL IS IMPORTANT

Parents and families have a major role in the education of their deaf child. Parents have experience they can share with the school to help teach deaf children. Parents can also work with the community to make schools better for deaf children. Schools with active parents' groups can talk about the educational and emotional needs of families with deaf children. Such schools are often better schools.

As parents become more aware of their child's right to education and ability to learn, they will themselves begin to make demands on local schools.



## Good schools prepare a child to make a living

Many parents worry about the future for their children who are deaf or cannot hear well. How will they be able to earn a living and support themselves and their families?

Some schools for the deaf train their students in vocational skills they can use later to find a job or start a business. Both sewing and carpentry are common trades taught in vocational programs. There are also training courses that deaf children can go to after completing school, in computer skills, motor repair, printing technology, accounting, cooking, agriculture, and art. In fact, it is almost impossible to find a career in which a deaf person has not excelled!

At a residential school for the deaf in Romania, the children come from all over the country—sometimes from small villages more than 200 kilometers away. The children spend 9 months of the year at school, so it becomes a second home for them.

At school everyone uses hearing aids, learns speech and lip reading, and is taught to work with clay to make pottery. Many of the children leave the school when they are 14 years old and later earn their living as skilled potters.



## Working together to help deaf children succeed

Deaf children can succeed when parents, schools, and communities work together to create a positive environment for them. Good education for these children depends on many things, including:

- whether children learn and use a language.
- whether there is good teaching, communication, and family participation.
- whether the community creates opportunities for deaf people to succeed.



*The primary school where I teach has a popular carpentry class taught by a deaf man.*

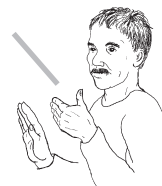


*Our group of deaf adults manage the railway station's restaurant. I think it is good for the hearing people we meet to learn to communicate with us. And if they don't learn, they don't eat!*

Parents, schools, and communities can work together with deaf youth to make sure vocational training they want is available, that jobs are offered to deaf people, and that loans or grants are available for small businesses.

Some communities even give lower taxes or financial assistance to businesses that employ workers who are deaf or do not hear well. Community organizations have established revolving loan plans that provide deaf craftspeople with funds to buy the basic equipment and materials to start their own small businesses. The loans are paid back little by little, so that the same money can be used to help another deaf person get started.

*Several of my deaf friends who studied religion now serve as priests, and use sign language to communicate.*



### House painters find success

A network of deaf men in the south of India ran a house-painting business. People preferred to ask them to paint their houses as they did it faster than other painters. Babu, the leader, was skilled at negotiating and actively looked for new business. With many houses being built or remodeled, more and more people discovered the group of deaf men were skilled at their work, and they were in great demand.



While this book is about the importance of helping a deaf child as early as possible, it is also important to try to help deaf adults. Our communities are strongest when they look after all of us.



*My name is Tsogu, and I live in Mongolia. Here is my story.*

### NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN

Tsogu lost his hearing after a serious illness when he was 3 years old. As he grew older, he stayed at home while his sisters and brothers went off to school. Tsogu's family used a few home signs to communicate with him, but he spent most of his time alone, taking care of the family's horses, sheep, and goats.

*Tsogu was a good herdsman, but he was so isolated. We didn't want his world to be so limited.*

*We wanted him to be able to make friends, to read and write, and maybe learn a trade so he could have a better life.*



One day his parents learned about a new class, started by a community group, for deaf adults who had never gone to school. After studying hard there for 2 years, Tsogu was finally able to communicate easily with his classmates, and to read, write, and do math.

Tsogu decided he wanted to learn a skilled trade like some of his friends from the same program. He was accepted at a vocational training school to learn how to be a carpenter.

*With a good job, I was able to think about marrying and starting a family.*

*And our little girl has her father's curiosity and determination!*

