



# MIMI'S BUILDING BLOCKS

## SCHOOL AND HEALTH ACCESS RECOVERY IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA



Save the Children®



Mimi's Building Blocks  
*Building Ethiopian Children's Futures Through Education*

Invitation to Partner  
August 2023

*Mimi O'Hagan and children enjoy their time together on the playground of one of Mimi's Building Blocks schools in Tigray.*

## Mimi O'Hagan and Her Extraordinary Legacy in Tigray, Ethiopia

After a career in communications spanning nearly five decades, Mimi O'Hagan retired from corporate life in 2000, with the most meaningful part of her life yet to begin. After several years of traveling the world to do service work in Thailand, Tanzania, and other countries, in 2006 she visited the region of Tigray, Ethiopia. At age 76, while helping to build housing structures, Mimi observed the pervasiveness of poverty that impacted many Tigray communities.

As she would later attest, she was also struck by the kindness and generosity she received and witnessed from the Tigrayan people. Then and there, Mimi decided to dedicate the rest of her life in service to communities in Tigray. She reached out to Save the Children, an organization with a long-standing presence and effective track record in the region, and a joint venture was formed.

Over the next decade, Mimi made it her personal mission to enable Save the Children to construct and refurbish much needed facilities in Tigray – a number of schools, health posts, and the wells and water systems that would serve these facilities – dubbing them “Mimi’s Building Blocks.” She donated her own funds and reached out far and wide to friends, family members, and contacts who contributed generously to help make her vision a reality.



Mimi O'Hagan cuts the ribbon to mark the opening one of Mimi's Building Blocks schools.



Mimi's good friend and a generous supporter of the original Mimi's Building Blocks, Carol Reinhold and her family visit Daga Reinhold Primary School in February 2011.

Mimi returned to Tigray many times throughout the building process. She proudly took part in the work, shoveling dirt, transporting materials, and laying bricks alongside Save the Children staff and local community members. Mimi brought family and friends along with her, those who had given of their own funds, to celebrate the opening of new schools, join children on freshly built playgrounds, and appreciate the meaningful difference they were helping make in Tigray.

Mimi passed away in May 2018, but the fruits of her efforts, and those of her fellow Mimi's Building Blocks supporters, lived on.



## COVID, Conflict, and Isolation

For well over ten years, Mimi's Building Blocks helped provide critical education and healthcare to children and families in Tigray and contributed to decades of progress that had first begun in the 1990s. That all changed in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic caused all schools to close, forcing 1.2 million children out of the classroom and stripping them of the critical supports and protections of regular education. Then in November 2020, [armed conflict broke out in Tigray between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front.](#)

Over the next two years, thousands of Tigrayan civilians were killed and injured in the Tigray War. Extended periods of aerial and ground bombardment inflicted trauma and deep psychological wounds on the entire population. Many children witnessed things that no child should ever see. Thousands of kids became lost or separated from loved ones and were forced to flee their homes. Throughout the entire conflict, Tigray was cut off from Ethiopia and the world, without access to humanitarian aid, food, fuel, or other supplies. Hunger and malnutrition were widespread, and people went without lifesaving medicines. Out of school for nearly three years, children missed out on learning and were at risk of exploitation, sexual violence, early marriage, and child labor. The conflict damaged their villages' schools, health centers, wells, and water systems, including those so faithfully built by Mimi and her co-supporters. The positive gains achieved in Tigray during the prior decades were ravaged.



Two years of brutal conflict and isolation deprived children in Tigray of healthcare, education, food, and other vital resources and services. Filmon\*, 2, developed severe acute malnutrition and related health issues.

*\*Name changed for protection.*

## Peace at Last – Now Let's Get to Work

On November 2, 2022, a peace treaty was signed between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, with both parties agreeing to a "permanent cessation of hostilities" to end the Tigray War. Life is slowly beginning to return to a "new normal" in Tigray, but the implications of the war remain painfully present.



Save the Children US CEO Janti Soeripto visited Tigray in March 2023. She was struck by the damage and the devastating effects of the region's two years of isolation. Alongside other humanitarian leaders, Janti is championing the rebuilding schools and health facilities (and the vital water systems that accompany them) as the "number one priority" in the region.

Janti remarked: "If you don't have education, it's very hard to sustain a peace process. We must get kids back into school as soon as possible to restart that and to make sure they overcome the gap... They haven't been in their schools for three years in Tigray. So even that, overcoming that gap, making sure people accelerate their learning or get back to the level where they should have been, that in of itself is a massive undertaking. Basic healthcare, education for children, and the reconciliation process there, with everybody included, is critical to maintaining the peace."

## A Legacy Renewed and Expanded

Mimi's nephew, Byrne Murphy, a close philanthropic partner of Save the Children, feels fortunate to have traveled to Tigray with Mimi and his family in March 2010 to witness the opening of one of Mimi's Building Blocks, Afgol Primary School. He reflected on his aunt's dedication to expanding education and health in Tigray, and on his involvement in the current project:

*"My aunt Mimi was 76 years of age when she first visited Tigray. She was incredibly moved by the people she met – families working so hard, in the midst of a years-long drought, to make ends meet. Most had so little in possessions, but were so rich in spirit. Mimi immediately decided to dedicate her remaining years to their welfare, and over the next decade she spearheaded the construction of schools, health clinics and freshwater sources.*



Children from the Afgol community waiting with gifts for Mimi and her fellow supporters upon the opening of their new school.

*During these past three years many of those new school yards and buildings have been heavily damaged by the ravages of the pandemic and armed conflict. Valuable time has been lost in the children's education, time which is extremely difficult to make up. Repairing the schools and clinics is of the utmost urgency.*

*My wider family and I were honored to be a part of creating Mimi's Building Block at its inception, and we are thrilled to reignite Mimi's legacy now. The Tigrayans deserve hope and a return to normalcy, and that's exactly what we'll deliver with this project."*

Driven by Mimi's compassionate spirit, Byrne and Mimi's wider family have taken up her most cherished work in Tigray. Through Mimi's trust, they have stepped forward with a generous commitment and an invitation to others who wish to help rebuild Mimi's Building Blocks along with three additional schools in the region that were also heavily damaged – for a total of nine schools, two health posts, and the wells and water systems that serve these facilities.

***In addition to investing a generous \$250,000 to kick off this project, Byrne has, on behalf of the Trust for Mimi's Estate, pledged a dollar-for-dollar match for gifts contributed by other donors, up to \$250,000.***

The total budget for this critical effort in Tigray stands at just over \$750,000, detailed on the final page of this proposal. Thus, Byrne, Mimi's family, and Save the Children hope and anticipate that the contributions of other caring supporters – which will be doubled through the match – will enable us to hit our mark.

We hope you will join us so that together, we can rebuild these important facilities, bringing much needed resources and a brighter future to children and families who have been through the unimaginable.

## Damage Sustained to Mimi's Building Blocks

In early 2023, Save the Children conducted a detailed assessment of all of Mimi's Building Blocks. As reflected below, each of the schools and health posts sustained major or moderate damage. In addition, looting stripped the facilities of furniture, equipment, medical and educational supplies, and all other materials. The following chart lists in more detail the damage sustained at each site.

Site Name	Functionality	Damage
Adi-golgol Primary School	Partially Functional	Major damage to glass, latrine and washing station. Moderate damage to pipe fittings and faucets.
Afgol Primary School	Not Functional	Major damage to glass and foundation masonry in latrine blocks. Five doors stolen from latrine blocks. Moderate damage to latrine block and playground.
St. Davdi's Al-asa Primary School*	Partially Functional	Major damage to ceiling, roof, glass and masonry. Moderate damage to floor tiles, pavement and cement surface.
Dagia Reinhold Primary School**	Partially Functional	Major glass damage. Moderate damage to three classroom doors and playground.
Felegsha Primary School	Partially Functional	Moderate damage to floor surface, window lock and window screens.
Mai-cheka Primary School	Partially Functional	Major damage glass and water supply system. Solar system non-functional. Moderate damage to playground. Three latrine doors stolen.
Aynalem Health Facility	Partially Functional	Damage to facility and looting of equipment and materials.
Mai-Mekden Health Facility	Partially Functional	Damage to facility and looting of equipment and materials.

*\*Save the Children gratefully recognizes the contributions of **St. David's School and the leadership of Headmaster David O'Halloran** in the original construction/renovation of Al'asa Primary School.*

*\*\*Save the Children gratefully recognizes the contributions of **Carol Reinhold and the Reinhold Family** in the original construction/renovation of Dagia Reinhold Primary School.*

A Closer Look – Afgol Primary School: Thanks to Mimi and the many supporters of Mimi's Building Blocks, Afgol Primary School had included two classroom blocks, an administration block, an Early Childhood Education (preschool) block, two latrine blocks (one with eight toilets, the other with four) and a playground, all constructed by Save the Children. During the conflict, most of the school's window glass was broken and the blockwork was damaged during heavy gunfire. Many of the doors were stolen, there is now major cracking to the foundation masonry and flooring, and the playground fixtures have been broken.





## Bringing Back Mimi's Building Blocks – How We Will Do It

Restoring Mimi's Building Blocks and the access to education and healthcare they once provided will require not only construction work, but important complementary measures. We are excited to get going on these efforts as they will not only improve the lives of children and families in the vicinity, but help signal the dawn of a new, more hopeful day for Tigray at large.

### Restoring Health Access

The health posts of Aynalem and Mai-Kekden that were touched by Mimi's compassion and generosity were entirely gutted. Thankfully, however, they otherwise remain relatively intact. As such, our project will restore these facilities through provisions of health and medical equipment, as well as furniture.

### Restoring Education

**Bricks and Mortar:** Rehabilitating the nine schools in question – six Mimi and friends supported plus the three newer builds – will require repairs to main classroom buildings, latrine blocks, and playgrounds. Because clean water is vital to children's health and wellbeing, nonfunctioning water points at six of the schools will also be restored. Provisions of supplies will include furniture, books and learning materials, and indoor and outdoor play materials.

**Psychosocial Support and Training:** Children in Tigray have been traumatized by the war, having endured constant aerial and ground bombardment, the loss of family members and friends, the fleeing of their homes, physical injuries, and more. As such, we will provide psychosocial support for children as they return to school, as well as psychosocial training for teachers.

**Food Support:** After two years of being cut off from the outside world, many in Tigray are still experiencing hunger and food insecurity, and school-aged children tend to be among the most malnourished. To increase school attendance and keep children engaged in learning, we will operate a one-year school feeding program consisting of daily provisions of high-energy biscuits.

**Mobilizing a Return to Learning:** Since children in Tigray have been out of school for a full three years and they and their families have endured two years of brutal conflict, getting kids to come back to school will require sensitization and advocacy efforts within the communities. Parents, for example, may feel their child should contribute to the household or may not feel comfortable sending them to school out of fears for their safety. Local campaigns on the importance of education and implementation of our Safe Back to School<sup>1</sup> initiative will help overcome hesitancy and mobilize children to get back in the classroom.



In early 2020, St. David's School Headmaster David O'Halloran and then-8<sup>th</sup> grade Class President Finn\* visit St. David's Al'asa Primary School. St. David's was a generous supporter of the original Mimi's Building Blocks and funded the construction of this and an additional school. Save the Children is grateful to St. David's for their commitment to helping us rebuild. \*Last name withheld for privacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children began the Safe Back to School (SBS) effort in 2020 as a response to the global pandemic. The goal of SBS is to help children transition back to learning in safe, inclusive environments. This includes helping education systems become resilient against future crises and ensuring kids can get back to the important work of their education.

**Supporting the Educators:** To help teachers return to the classroom after three years of school closures, we will conduct educator trainings using the Ready to Learn framework, a tested pedagogical approach that aims to support children in the development of foundational literacy and math skills.

### **Tracking Progress and Results**

To ensure the project is on track to meet desired outcomes, the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team at Save the Children’s Tigray Regional Office will conduct continuous supportive supervision to monitor progress in meeting defined targets.

### **Partnerships**

It is important for Save the Children to nurture partnerships at the local, regional, and national levels to engender trust, reinforce collaboration, and support the sustainability of our work. Community members will participate directly in the rehabilitation of the facilities in their villages, and businesses across the district will provide resources and services. Ethiopia’s Ministry of Women, Children & Youth Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Education will actively participate in project implementation. Additionally, the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development will play a central role to encourage local and regional ownership at project phase-out.

### **Community Input and Inclusion**

Social acceptance of the project activities will be promoted through the constant involvement of community members and leaders in decisions that concern the public, ensuring their input and feedback at all stages. Because this project will promote the right to an education for all children – including girls, those with disabilities, and others at increased risk for being left behind – we will engage families, communities, school institutions, and authorities throughout the process to reinforce the importance of inclusion and promote positive social behavior change.

Economic and financial sustainability will be ensured at various levels. Permanent structures will be built and restored using high quality, locally available materials, ensuring the facilities are durable and the construction process supports local economic recovery. Communities will be mobilized to contribute in-kind to their schools’ rehabilitation and will be trained in the upkeep of the facilities, wells, and water systems to ensure ownership and long-term maintenance.

### **Well-Positioned and Ready**

Because Save the Children managed the construction and rehabilitation of the original Mimi’s Building Blocks, we are uniquely and beautifully poised to reestablish and expand efforts in Tigray due to our existing connections and knowledge.

Additionally, Save the Children is familiar with the condition of the schools through our completed assessments, which positions us to efficiently begin reconstruction efforts.

Finally, our staff in Ethiopia who will lead the effort are from Tigray and primarily reside there. Their cultural familiarity and drive to bring their home region back from the devastation of the past three years will help move the rebuilding process forward with efficacy and enthusiasm.



A skilled and passionate humanitarian, Director of Operations Atakilt Gebreyohannes grew up in Tigray and wants nothing more than to restore the lives of children and families there.

## Budget

Component	Funding Need
<b>Renovations and Provisions of Furniture/Equipment/Supplies</b> <i>Renovation of damaged school classrooms (9), latrine blocks (9), and water points (6). Provisions of furniture, learning materials and play materials for schools. Provisions of furniture and health/medical equipment for health facilities (2).</i>	\$349,600
<b>Psychosocial Support for Children, Psychosocial Training for Teachers</b>	\$6,000
<b>Capacity Building and Training for Teachers</b>	\$4,225
<b>School Feeding Program (one year)</b>	\$86,500
<b>Targeted Local Campaigns to Get Children Back to School</b>	\$11,000
<b>Staff</b>	\$54,432
<b>Staff Travel</b>	\$18,852
<b>MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning)</b>	\$3,822
<b>Country Office Shared Costs*</b>	\$120,000
<b>ICR (15%)**</b>	\$98,165
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$752,596</b>

\*Country Office Shared Costs – A portion of general costs that are not directly attributed to the project but necessary for the running of the Ethiopia Country Office and the Field Offices engaged in the project.

\*\*Indirect Cost Recovery – Administrative cost rate of 15% to Save the Children US for staff support and the work of the organization more broadly.

## Please Join Us

We are deeply grateful to Mimi’s family for their generosity and to Byrne Murphy for championing this important effort. Together, we invite your partnership in the restoration of Mimi’s Building Blocks in Tigray, helping us bring opportunity and healing to children and families who have endured so much.

While on its surface this is largely a construction project, in truth it is so much deeper. **Together we will help rebuild lives that have been on pause**, enabling those who have been living in the shadow of disease and conflict to re-emerge and reach for the sky.

Thank you for your consideration of this very meaningful opportunity.

### For more information, please contact:

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Pictured here with Carol Reinhold, Mimi was welcomed as an honored guest within the Tigray communities she so loved and supported. Her legacy of education, healthcare and compassion will live on through your investment.