The UNESCO Programme for the Education of Children in Need supports the education of some of the most dispossessed children in the world: street children, child prostitutes, boy soldiers, working children, young refugees and child victims of conflicts and natural disasters. Most of these children, and many millions of others like them, never get a chance to voice their experiences. Without education, few have any chance of leaving the cycle of poverty and oppression behind.

The ‘My Life Is A Story’ appeal was launched in 2008 with children’s author, Lauren Child. Its purpose is to give excluded children the opportunity to express themselves, by steadily gathering real-life stories, some written, some photographic, some drawn, others noted down by adults.

The initial phase of the appeal is focusing on the life stories of children within projects supported by UNESCO. It will later link into other communities of children around the world, most notably with school workshops in the United Kingdom. A striking feature of the ‘My Life Is A Story’ appeal so far is that young pupils in the relative comfort of the United Kingdom want to hear about the difficult lives expressed by children in places as diverse as Burkina Faso, Brazil and China. Not only can readily identify with a homeless child on the streets of Mexico, but they also want to understand the causes of the situation. The hopes and aspirations of children everywhere seem to be remarkably similar.

It is hoped that people will see these small testimonies as an illustration of our interconnectedness and the paramount importance of education to achieve a better and fairer world. Following are some testimonies from around the world:
Santosh, 9 years old, India
My name is Santosh Kumar. I am a Hindu. My mother and my father cannot read or write because they have never been to school. They both work as labourers but they don’t earn much money. My father earns little. I have six brothers and one sister. Two are unemployed and one works as a labourer for 1000 rupees per month (approx US$20). We live in a two room mud hut in the village of Mahmadwa in Uttar Pradesh. Our house has no electricity or water and we collect water from the village hand pump. Life is more difficult during the rainy season because we are wet all day and sometimes cold. But I am more fortunate than my parents and my brothers as I have been accepted into the Project Mala school (supported by UNESCO) which I attend five and a half days a week. In the school, I get a breakfast and a hot meal at lunchtime and I eat as much as I can. They also gave me a uniform which I wear all the time even when I am not at school. If I work hard and pass the exams then I can stay with Project Mala up to Grade twelve and after I will be able to get a good job in the nearby city of Varanasi. Then I’ll help my parents and give them some money.

Santosh’s testimony is part of the ‘My Life Is A Story’ appeal launched in 2008 with children’s author, Lauren Child, UNESCO Artist For Peace.
Lale, 16 years old, Pakistan

I am Lale. I am 16 years old now. I got married last year. My husband is 21 years old and is working in Dubai as a driver. Since my marriage, I have lived with my in-laws near Baghbanan, Shamshatoo road. I come from a very poor family. My father works on daily wages in a brick kiln and earns PKR 150 per day (approx. US$1.90). His working hours are very harsh, and it all depends on good weather. No sunlight means no work for him. I have five brothers and four sisters and two mothers. I am the eldest of the girls. These conditions meant that only three of my elder brothers could go to school. Only one of my brothers completed primary level education. There was no question of any of the girls of the family going to school because of our hardships. The Education Shelters (set up by HOPE’87 with UNESCO support) have helped the families of the area, particularly the girls. They convinced my parents to allow all my sisters of school age to enrol and seek education, starting in 2003. Since I was already over age at the time of my enrolment at the girls’ school in Shamshatoo, the teachers put me through a fast learning programme for the first two years. Thanks to the teachers and staff at the school I have now completed my primary level education, graduating in summer of 2007. To my luck, my husband also insisted on getting married to a girl of at least primary school level.

Lale’s testimony is part of the ‘My Life Is A Story’ appeal launched in 2008 with children’s author, Lauren Child, UNESCO Artist For Peace.

Radha, 7 years old, Faridabad, Haryana, India

I am Radha. I'm 7 years old. I live in Jainder. My father is a rubbish collector and our house gets messed up all the time with rubbish he brings home. Sometimes he returns with dolls in the rubbish. I sit and play with them for a while before they are packed off. If I had a magic wand I would make a wish for a bigger home so I don’t have to sweep the

Radha's story is part of the ‘My Life Is A Story’ appeal launched in 2008 with children’s author, Lauren Child, UNESCO Artist For Peace.
I also mop, fetch water, feed my little sister and cook the vegetables and bread, wash the clothes and dishes. I love listening to stories. If there is one more thing I could wish for too it is peace and quiet, here, in our area, everywhere. Often I just want to run away.

Radha participates in the Jandeira project run by ISCA with UNESCO backing. Her message is part of the ‘My Life Is A Story’ appeal launched in 2008 with children’s author, Lauren Child, UNESCO Artist For Peace.

**Gulafrez, 10 years old, Kabul, Afghanistan.**

I’d never been to school before until now. I’m really happy to be here, learning to read. Reading means you discover lots of things. I’m the youngest in my family. I have three brothers and just as many sisters. Four of them are married. None of them have ever been to school so they are happy for me. I’ve always helped my brothers find plastic on the streets, to resell it where we can. We also use it to burn and make fires. As my father died during the war, my mother works cleaning people’s clothes and houses. When school is over I go home and help her deliver clean clothes back to people’s houses. I don’t want to leave my country. I want to be a doctor. I’ve now got friends I never had before. We play together, boys and girls, but in class we are separate, which I prefer. I love the books at school, the ones that tell stories.

Gulafrez is part of the ‘Afghanistan Demain’ project run in Kabul Afghanistan with support from UNESCO. His testimony is part of the ‘My Life Is A Story’ appeal launched in 2008 with children’s author, Lauren Child, UNESCO Artist For Peace.