PORTRAITS OF **PROMISE**



Beating the Odds: Ararat the Overcomer

by Ellery Sadler, staff writer

The world sees kids. We see warriors.

Most of the children in our Orphan's Promise programs aren't yet five feet tall, but they are some of the bravest people we know. They are warriors. Overcomers. Their stories are battle cries of hope and resilience.

This next story takes us to the small village of Mkhchyan in Armenia. We can't wait to introduce you to Ararat and have you join us in cheering him on in his journey.

These are the stories. These are the souls. These are the portraits of the lives we're changing.



ONE IN FOUR PEOPLE IN ARMENIA

LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

These children come from some of the most vulnerable and at-risk backgrounds around the globe. The giants they are battling are bigger than just hunger or access to education. They're fighting generational addiction, abuse, trauma, poverty, and oppression.



ONE IN FOUR

One in four people in Armenia live below the poverty line.

That's about 700,000 people who struggle to provide the basic necessities of food and shelter to their families¹. Real parents lying awake at night, worrying about whether there will be a roof over their kids' heads next month if they can't make rent. Real children going to school with an empty belly, hoping their parents will have found something to put on the table by dinnertime.

And that was before the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated many of the struggles families were already experiencing in their battle for survival. Over 720,000 Armenians could suffer downward mobility, according to research by the World Bank Group². Income and employment are even harder to come by. Health concerns are even more serious. Having shelter for your family is more critical.

Poverty is multidimensional. Some layers are physical: lack of resources, finances, or adequate food, water, clothes, and shelter. Some are intangible: the lack of security that constant uncertainty and scarcity bring, the absence of hope for a better future, the mental exhaustion and emotional toll of poverty, the generational impacts of trauma. All have a cost.

^{https://hetq.am/en/article/110402#:":text=23.5%25%20of%20Armenia's%20population%20was,by%20the%20country's%20Statistical%20 Committee.&text=Of%20the%2023.5%25%20living%20below,%25%20as%20%E2%80%9Cextremely%20poor%E2%80%9D.} Ararat's family in rural Armenia deals with a variety of these different dimensions. Neither of his parents has the security of a stable job. His father repairs houses to meet the family's needs, but the work isn't steady. Ararat's mom has only a secondary education, so her employment opportunities are limited as well. This is also because their village is quite small, so there aren't a lot of factories or industries needing low-skilled workers. To help her husband provide for their family, Arafat's mother takes seasonal work in a nearby greenhouse and tends to the small vegetable plot they have in their yard.

One of the biggest challenges the family faces is the lack of access to clean water. Without running water or a nearby well, they have to go to another village, fill up bottles and buckets, and carry it all back with them. During the pandemic, as families are being instructed to stay home for their own safety, having to leave the house to get water provides even more stress. On top of all this, Ararat's family is facing housing insecurity as they shoulder a huge debt left to them by an uncle. It's impossible for them to pay the debt off and keep providing for their children. Ararat's parents fear their only option may be to sell their home.

With such stress and uncertainty, it can be difficult for parents who are grappling with poverty to emotionally invest in their children. They don't always have the time or emotional capacity, which can leave children emotionally neglected and lacking the skill sets they need to properly process the anger, fear or trauma they may be experiencing. In this way, poverty can be generational, as children learn to survive at an early age by operating out of this emotional and physical scarcity.

According to UNICEF, 28% of children live in monetarily poor households. Younger children often suffer from a lack of nutrition while older children are often deprived of leisure or social relations. Fully 12% of children ages 15-17 are not enrolled in any type of education or training³.

³https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/reports/state-child-poverty-armenia-2016#.^o:text=ln%20Armenia%2C%2064%20percent%20of,in%202%20 or%20more%20dimensions.&text=Children%20who%20are%20deprived%2C%20are,live%20in%20monetary%2Dpoor%20households.

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Thanks for your generosity. We look forward to making a difference together.

with orphan's promise

OVERCOMING THE ODDS

For Ararat and his sister, Anna, this cycle began to shift when they learned about the center for kids at the local church. This Training Center, supported by Orphan's Promise, works with the church to involve children in daily activities, learning opportunities, and summer camps.

It was at one of these camps that we first met Ararat and Anna. What a privilege to get to invest in these two precious souls and offer them a safe and loving space to be poured into by teachers and mentors. They started studying English, Life Skills, and Computer Skills. These classes are expensive in Armenia, so for Ararat and Anna to be able to access them for free is a huge blessing to their family. These skills will help prepare them for high school, university, and hopefully a stable, well-paying job later. It's the first step toward breaking a cycle of financial insecurity and providing better futures for their

"Just as poverty is multidimensional, coming alongside vulnerable children must also be a holistic effort."



The impact of COVID-19 on employment and income is likely to dramatically increase poverty rates across Armenia—from approximately 33% to 46% of the population living in poverty⁴.

⁴https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Poverty-and-Welfare-Impacts-of-COVID-19-and-Mitigation-Policies-in-Armenia.pdf children and grandchildren. However, just as poverty is multidimensional, coming alongside vulnerable children must also be a holistic effort. That's why we started providing food packages to this family during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Ararat and Anna's parents were not able to get work. We also included them in our "Warm Winter" project, which supports at-risk families with payments for winter heating during the coldest months.

Slowly, we started to see Ararat blossom. The hours that he spends at the Center making new friends, studying, and playing sports are some of his happiest times. He loves playing chess and considers becoming a mathematician someday. Ararat is also learning to deal with some of the emotional burdens he's been carrying. It makes a huge difference to be able to open up and talk with the teachers who advise him, pray for him, and answer his questions. The Life Skills courses help equip Ararat with skills like patience, working through feelings of anger or offense, and learning to understand and forgive others. Over the past year, we've seen the hard work he's doing begin to pay off as he becomes more open, friendly, and free. Thanks to the prayers and consistent love of his teachers, Ararat is overcoming huge emotional obstacles that were hindering him from reaching his full potential.





His life is changing before our eyes. His future is being shaped. We are so thrilled for Ararat as he continues to learn and grow with such courage. You are a warrior, Ararat! You are an overcomer. From all around the world, we are cheering you on. We are praying for you. You are not alone.

For our partners in this work, Ararat and his parents have a message. With a big smile on his face, Ararat shared, "I love you very much



and thanks for everything. Thanks to all of you who support these training centers. God bless all of you!" His parents added: "We would like to have many such Centers around the world, where the children are taught Christian values. Our only prayer for our children is to be faithful to the Lord and stay in His house."

Thank YOU for being an answer to that prayer—every day, all around the world.







orphanspromise.org

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