

# Georgia

## Hope for Children at Kaspi Orphanage

### The Forgotten Children

Since the fall of the communist government, the Eastern European nation of Georgia has been struggling to regain its equilibrium. In the midst of government restructuring, internal conflicts, and civil wars in the surrounding region, the country's economic and social systems—including state-run orphanages—have been neglected. In addition, prevailing social attitudes left over from the former regime have compounded the plight of the unfortunate children who reside in these institutions.

Today, as in the past, Georgian children who are mentally or physically disabled are not considered viable contributors to society. Therefore, they generally are placed in substandard government-run institutions where they receive minimal care and live in severe isolation. Sadly, most institutionalized children do not live to adulthood. Over the past decade, conditions have worsened in the orphanages due to the lack of government financial support. Without proper care, these children continue to suffer from emotional problems, malnutrition, and untreated wounds and injuries, such as broken arms, skin diseases, and gangrene.

### Hope for Children at Kaspi Orphanage

In 1998, World Vision, The First Step (a local nongovernmental organization), and concerned pediatricians and professionals evacuated 25 disabled children who needed critical medical care from the Kaspi Orphanage and placed them in Gumarishvili Children's Hospital, where they received medical treatment. Subsequently, The First Step (TFS) developed a program to address the needs of these and other children with disabilities from Kaspi Orphanage and help reintegrate them into their biological families or place them with foster parents.

With World Vision's support, TFS established the First Step Children's Village, designed as a group of independent, self-governed and self-sustainable cottages, where children are cared for in a family-style environment and provided with the skills necessary to be integrated into society. Currently, the village has one home that accommodates 12 children, with plans to build additional cottages.

Each cottage family is headed by a surrogate "mother" who is assisted by two "aunts." As trained teachers, these substitute relatives maintain a loving, stimulating environment in which the children receive individual skills training in the areas of self-care, motor skills, communication, social behavior, and self-direction. The objective is to increase the independence levels of the children, thereby enabling them to be successfully reunited with their families or integrated into other caring homes.

### Project Accomplishments

In April 2002, 12 of the 25 disabled boys and girls evacuated from Kaspi Orphanage arrived at the First Step Children's Village. Since then, significant progress has been achieved. At the beginning of the program, eight children were diagnosed as functionally dependent and four were determined semi-independent. At the end of fiscal year 2002, all 12 children tested in the semi-independent category. Everyday life at the cottage has been an educational process in itself. The following are some of the household activities in which the children participated:



World Vision is helping disabled children from Georgia's Kaspi Orphanage experience love, acceptance, and encouragement through its support of the First Step Children's Village. Here, children receive individual care and vital functional and social skills training in a family-style environment. The goal is to bring each child to a level of independence that will enable him or her to be reunited with biological family or placed with loving foster parents.

- Eleven children attended specialized school.
- Seven children took swimming lessons. One child is swimming independently.
- Each child had the opportunity at different times to accompany the cottage mother to the city on public transportation.
- Various children have attended football games, the movies, or the circus.
- The biological parents of two children regularly visited the cottage. One biological mother took her son to the zoo.
- One child spent 15 days at a camp with non-disabled school children. This was the first attempt to socially integrate one of the village children with “normal” children.

### **Objectives for 2003**

With World Vision’s support, TFS plans to continue the functional and social development of the existing 12 children at the First Step Children’s Village, with the goal of bringing three of the children to a functionally independent level. Specific objectives for fiscal year 2003 include:

- Equip children with skills for independent living
- Ensure the psychological rehabilitation and stabilize the health condition of each child
- Reintegrate children with their biological families or place them with foster parents
- Develop plans for the construction of additional village cottages

Once the funding commitment to TFS has been fulfilled for this fiscal year, World Vision plans to utilize any additional funds to assist other institutionalized children with disabilities in Georgia.

### **Your Opportunity to Help**

While much has been accomplished, there are many other children at Kaspi Orphanage who desperately need the opportunity to escape the isolation of institutional life and learn vital skills that will enable them to be integrated into their society. The Kaspi Orphanage Project—which includes the support of the First Step Children’s Village—needs \$56,933 this year to provide loving care and skills training for disabled boys and girls in Georgia. Please consider how you can help us demonstrate Christ’s love and bring hope to these precious children.