

Yes, but does it actually work?

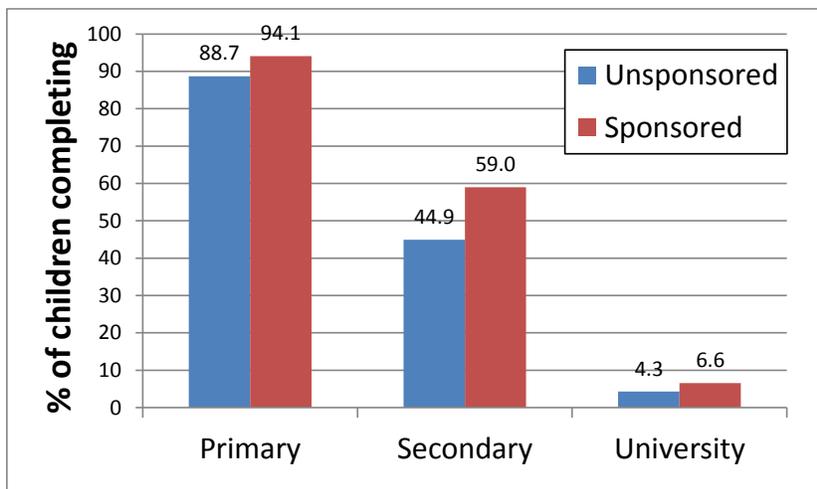
The Giraffe Project works primarily through direct financial support of individual children by individual sponsors. For the sponsor, this brings a close, personal connection with a specific individual that they (often as a family) can genuinely and consistently help. But the sponsorship model is not without its critics. For example, what makes one child more deserving than another? Doesn't it sow discord if one child is supported while a sibling, classmate or neighbour is not? Isn't it all a little, well, condescending?

Pragmatists like me can look at this another way – in terms of hard results. Recently, social scientists from three prestigious US universities published an academic paper entitled 'Does International Child Sponsorship Work?' (Wydick et al., 2013, *Journal of Political Economy* 121: 393-436). It's a fascinating, instructive (and, in terms of methodology, occasionally difficult) read.

Basically, the authors and their teams undertook field work in six countries (Uganda, Guatemala, Philippines, India, Bolivia and, yes, Kenya) to gather data on the success of the world's third-largest child sponsorship organisation, Compassion International. Data were subjected to rigorous analysis to compare the achievements of sponsored children with comparable children who did not receive sponsorship.

The final conclusions of this analysis are presented only after 33 pages of detailed background material, description of analytical methods (with the complex algebraic statistical models for those who like that sort of thing) and tabulation of data. But the bottom line is an emphatic yes, the sponsorship model *does* work.

For example, and as illustrated in the Figure, children who receive sponsorship are more likely to complete their education, whether judged at the end of primary, secondary, or tertiary level. Most countries now provide primary education for most children, so success rates are high, regardless of sponsorship, but the effect of sponsorship on success at secondary level is particularly striking. And note that in the programmes reviewed in this paper, children were only sponsored up until age 12. Even if sponsorship ends then, the sponsored child was 31% more likely to complete his or her secondary education at age 16.



Figures for completion of University education may seem disappointingly low, but reflect the overall low level of University provision in these countries and the deeply impoverished beginnings of the children that sponsorship organisations try to reach. (If you're like me, you'll want the statistical evidence: the advantage of sponsorship in all indices of completion of education was statistically significant, regardless of the statistical model used, at $P < 0.05$).

And there's more. Recipients of sponsorship were statistically more likely to find salaried employment and white-collar employment in adulthood and take leadership positions in their communities and churches.

These are the benefits of sponsoring a child – selected on the basis of greatest need – through until age 12. While not examined in the study of Wydick et al. (2013), it is our hypothesis that continuing to provide support through secondary school and academic or vocational college courses appropriate to the individual child will further improve the chances of the child 'walking tall' into productive citizenship.

Finally, towards the end of their paper, authors speculate on the causal mechanism behind the positive impact of sponsorship, highlighting the importance of 'raising children's self-esteem, reference points, and aspirations'. This, it seems to me, is the heart of the matter. It's not the money. It's not (just) the roof over the head or the food in the bowl or the computer in the corner or even the qualified teacher standing at the front of the class. It's the *care*. It's the recognition of, and the reverence for, the uniqueness of each individual child. This is the guiding philosophy of The Giraffe Project and all of our staff, sponsors and volunteers: to give that child the knowledge of their own worth and their own potential – to help them truly 'walk tall'.

John Newbold