

Dear Reader,

I am eleven years old and I want to tell you a story about my journey as a child vendor. My family is very poor so I sometimes beg for food. My parents do not have any education and there are no readers in my family. Books are not important, food is. I work hard every day because if I do not sell all my products, then my family goes hungry. Many times we do not have food, I always hear my little siblings cry because they are always hungry.

My day starts very early and I come home very late. It is not safe on the streets, there are gangs who beat me up and steal my money and stuff. But you see, it is easier for children to sell things because the customers feel sorry for us and most people just give money because they pity the way we look.

I realised that things do not have to be the way they seem. I ask some people driving nice cars and wearing flashy clothes with expensive phones how they can get money like this to buy whatever they want. They always tell me to go to school and learn how to read. I tried and sound every word, but it is very hard.

One day, a girl named Quen told me there is a free reading programme at the library where kids like me who don't go to school can learn how to read and write. I was so excited because I thought if I could read and write, I can make more money and my family will never go hungry. People will never look down on us again.

After a year, I now know how to read and write thanks to the programme "Turn a Life Around." I love to read because it takes me places. It gives me a chance to be someone or somewhere else for a while instead of the real world of violence, hunger and survival. Reading helps me understand where I am going or will go. People no longer take advantage of me and my family. Reading broadens my vocabulary and knowledge. I know what to say and how to act. Reading is magical. I can be anyone in the story, have any job I want and visit many places I never knew existed. Reading finds new friends, new worlds and new experiences. I now have a new perspective on my life. I want to go further with my studies.

I would advise every child to read. This is your chance to make a difference in our world. I now have the confidence to go to school and achieve goals. I placed ninth in my class out of 40 kids. Illiteracy is a form of slavery and kills dreams. We need to be obsessed as a nation to teach our children how to read to minimize poverty and illiteracy. Let's make the world a better place.

Alexandria Slaven

Year 7