

# Creating Pathways for Positive Development: The Ysalane Cho Story



This story was commissioned by the United Nations Children's Fund in collaboration with the Government of Belize. UNICEF gratefully recognizes the work of the Center for Social Well-Being and Development at the Milken Institute School of Public Health, The George Washington University (GWU), for producing this narrative.

Copyright © 2014 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Belize. All rights reserved.

Permission is required from UNICEF Belize and GWU to reproduce any part of this publication in any form.



## One Story, Two Paths

This story shows how the well-being of children and women in Belize is the result of a process. The process of child development is like the growth of a tree, or the building of a house. It takes time, and depends on many interconnected factors at each stage of growth. It is also cumulative – what happens at one stage affects later stages. If you deprive a young tree of nutrients, its growth will be hampered. If you build a house with a weak foundation, or with poor quality materials, that house may experience leaks and problems, and may be the first to blow down in a storm.

The same is true for children. If a child doesn't receive adequate nutrition as an infant, this may impair brain development or physical growth, which can hurt school performance and affect the child's ability to pay attention in school. When older, this can affect his or her ability to find good employment and support a family. Lack of good nutrition as a child also can lead to long-term emotional or health problems as an adult.

Here is the basic message: There are many connections involved in how a child develops and learns over time. At each stage, there are many factors that can support or hinder a child's development at many levels. Some factors may be individual, others may have to do with the community, and others may be connected to broader societal issues (for example, poverty and discrimination). Lack of adequate nutrition for a child may be the result of poverty, which may be the result of limited access to employment for his or her parents. Or it may be due to a lack of infant and child nutrition education or support programs. If the child has difficulty in school, these problems may continue if there is no one at the school trained to recognize the root of these problems and intervene as early as possible.

There also are special development issues related to girls and young women. If a young girl drops out of school early, it may be due to gender role issues. For example, she may be pressured to take on traditional female roles that don't depend on education. In contrast, boys may drop out of school because they look ahead and see no reason to continue if there are few jobs available that require the skills learned in school.

Recognizing that development is a process, with many factors involved at each stage, is a good start towards taking action that promotes successful well-being and development. While starting early is important, providing support along the developmental path is equally important to maintain progress and to ensure that all Belizean children have the best possible chance to thrive.

This story presents two possible paths for a Mayan girl named Ysalane Cho from a village in the Toledo District. One path shows that Ysalane faces barriers that are not addressed and that lead to constraints on what she is able to do. The second path shows life-cycle support points at different levels, and how these altered Ysalane's situation in a positive direction.

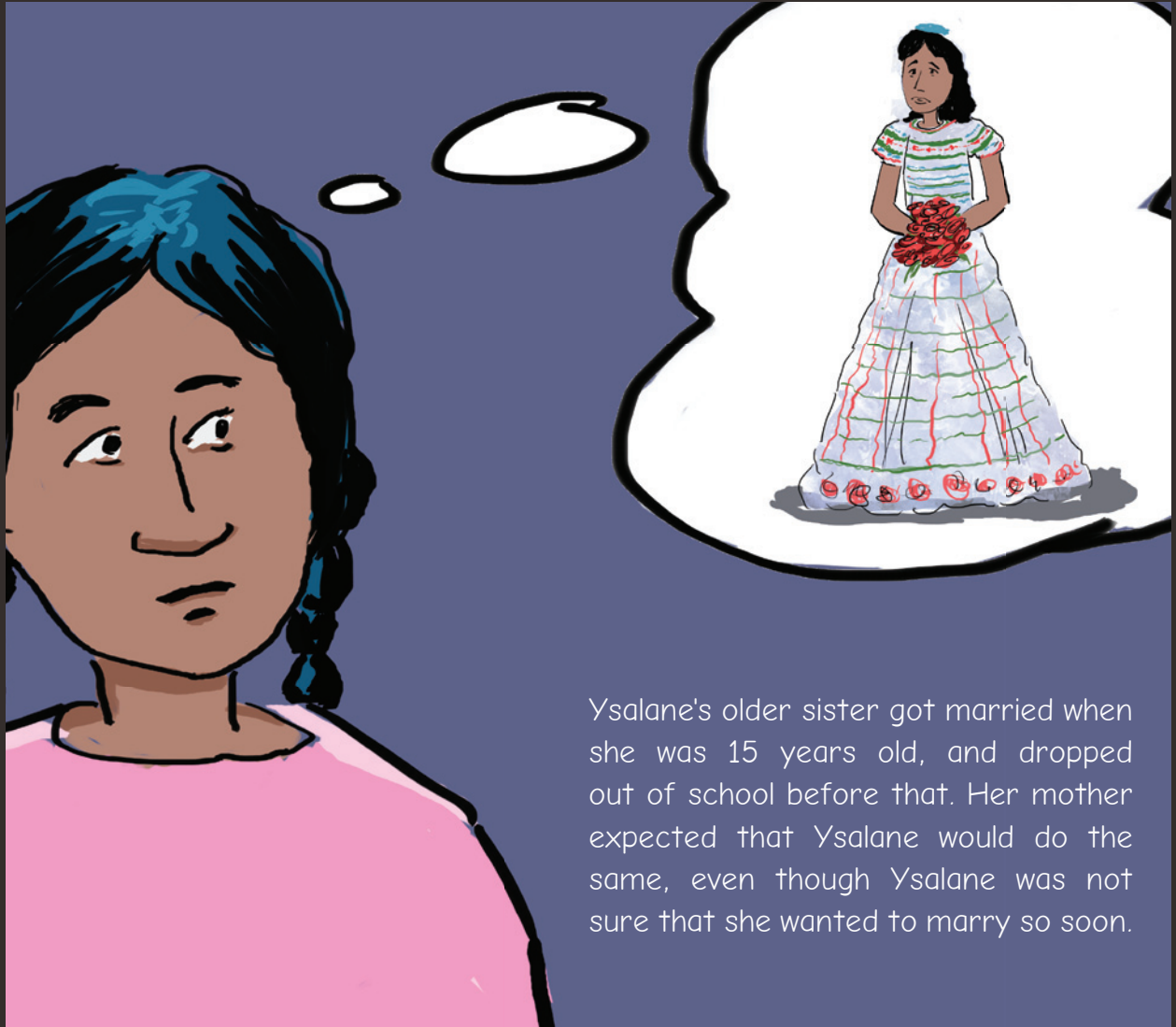
## Path One: How Ysalane Grew Up and Dropped Out of School



Since she was nine years old, Ysalane has gone with her mother to sell vegetables at a stand in Punta Gorda. Whenever she did that, she missed school. After a while, she fell behind.

Ysalane's parents had to choose between devoting resources to send her older brother to school or for her schooling. They were used to thinking about school as more important for boys. They also felt uneasy about the long bus ride she would have to take to get to school, because they could not watch over her. They decided to support Ysalane's brother.





Ysalane's older sister got married when she was 15 years old, and dropped out of school before that. Her mother expected that Ysalane would do the same, even though Ysalane was not sure that she wanted to marry so soon.

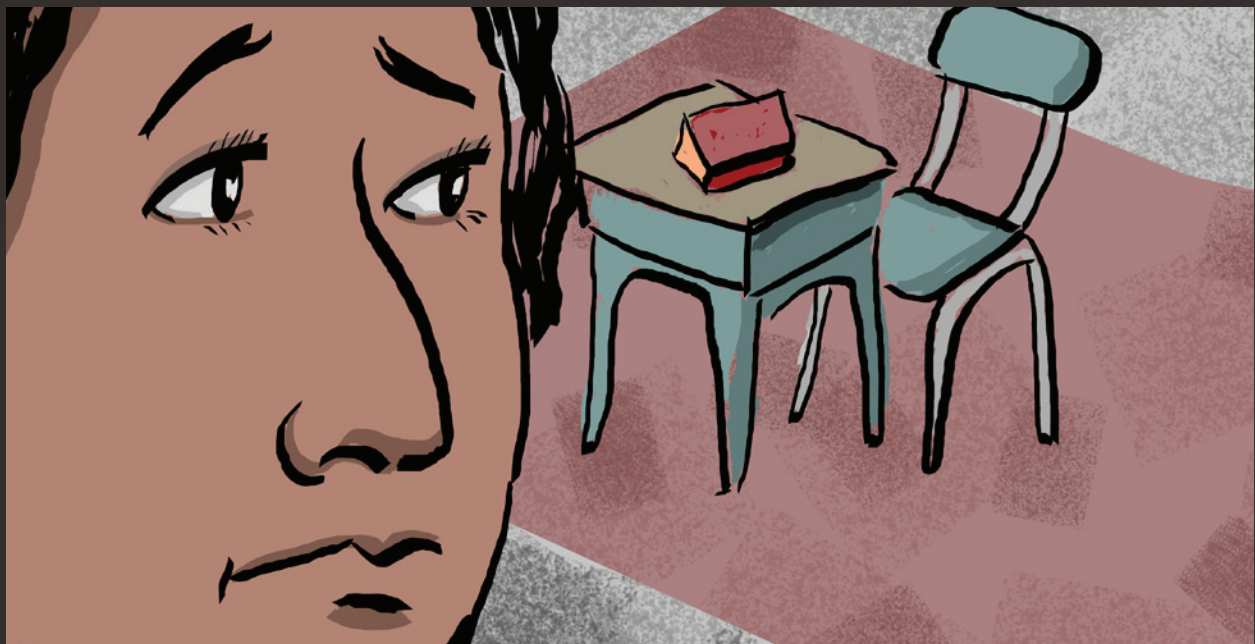
Ysalane had a friend, Malinali, whose mother was a teacher. To become a teacher, Malinali's mother had to stay in school and get a teaching certificate. Ysalane didn't really know what steps were necessary to do that, and wasn't sure where to find that information.



Ysalane was not sure she liked school anyway. Most of the instruction was in English. She spoke and understood English, but it was not her first language. Sometimes it took her a long time to read her assignments.



Ysalane had another problem. Reading was hard for her because she had a problem seeing out of her right eye. It was often red and swollen. There were no eye care services near her village.



By the time she was 12 years old, Ysalane was barely attending school. At age 13, she dropped out before starting secondary school. Her eye still bothered her, but she could perform household tasks by using her left eye. Ysalane worked with her mother and other women in the village to make and sell corn tortillas at the market.



Ysalane's friend, Malinali, now takes the bus to secondary school, and they don't get to see each other often. Malinali says she wants to be a teacher and won't get married until she is ready. Ysalane thinks about her example. She would like to go back to school and have more time to think about what she wants to do.

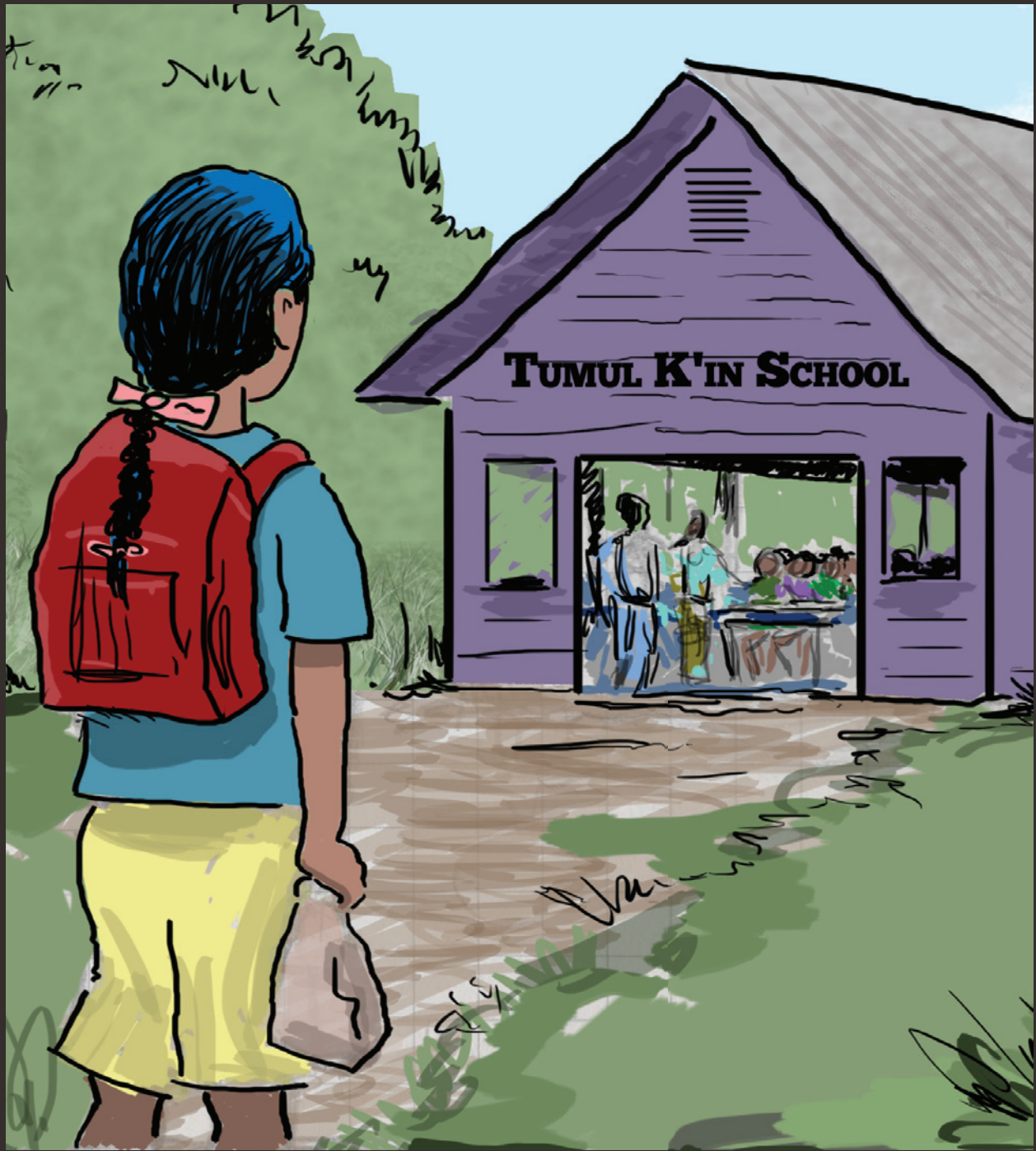


## Path Two: How Ysalane Succeeded in Staying in School





When she was nine years old, Ysalane's mother started to talk to her about helping to sell vegetables at a stand in Punta Gorda. Ysalane knew that if she did that, she would miss school. One day in the village, her mother heard some members of the Toledo Maya Cultural Council talking about several villagers organizing to ride together on a bus to sell at the Punta Gorda market. They could help each other. So her mother decided that it would be okay if Ysalane just came with her on Saturdays to Punta Gorda, but not during the week.



When she was a little older, Ysalane's family had to choose between devoting resources to send her older brother to school or for her schooling. They were used to thinking about school as more important for boys. They also felt uneasy about the long bus ride that she would have to take to get to school, because they could not watch over her. But when they found out that a new school, run by the Tumul K'in Center of Learning, was being constructed close to the village, they felt more comfortable about Ysalane continuing with her studies.



Ysalane's older sister got married when she was 15 years old, and dropped out of school before that. Her mother expected that Ysalane would do the same, even though Ysalane was not sure that she wanted to marry so soon.



Ysalane had a friend, Malinali, whose mother was a teacher. To become a teacher, Malinali's mother had to stay in school and get a teaching certificate. Ysalane didn't really know what steps were necessary to do that, and wasn't sure where to find that information. She finally asked Malinali's mother to explain this. It didn't seem so hard to do.



At the same time, Ysalane was not sure she liked school. Most of the instruction was in English, not her first language. Sometimes, it took her a long time to read her assignments. Also, Ysalane's parents were concerned that too much school would lead to a loss of Mayan cultural and traditional values. One afternoon, a woman from the Tumul K'in Center of Learning came to speak in the village. She explained to Ysalane's parents that Ysalane could learn in both English and her Mayan language at the newly built school. This made her parents feel more comfortable and they decided to let Ysalane continue school.

Ysalane had another problem. Reading was hard for her because she had a problem seeing out of her right eye. It was often red and swollen. There were no eye care services near her village.



By the time she was 12 years old, Ysalane was having trouble keeping up with school. She worried that she would have to drop out. But that year, a mobile medical clinic began to come to her village twice a week. For the first time, Ysalane was able to have a doctor examine her eye. She had to wear a patch for two weeks to let her long-infected eye heal. But after that, she could see fully with both eyes! Ysalane began to perform well at school.



Now, Ysalane walks with her friend, Malinali, to the local school. They help each other with homework. Ysalane wants to become a teacher like Malinali's mother. She also wants to feel proud of her Mayan culture, like her own mother. Ysalane just received an award at a school assembly, and spoke both Mayan and English. Her mother and father are so proud!

# How Support Over the Life Cycle Changed Ysalane Cho's Path

A local council organizes villagers to help them transport vegetables to the local market, reducing the need for Ysalane to help her mother and miss school.



Support for indigenous economic opportunity

When a new school is built near Ysalane's village, her parents no longer worry about Ysalane taking a long bus ride. At the new school, students learn in English and Mayan.



Providing access to quality education in rural areas; increased use of multicultural and multilingual instruction

Ysalane learns from a teacher about opportunities and social roles for Mayan women, helping her to think about options.



Education about school and job options for Mayan women; promotion of role models

Ysalane's eye infection is a barrier to learning. A mobile medical clinic is able to examine and treat her eye condition.



Providing access to quality medical care in rural areas

Ysalane learns that she can maintain her Mayan traditions, and that there are options and resources for school and a future career. Instead of dropping out, she stays in school.



Interventions across the life cycle can promote gender equality