



Wesleyan Reform Union



Overseas Missions Project

2024-2026



HOPE FOR CHILDREN

in Latvia

Family Centre Renovation Project

'Practical giving for a practical project.'



"This is our family centre in Riga. (The bottom 2 floors of the building on the right). We have over 200 families that come to us here during the year, where they can receive physical help, support and advice. The building was an old apartment when it was acquired by Hope for Children 30 years ago and is showing the years of wear and tear. The renovation list is long!"



**CERĪBA
BĒRNIEM
Latvijā**

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done." Proverbs 19:17

Contents & Introduction

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Thank you for taking time to read this brochure which is packed full of information about our new and exciting Overseas Missions Project for the next 2 years. The **'Family Centre Renovation Project'** for **'Hope for Children'** in Latvia.

The objective of the project is to raise money to renovate 'Hope for Children's' Family Centre in Riga, Latvia. 'Hope for Children' first began in March 1994 (30 Years ago this year).

Helen Vipass MBE (Left on photo below) is the Director of 'Hope for Children' and one of the founding members. Helen is a qualified teacher and originally comes from Swinton near Mexborough but moved to Latvia after feeling a strong calling to serve there. When she saw the number of children on the streets, she knew she had to act, 'Hope for Children' was born and you can read about this and some of their work in the pages of this brochure. Helen works tirelessly for 'Hope for Children' on the ground in Latvia and has dedicated her whole life to serving those families and children who are in desperate need.

We hope that with your help we will be able to play a small part in sustaining and growing this amazing work that Helen and her team continue to do at 'Hope for Children'.

"I have known Helen since we met in Latvia 25 years ago, our Church at Jump have been supporting 'Hope for Children' since that time. I have visited 'Hope for Children' on many occasions, and the work that they do, and the difference they make to the children there is truly humbling. When you see the children and families who come to them in desperate need, and then you see the gratitude and the smiles on their faces, when they experience the love and the practical help that 'Hope for Children' gives, it warms your heart."

Ian Sykes (OM Project Leader)

'We aim to restore and bring hope to children and families in Latvia which have fallen into crisis because of poverty, homelessness, sickness and addiction. Hope for Children seeks to follow Christ's example of unconditional love and compassion in working with those most vulnerable to the effects of change and poverty.'

"I am so grateful for Hope for Children. Whenever someone asks about my childhood, I have very wonderful memories to share because of them" -Olga, Riga

A Brief History of 'Hope for Children'

Small Beginnings

HfC's first days were not grand in scale. In the winter of 1993, we would simply meet children on the street and take them to cafes for a meal. In subsequent encounters we would find the same children and offer them warm clothing.

We would also visit children who were in prison. We tried to meet the needs of children as best we could, while dreaming of having a place where we could invite them.

These children lived in desperate conditions, many forced to survive as best they could by begging, borrowing, stealing or working – for example by selling newspapers or scavenging scrap metal from the dump to resell.

Some lived on the street. Those who returned home at night faced sleepless nights in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions and buildings that should have been condemned. Many suffered violence and abuse from parents who had given up hope and turned to drink.

In March 1994, Hope for Children was officially registered by founding members: Vitali Astapenko, Mikhail Gill, Daniel Smith and Helen Vipass. Mikhail and Vitali were not only pastors, but also very good fathers to their children and an ability to demonstrate the father heart of God. Daniel and Helen were trained teachers from Britain who felt a strong calling to serve in Latvia.

A Safe Place to Be

Finding a place to rent where we could invite the children to visit proved daunting. First there was a shortage of accommodation in Riga at that time. Second, no one wanted to open their homes to these kids – affectionately described by one person as cookie-thieving dirt magnets.

But once God gave the green light, everything came together – HfC registered and was offered an apartment right in the centre of Riga. This place had been the home of a wonderful pastor who had passed away.

In April 1994, we began receiving our first children. Initially, they would come to the apartment during the daytime, but when we realised many of them were going off to sleep in stairwells or attics, near warm pipes in basements or sitting upright in public transportation we began to let them stay overnight.



In March 1994, 30 years ago this year! Hope for Children was officially registered by two British school teachers and two local church ministers and an apartment was given us to rent. We began receiving our first children in April 1994.

"Everyone knows of the 7 Wonders of the World, but in fact there should be eight because Hope for Children should be one of them" — Artyom, Riga

A Brief History of 'Hope for Children'

Expanding to Help More

By the end of 1994, HfC acquired a place of its own – Dzirnavu 119-30. This apartment was used as a day centre. It also gave us the opportunity to separate the boys from the girls at night. The girls and small boys stayed at Dzirnavu 30, while the older boys stayed at the place on Krisjana Barona.

It was good to have another place for children to stay overnight, but not ideal that this same space had to be shared with all the other children who dropped in during the day.

In August 1996, HfC acquired an apartment across the entrance way (Dzirnavu 29) and began repairs in preparation for use as a day centre. This was a slow process, moving forward when funds and workers were available.

In November 1996, HfC acquired an apartment in the Riga district of Zolitude on Zolitdes street. After adding a bit of new wallpaper and paint, this place became the new boys' home, replacing the old rental on Krisjana Barona street.

In May 1998, HfC acquired the apartment next to Dzirnavu 29. Steps were taken to link Dzirnavu 29 and 31 and repairs continued on this expanded and merged space. In December 1998, a farm was acquired in Durbe near the port of Liepaja. The farm became a refuge for street children from Liepaja.



In February 1999, Dzirnavu 29/31 opened as the new Day Centre.

Over the following years HfC acquired various apartments to place children in families with foster parents.

In 2001 the apartment at Dzirnavu 30 was converted to an office and Family Support Centre.

In February 2004 HfC opened the doors of a new day centre in the Riga district of Bolderaja, and a day centre opened in the Skruna district of Latvia but has recently closed due to the retirement of its Centre leader.

The farm that was acquired near the port of Liepaja as a refuge for children from that area was replaced by a new day centre in Karosta Liepaja in 2012. A summer house by the sea was also acquired for taking families for short breaks in the summer holidays.

Looking back over the 30 years HfC is thankful for the many friends and sponsors who have prayed, contributed and helped our children.

We are also very grateful to our dedicated and servant hearted staff. But most of all we stand in awe of and gratitude to our God who has faithfully provided so many resources throughout the years, so much material provision, strength, energy, protection and wisdom and most of all such all-enduring love.

Mission Statement

Hope for Children is a Christian charity which serves to restore and bring hope to children and families in Latvia which have fallen into crisis because of poverty, homelessness and substance abuse.

Hope for Children seeks to follow Christ's example of unconditional love and compassion by working with those most vulnerable to the effects of change and poverty.

In pursuit of helping children reach their full potential we work towards giving them the best chance of a good education and healthy lifestyle providing them with the nurturing and safe environment they need.

"It's a second home to some kids, but for others it's really a first home. There are some children who see nothing good with their families and going to Hope for Children is the first time they experience a real home" – Zhenya, Riga

Current Work & Objectives

Day Centres

Hope for Children runs two Children's Day Centres and one Family Centre in Riga.

There are far too many children living in poverty in Latvia and far too many who suffer neglect and other forms of abuse. Because of the legacy of alcoholism and other forms of addiction left after the fall of communism and because of the struggle to survive many parents are abandoning their children and their needs in some form or other and are leaving them very much at risk. Even worse, some turn to abusing their children.

Our day care centres provide help and shelter for such children at risk by giving them a safe, welcoming environment where they can find a second home after school and all the support they need for their emotional and physical development. As well as helping to protect them, and teach them how to protect themselves, we encourage and help them to improve in both studies and behaviour while at the same time giving them space to rest and enjoy life, to see and do things they would never normally be able to do and to make them feel special and loved. We care too about the children's emotional and spiritual needs, listening to them, sharing their burdens, praying with them and reading bible stories.

Family Work

When a child opts for the streets already too much damage has been done. Early on at Hope for Children we understood that it's much better to support parents who are about to give up the fight and take to drink, drugs etc, succumb to nervous breakdown or abandoning the family, than to have to rescue children who are suffering the consequences of their parents hopelessness.

Our family support programme has developed to support families in crisis by

- Giving physical support in the form of food, clothing, hygiene products, household items, furniture etc
- Giving occasional financial support
- Befriending, defending, counselling, informing of other sources of help, giving practical advice, praying.
- Seminars lead by professional psychologists.
- Occasional recreational activities.



Foster Homes

Hope for Children also provides for and facilitates foster homes. Sadly, sometimes children need to be removed from their situations at home and foster housing allows children to be put in a safe and loving environment in the short term at least.

In Latvia there are still thousands of children in State care living in institutions alongside many other hurting children. Adoption and foster-parenting are still on a small scale in Latvia.

At Hope for Children, we believe that encouraging foster parents is a critical step in providing children with a more loving and home-like living situation.

Our staff are working to encourage more families to consider becoming foster parents as well as providing accommodation, material and moral support to those who are prepared to take up the challenge and give their lives to raising children.



"The day centre gave us all the basics but even more importantly it was a place to rest"

— Angelika, Riga

The Family Centre

“When a child opts for the streets already too much damage has been done. Early on at Hope for Children we understood that it’s much better to support parents who are about to give up the fight and take to drink, drugs etc, succumb to nervous breakdown or abandoning the family, than to have to rescue children who are suffering the consequences of their parents hopelessness.

Our family support programme, to support families in crisis, runs from our family centre, which is in desperate need of renovation.”

Here is a small snapshot of what happens at ‘The Family Centre’.



‘Hope for Children’s’ family support centre is based in the centre of Riga at Dzirnavu iela 119 and consists of three apartments, two of which we joined together to make a place where families can get help with food, clothing, toys, baby apparatus, household items, school materials etc. We also link donors of large appliances and furniture to families that have such a need.



Anzhela & Helen Vipass MBE



Anzhela, a former long-term alcoholic but now a strong Christian for at least the past 15 years, leads the work and offers a weekly Bible study to any parents who might be interested. Anzhela also builds relationships with families through home visitations, Christmas and Easter celebrations, family games days, and taking families out to our summer house for a 5–7-day break by the sea in summer. In summer she also arranges a 5-day activity week for kids.



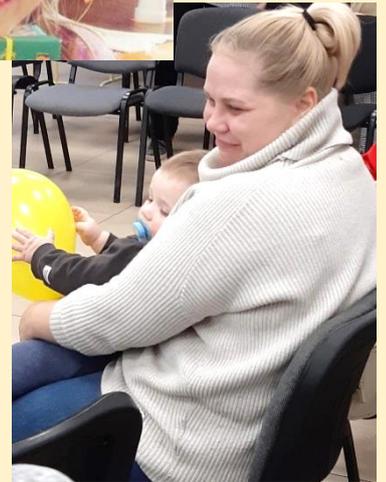
“We were shown that we could be more, no matter where we came from and even if our family situation was completely bad. We learned that we didn’t have to be like them but we could be something better” — Zhenya, Riga

The Family Centre

In another apartment opposite we have rooms for reception where we register new families and, on infrequent occasions, help watch children while parents look for the things they need. This is a quieter and more roomy space where we can have frank conversations with new families and, when felt led, ask them if they would like us to pray for them, or would like a New Testament or Children's Bible, and if they would like to know where to find a church service in their language and area. It is also a time when we can inform of other agencies which can help, for example in the case of abuse and addiction.



In 2023 we helped at least 175 families, the vast majority of which came for help on several occasions.



We rejoice in having the privilege of relieving suffering, establishing friendships and seeing God answer our prayers for specific needs of our families, but it gives us the greatest joy to see parents sending their children to Sunday school and themselves seeking and coming to know the unconditional love of God, as seen in Jesus, entrusting their life to him and becoming part of a local church fellowship.



"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done." Proverbs 19:17

The Family Centre Renovations



Here is a very small selection (with photos) of the priority work that needs to be done including-

- Floor repairs and new linoleum in the corridor and the first room of both the centre and reception area.
- New emergency exit door and repair of steps and surrounding walls.
- Replacement of central heating pipe.
- Plastering and painting of a wall damaged by a water leak.
- Re-tiling of part of the bathroom floor and wall after repairs of a damaged pipe.
- Repair of the ceiling in the food storage room, caused by a water leak.
- New gas heater (boiler) or repair of the present one.

As you can see the list is long and these are just the priorities!



“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done.” Proverbs 19:17

Hope for Children News

Hope for Children is 30 years old!

When two British school teachers and two local church pastors registered 'Ceriba berniem' (Hope for Children) 24 March 1994 here began the most wonderful ministry and adventure which has given relief and hope to many thousands of the most needy children, parents and guardians of Latvia. In our newsletters this year we plan to look back at some of the stories from earlier days as well as keeping you in touch of what is happening in our three centres today.

Our work began on the streets of Riga centre where our base was a three-room apartment that someone had kindly agreed to rent to us. The very first children we invited there to have something to eat were a group of three siblings who were begging for money or trying to sell newspapers to survive. These three, sweet but rather wild kids were soon followed by over two hundred more within our first year! They were hungry, dirty, poorly dressed and thirsty for love and attention but Riga's children's homes were full to the brim and the system of welfare was failing.



Our first Christmas dinner December 1994. Turkey courtesy of the US embassy :)

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Kids who tried to sleep in stairwells, attics, in basements, parks or sitting upright on public transport, would often fall asleep on our sofas. Maris (left) missed three years of schooling but with our support managed to finish school, trained as a cook and to this day loves his job as a chef.



Co-founder Daniel with some of the street boys.

Happily, by the end of 1994, Hope for Children had bought a place of its own which also operated as a day centre but allowed some children to take refuge there overnight; it wasn't long after that however, beginning in 2001, that we were able to buy three apartments in the district of Zolitude that became our children's home.

Such were our early beginnings in the 1990's, more on our history will follow in our next newsletter.



Bolderaya day centre

Bolderaya day centre opened its doors to needy children in 2003. Olga, who has been working with our children there since 2017 shares some of her most encouraging stories:

Our centre may be very small but I'd like to mention how big the number is of children who have been changed by it. Every year on average 15–20 children regularly attend our centre for six months or more but a larger number of children come for shorter periods as well as parents that stop by to chat and whose hearts towards their children are changed for the better.

I really wish to share about a family with six children who all came through our centre, some of which I've seen grow up before my very eyes, from a time when I had to crouch to be on a level with their eyes. Their mother was in a very bad state and led a harmful lifestyle therefore the children had to live in an oppressive atmosphere in dismal, cold and cramped conditions; for all the years I have known them, all the family lived in just one room. However, when they came to the centre they could rest in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, relax and be happy and get all the things they needed for studies and to enjoy free time. The children said themselves that they knew we always looked forward to seeing them and would always look after them. We also showed care towards the mother and saw her gradually change for the better and as for the children, the elder children have finished school and are working in the profession they studied for while the younger children are finishing school. One of the girls who is now 16 has become the biggest help in our centre; the children really love her and she now encourages others.



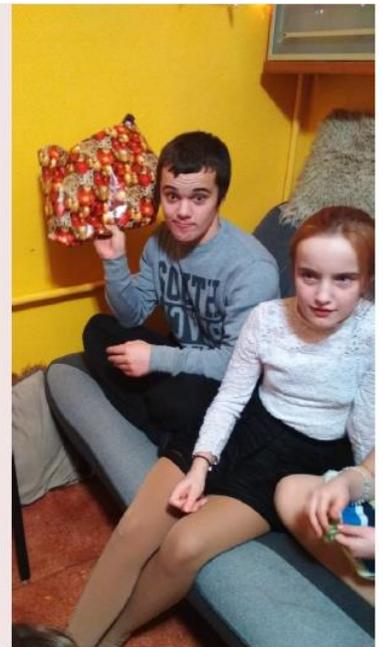
As much as our children love to receive attention and care, they enthusiastically reward us with lots of love too. 😊

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They especially look forward to their birthday. As you can see in the photos.



One of the boys that came to our centre, now 22 years old, used to come daily with his sister and little brother. He differed from other kids in being sometimes aggressive, sometimes very naïve and his mother feared he would never be able to finish school or be able to learn a profession; he loved to come to our centre however and especially liked to watch us cook and help prepare food. I remember clearly when one Christmas, we gave him a gift of a frying pan and you should have seen his face and how happy he was! Today he's successfully working as a chef in a restaurant.



This is just a small part of the many victories won by of the joint effort of our workers, sponsors, volunteers and other sincere, caring individuals and of course the children themselves from whom we ourselves constantly learn! Sometimes it is very difficult to evaluate the work done but for sure we must always be ready to do a good deed since this is one of God's most important commandments, to love your neighbour as yourself.

Olga, Centre leader

Looking further back ...



Some of Bolderaya Centre's first kids with Valentina the first leader of this centre (above) October 2005

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Year 2012 Liene (left), another of our leaders, is making sure the children are well prepared for school, no matter how reluctant they are ☺



Karosta day centre

Our work among needy children in the Liepaya district of Karosta began by supporting a small church-based children's centre but in February 2012 we were able to open the doors to our newly refurbished centre for Karosta's most needy children.



Roman and his two brothers began to attend our centre last September. His mum abandoned her sons to live in the UK and doesn't bother to get in touch but thankfully he has a loving grandma who does her best to care for all three.



Veronika is now 17 years old but from the age of only six our centre has been like a family to her since she has always lacked a close relationship with her parents. Now she's a wonderful volunteer!



Our children typically tend to struggle with self-discipline in school, authority among friends and the influence of competition in urban neighbourhoods. In the first half of the school year there was a lot of skiving off school, which the children hid by faking illness and inducing injury, but thankfully of late we see this is no longer happening. However, in our micro environment the problem of respect among children is still present when friends are gossiped about yet outside they pretend to be perfect friends with a smile on their faces. Our children are often unable to value friendship, show respect in basic situations and appreciate the existence of friends.

Among the girls, there's also competition for influence in the neighborhood. Many want to be leaders and sometimes this is followed by vindictive ways of acting eg slander, bribing with sweets or choosing to lie. Recently though, one negative leader left us when she was taken into a care and the girls have become more unified and nicer to each other.

We see that discussions in class of Biblical teaching on heart attitudes, building friendships correctly and individual conversations, evidently bring good fruit and we pray that this effect will be long-lasting!

Baiba, Centre leader

Family centre

From the beginning of our work with street children in 1994 we knew that we must also do all we can to support struggling parents before they give up the fight to survive and abandon their children, for example by leaving to work abroad or choosing a life of intoxication. It took some time before we had the resources to start a family support centre but since we began our family work in a more organised way we've helped, mostly on a regular basis, well over a thousand families with material and nonmaterial support.

When Sigita came to us in need two years ago, life for her and her four children was one big struggle. Her income was very small so her search for a place to rent, which was suitable for her wheelchair-bound son and where the landlord would accept young children, left her with no choice but to rent a dark and very damp apartment. Sigita had little to smile about as she struggled with asthma and meeting the needs of her children but the big dose of friendship and practical care that she received from and through us soon changed her demeanour. Sigita is now one of our most enthusiastic and positive mums who attends almost every event we organise and yes, now smiles a lot more!



After the sudden and tragic death of her husband, Diana and her three children ended up having to move into awful living conditions which was the only place she could afford. It was our privilege to help rehouse this lovely family but recently we discovered that, due to the fact they had not got a computer of any kind, her children were having to do their homework elsewhere and hence came home very late every week day. We're so grateful to the sponsors who generously provided these children with two laptops and a better chance of succeeding in their education!



Anzhela, Centre leader



celebrating 30 years



April 6th this year we gathered together with many former staff, volunteers, children and sponsors to celebrate thirty years of ministry to children and families at risk. It was the greatest joy to see so many of our former kids again, happy and doing well in life, as well as former ‘soldiers- in-arms’ who had battled faithfully alongside me to help build a better future for as many young lives as possible.) The early post-Soviet years of great change in the nineties and early 2000’s were overwhelmingly challenging but with the material help and prayerful support of big-hearted people like you we could do far more than we hoped for or imagined.

Although there’s more stability in Latvia today, we still continue to face great need and still rely very much on your support. Our staff, children and parents cannot thank you enough for your genuine care and we really hope that you’ll stay alongside us!

Helen M. Vipass MBE, Director

*“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done.”
Proverbs 19:17*

“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done.” Proverbs 19:17

Points for Prayer

This year is a special year for us as we reach the grand age of 30 years! It's a time when we particularly reflect on God's **faithfulness in love, provision, protection and much more** as we ministered to the most needy children, parents and guardians in the city of Riga as well as in Skrunda, Liepaya and Kraslava. So **many thousands of lives were touched by God's love** through us and changed for the better, so **many grew to know how real and unconditional His love is for us** and how we can enter into a relationship with Him. We praise Him for **founding Hope for Children** and we thank Him for all the **wonderful friends he's placed around us** who support, pray and intercede for Latvia and its children.

We also thank God for

- the many, often challenging but sweet, children we have been entrusted with and for the struggling parents we have the honour of getting to know and helping.
- a wonderful time at Christmas when not only did we have our own celebrations for our centre children and families but a large number of them were invited to church Christmas events too.
- all the wonderful volunteers we have helping in our children's and family support centres. Also for His hand upon our long-term volunteer Lena who, despite ongoing treatment for cancer, still enthusiastically comes to help us.
- the precious, dedicated staff we have who keep the children and parents/guardians in their heart outside of work hours, interceding for them in prayer too.

Please join us in praying for

- the most needy to find us or us to be led to them.
- the children that attend our centres in Bolderaya (Riga) and Karosta (Liepaya), that we could uncover threats to their well-being and help protect them, lighten the weight of their burdens, uncover lies they have believed about themselves and their future and instill truth. That they would grow in knowledge and wisdom and be able to develop their talents. Staff at our latest meeting asked to pray especially for those going through adolescence and for wisdom to know how best to guide and help them to make right choices.
- a children's worker for our Bolderaya centre. We're sad that Evita, who we wrote about in our last prayer bulletin, decided not to stay with us in Bolderaya and took a job closer to her home. Please pray for the rest of our team (health, protection, inspiration, wisdom, joy and more) especially Olga who soldiers on in Bolderaya with only Heli (a faithful part-time volunteer) and Julia, one of our older teenagers who has become a fantastic helper.



Time and time again we have experienced positive change after asking you to join us in prayer. Thank you for your intercession on behalf of the children and families of Latvia and for us as a team at Hope for Children!

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done." Proverbs 19:17

Donations

Thankyou for taking time to read about the amazing work that 'Hope for Children' are doing amongst children and families in the heart of Latvia. The work that they do comes from a deep desire to follow Christ's example of offering unconditional love and compassion to those who are vulnerable and most in need. We hope this brochure has given you an idea of some of the work that needs doing and the level of help that they need.

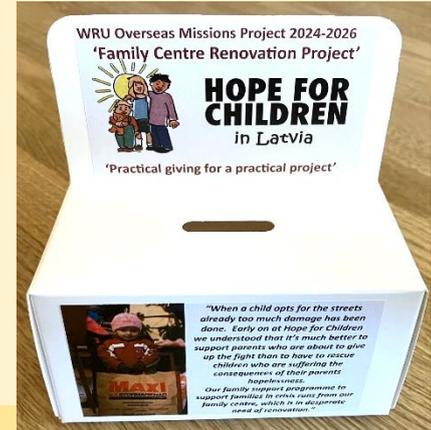
We would love you and your church to be involved in this really worthwhile project and in doing so we can help to play a small part in sustaining and growing this amazing work that Helen and her team continue to do at 'Hope for Children'.

Fundraising ideas

Giving a one-off gift would be really great but we understand in the current economic climate giving in small amounts is sometimes more convenient for people.

Here are some ideas:

- Saving your loose change.
- We are supplying you with a few collecting boxes, (see photo) if you require any more, please let us know.
- Perhaps you could consider appointing a project coordinator in your church to deal with all matters concerning the project including retrieving and remitting money from collection boxes at regular intervals, or to collect an agreed amount from consenting members on a weekly or monthly basis.
- We are open to you using your own novel ideas for fund raising.
- One idea, seeing this is a practical project, if you have any DIY enthusiasts – they could do odd jobs for people – donating the proceeds to the project.



How to Donate

- If you don't use cash, we can accept donations by cheque (payable to the WRU), by bank transfer or standing order (either one-off payments or regular standing orders, weekly or monthly)
Account Name - Wesleyan Reform Union, Sort Code - 56-00-09, Account Number - 00141232.
(quoting reference - OM HFC project) (OM = Overseas Missions), (HFC = Hope for Children).

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Thank you in anticipation of your support.

*The WRU Overseas Missions
Team*

"Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name."

1 Chronicles 29:13