



MARLENE LEFEVER

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Fill the Hole

*A Ministry Strategy for Developing New Programs
Among Semi-literates and Children*

This article follows the pattern used by David C. Cook in developing an at-risk children's program, starting in India and spreading around the world. Jyothi, 12, is the daughter of rag-pickers in India. Her grandparents took out a loan to build their hut, but when it came due, they couldn't repay it. Jyothi was pulled out of school to work long exhausting hours as a housemaid for pennies against the loan.

But after work three days a week, she attends a Christian program that the children have named "Happy Club." It's the only time in her week when she can be a child, when she can smile and know that in spite of what evil in the world does to her, she is cared for by her heavenly father. He is outrageously in love with her. Week after week, she learns the Bible stories. She listens as they are told. She acts them out. She draws and retells them. She understands them, and she begins to work with the Holy Spirit to make changes in her attitude and actions.

Today millions of children in India, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Mexico, Senegal, and ten other countries are learning about Jesus in programs like the one Jyothi attends. It started just three years ago. The process the developers at David C. Cook followed may guide others as they create ways to share the greatest story with others around the world.

RESEARCH AND FIND THE HOLE

Cook was looking for a hole in ministry, an area where nothing existed. They started the process by convening two groups of India's ministry leaders. They were asked: "What vacuum do you see in Christian ministry in India?" Both groups identified the same hole. "We have 18,000 Christian orphanages in India. Almost none have a program to help children fall in love with Jesus. The children age-out of the orphanages and return to their god-selves."

PICK A HOLE IN YOUR STRENGTH AREA AND FORM NATIONAL ALLIANCES

Because of Cook's 139 year history in children's programs this was an ideal hole for it to fill. This new program would teach Bible stories that would speak to the felt needs of orphans and other children at-risk. As they learned the stories, children would grow in their understanding of a loving Father who wants to adopt them into His family. So Cook had the basic content, but without alliances with people in India, Cook could not reach India's children. The India alliance actively revamped the program. No teacher and no child would doubt that this program was for them.

PURSUE LINE EXTENSIONS

This program provides three lessons a week for three years for children ages 9-11. That's 478 Bible stories, all with a Christian worldview. Cook is now asking, "Are there other holes an adaptation of this program might fill, like foster care, mentoring for teens, or even women at-risk?"

Years ago, seven-year-old Bindu was placed before a man who wanted to buy her. A Christian stepped in and stopped the sale. Today, as an adult, she is the teacher of the Joy Club Jyothi attends. The teacher said, "I see myself in every child. Everyone narrates my story. The Bible lessons I teach are the words of God. This program draws these wounded children into the heart of God's story." 

